Columns
Spirituality



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January 26, 2023

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Louise Penny's novels about Inspector Gamache have been for me a source of delight and inspiration. When I finished her most recent book, *A World of Curiosities*, I was struck by something that Inspector Gamache realized about himself.

Without giving away any of the story, Gamache reflected on an earlier time when he denied an applicant her chance to enter the police academy. The reason was rooted in a desire for revenge for something this person's parents did to his parents. As he became aware of this, he realized that his act was in a way a very "'slow, deliberate murder, and was shocked, appalled at himself, and deeply ashamed."

But it had an unexpected benefit. It forced him to go deep inside his own "cave," giving him an insight into what evil decent people could do. He realized he had that "monster" within himself that he fed.

At first, this may not sound very uplifting as we start a new year. However, I believe it is a stark expression of what needs to happen for us to begin to *see* in new ways so that we can transform our behaviors in ways that address the injustices we perpetrate and in which we are complicit.

Immediate responses to such revelations might be to reject what you see, or justify it, or believe it shows how awful you really are.

The hardest part for me is to see that those aspects are part of me. I am both capable of loving compassion and judgmental selfishness. I am a complex mix of hurts and loves that shaped how I see myself and others within this evolutionary journey.

This was especially difficult for me as I grew up at a time when perfection was a trait we attributed to God. I learned quite early that I was "to become perfect as my heavenly Father [sic] was perfect."

I took that very seriously. Wanting to be perfect was almost seen as a quid pro quo for receiving God's love.

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I no longer believe that perfection is a goal or the way to obtain God's love. Rather, like Gamache, I now risk going into the cave of my inner being and allowing the luminous light of Divine Loving to shine. I then see all those aspects of myself and know they are part of who I am, and within whom Divine Loving dwells.

To enter the contemplative journey is to enter into such a transformative process.

As we consent to see ourselves as we are, the light of Divine Loving continues to illuminate aspects of ourselves that we were unaware of; that we do not like; that we never thought we were capable of.

I was also inspired by *The Instruction Manual for Receiving God*, a book by Jason Shulman. It helped me reflect that the luminous presence of Divine Loving surrounds us, waiting for us to go into our cave. Through contemplative practice, we are invited to see more clearly who we are.

We can't see it without the light because we all have been injured by wounds from early childhood that shape our perception of self. Once those wounds are brought to awareness, they reveal the various defenses we have developed to protect ourselves.

These defenses may be necessary for a time, and when the light shines on them, healing can begin. We no longer see ourselves or others through the lens of what we fear or from which we have to be protected, and which causes us to react defensively. We can begin to accept ourselves in our entirety and begin to see others in new ways.

Like ourselves, our world is in need of *seeing* in new ways. It is in need of healing. The human species has been evolving for millions of years. Multiple cultures with their values and beliefs developed over time and still shape and impact us. They teach us how we see who or what is important; who is worthy of charity, of justice; who or what lives are worth saving as we address the climate crisis; whose rights should be respected. Those beliefs and values often live deep in our caves where there is no light to illuminate them and bring them to awareness.

The starting point is to allow the light of Divine Love to illuminate who we are and heal our distorted vision so we can begin to see in new ways all with whom we journey on our Earth Home.

In this new year, let us "see" anew.