

The Face in the Mirror

The Pain of Having to Face Ourselves

Do I really want to see myself? Really? Not as I might prefer to see myself in order to have some rickety and ill-placed semblance of peace. Not the image that grants me permission to stay a course that maybe I should stay away from. Not the perception of myself that allows me to side-step guilt, by-pass accountability, and circumvent obligations that I find a bit distasteful. All of that aside, do I really want to see myself? Really?

We tend to craft an image of ourselves that fits what we'd like to be, but not necessarily what we are. We're quite adept at recognizing what's culturally acceptable so that we can be acceptable to the culture. We know what fits in the tight social circles within which we circulate, and we have some grasp of the latest trends as we see them spread across magazine covers and splashed across our television screens. In no way are we short on examples as served up by the culture, and we are perpetually subject to a bevy of obstinate expectations associated with those examples. In artfully and sometimes rather stumbling ways we draw from these various examples and expectations, crafting our image so that we fit whatever they happen to be at the moment.

Confusion in the Shaping

And in the shaping we incessantly focus on what we're supposed to be, which is perpetually held in some jarring tension against this sense of who we actually are. Over time, we develop an ever-morphing confusion regarding our identity as this constant tension too often plays itself out on the side of what's expected of us versus who we authentically are.

The battle incessantly incurred by this tension leaves us little time and inadequate energy to explore our core selves, as such an endeavor carried out with diligence will always ask the best of us. The mad chase to be whatever it is that will be accepted, to the greatest degree that it can be accepted, in conjunction with the elusive hunt to obtain whatever it is that allows us to blend in with a world that is itself trying to blend in . . . all of that consumes all of our time. And in the consumption, we are never free enough to ask who it is that we really are.

Maybe We Don't Want to Know

The reality might be that we don't want to know who we are. In part, maybe this incessant pursuit is in reality flight from who we fear we might be. Maybe the person that we attempt to craft is something that we perceive as a bit shinier and slightly more striking in comparison to the person that we actually are. Maybe the image that the world propagates is better. Maybe, just maybe the world knows something that we don't know. Maybe we'd rather be shaped by the world rather than being shaped by histories that are painful, or losses that are devastating, or belief systems that were forced upon us, or dreams that were forced into us. It might be that we don't like who life has made us to be, so we haplessly gawk at those vogue and savvy examples of what it is to be a vibrant and exuberant person. Or just maybe we want a bigger hand in making us who we've become over and above everything else that has taken license to shape us in whatever way we've been shaped.

But do we really want to know who we are? And is this fear of knowing in reality a fear of self. Is it a fear of what I might find if I scratch the surface a bit? Is it a throbbing apprehension of what sits down there in those dark places that would forever brutalize me

should I bring it to the light? Has my life been so marked by running from myself that running to myself is something that I don't even understand how to do? Is my goal to reinvent myself rather than rediscover myself because what I think I'd discover isn't all that appealing? Or do I assume that an image is something that is crafted rather than something that is cultivated?

The Richness of Running to Self

I would propose that the most potent person I can become begins with the solitary yet immensely challenging task of being the person I am. That may in fact be the most difficult part of this journey that we call life. The greatest 'me' begins with the authentic 'me.' That means that I must be willing to park myself wherever I am at, rein in my rather rogue passions, forcefully yet tactfully strip away all the facades, and accept whatever I find as my point of departure.

While I tend to run from me, I need to decide to run to me. And in the running I am going to seek out and boldly seize the strengths that I have ignored or altogether abandoned. It may well be that I have spent my life incessantly looking for things outside of me that are already within me. It would be entirely prudent to embrace an entirely different tact that involved recognizing these hidden attributes, learning to warmly appreciate them, and then robustly enhancing them in a perpetual cycle of personal growth that we could have hardly imagined as possible.

Where It Begins

It begins with intention not bridled by fear. It involves the impetus of possibilities to offset the impotence of impossibilities in order to actually challenge the impossible. It's an intention to grow despite the obstacles that currently lay across our path, as well as press through the obstacles that will arise as a response to our efforts to press forward. It all begins with a passion to grow that will not heed nor be dimmed by the challenges that in and of themselves will bring growth simply by virtue of our choice to engage them.

Second, authentic growth can only begin with an authentic start. That means that we must focus on who we are, which is typically quite different from who we've become. This focus is achieved by brazenly identifying the assorted facades, fearlessly calling them out, audaciously casting them off, and then embracing both the glory and gore of that which lies underneath. It is that glory and gore that is the raw material from which we build a self beyond anything that any collection of facades could hope to fabricate.

Third, we must secure the resources that are above us and adamantly avoid those that are below us. This means that we refuse anything that generates a lateral move or grants us permission to grow in place, neither of which have anything to do with growth. We must find those people seasoned with wisdom, seize those resources that are unashamedly bold, and be willing to allow those resources to speak into our lives even when their messages are hard and sharp.

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The face in mirror is a great one already which stands ready to be made greater still. It can be done when we choose to press through fear, tear ourselves down to our authentic self, and intentionally seek out challenging resources to assist in our growth. And when we do, the person that we've shaped ourselves to be pales in comparison to the person we are now on our way to becoming.