

Seeing God Everywhere by Eknath Easwaran

When Swami Vivekananda was a young college student, then called Naren, he used to go about Calcutta asking religious men and women a curious question: “Have you seen God?” They all said no until he went up to Sri Ramakrishna, who replied with the certitude of a God-realized man, “My boy, I see God more clearly than I see you.”

That will be our experience also. That is the experience for which all of us have come into life. And after this experience we love our family more, we love our partner more, we love our children more, we love our neighbors more, we love our country more — and the whole world will become our country.

In every religion there have been ordinary people like you and me who have, for no reason that we can put forward, turned inwards and entered the very depths of the unconscious where they see the Supreme Reality — call him Krishna, call him Buddha, call him Christ, call him Allah, call her the Divine Mother — and come back transformed in character, conduct, and consciousness to become a living light to all those around them.

He is within everyone

The greatest misunderstanding about religion arises from our physical orientation. Many intelligent people assume that religion asserts a God who is “out there” somewhere, swinging in a hammock between two galaxies. God is not outside us somewhere; he is within us, in the very depths of our consciousness. As the Sufis put it, he is closer to me than my jugular vein.

And not only within us: he is within everyone. People may be selfish, they may be violent, they may be causing a lot of trouble to everybody including themselves: God is still present in them and in every other human being on earth.

In all the world’s great religions, this is the purpose of human life: to realize God in the depths of our consciousness. It means discovering that we are not physical creatures that can be satisfied with physical gratifications, but spiritual beings made in the image of God. This supreme discovery brings a complete transformation of personality that cannot help making profound changes in the world around us.

That is why I say that as I present it, religion is the solution to all the problems that burden us today. In a truly religious country we would have no wars, no violence, no exploitation, no pollution of air and water — for the simple reason that when you realize God, you see God in everyone.



A practical interpretation

For a few great men and women of God, who are capable of total devotion to a divine incarnation, seeing God may mean an actual vision. In the Christian tradition, for example, Saint Francis of Assisi was blessed with visions of Jesus the Christ, and in India Sri Ramakrishna saw the Lord as the Divine Mother.

But while the idea of seeing visions and hearing angelic voices may capture our imagination, I would like to present a much more practical interpretation of what it means to see God. As Sri Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita, the man or woman who performs all actions as an offering to the Lord, without a trace of selfish attachment or ill will, is aware of the Lord always.

In our own age, Mahatma Gandhi is a perfect example of what this kind of awareness means. With his characteristic candor, Gandhi once said that he had seen no lights, heard no voices, and witnessed no visions. But Gandhi was nonetheless a man of immense spiritual awareness. He was able to work tirelessly for the welfare of all those around him — not just of those who were for him, but of those who were opposed to him also — without any thought of his own comfort or prestige, disarming his opposition not through force but through the power of his love.

A vision we can cultivate

This is the vision of the Lord which we can cultivate every-where, all the time.

Whenever we are able to forget our own petty satisfactions in working for the welfare of the whole, whether it is for our family, our community, or our world, we are becoming a little more aware of the Lord.

Whenever we are able to remember that what hurts us hurts others too, and are able to refrain from unkind words and deeds and even thoughts, we are becoming a little more aware of the Lord. Whenever we are able to respond patiently and positively to others even if they are hostile to us or rub us the wrong way, we are becoming a little more aware of the Lord.

Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, we can awaken into the highest life possible: we will see God everywhere, serve him everywhere, worship her everywhere.

Seeing the Lord in all creatures

The mark of the man or woman who has become united with the Lord is that he or she sees the Lord in all fellow beings, in every form of life. In one of the delightful anecdotes in the Mahābhārata, Dharmaputra, the oldest of the Pandavas, turns up at the gates of heaven with his dog.



Dvarapala, the gatekeeper, takes down all the vital information about Dharmaputra — name, address, siblings — and then he notices the dog.

“Sorry,” says Dvarapala, “we don’t admit dogs. See that little sign? It says Dogs Not Allowed.”

Then follows an awfully confusing situation: Dharmaputra is established in the Lord and should be admitted, but what should be done about the dog?

Finally Dvarapala gives Dharmaputra a choice: to enter heaven alone, without the dog, or to go back where he came from with his dog. Without the slightest hesitation, Dharmaputra chooses to be with his dog, who is then immediately revealed as Lord Krishna in disguise.

When you are always aware of the unity of life, you see the Lord in every living creature. To put it more personally, you see everyone as dear to you; every child is your child, and every dog is your dog. I don’t think anyone has ever put it more beautifully than the Compassionate Buddha, when he tells us that we should love and protect every man, every woman, every child, every creature on earth, the way a mother loves and protects her only child.

The saddest sight

Today it was smoggy, so we sought fresh air and freedom from the hurly-burly of city life by going to the Marina. We walked on the pier for a long distance, and from beginning to end it was a very depressing spectacle.

The pier was crowded with hundreds of men, women, and children, all fishing. There were chairs, sleeping bags, and transistor radios all over the place contributing to the pandemonium. A man was sleeping, but he still had his fishing rod in hand. There were little children six and seven years old, beautiful boys and girls being taught to kill fish. Parents were giving instructions to their children and friends to their friends. But to me the saddest sight of all was when the fish were landed. Still alive, they were dashed against the wooden plank, and the hooks torn away.

It is perhaps not fair to condemn or censure these people; we can only try to help them by our own personal example. They were not really cruel, but insensitive. This can happen to all of us when we become preoccupied with our own pleasure and forget the unity underlying all life. When we know this, we can begin to transform any selfish responses into the positive ones of compassion and sensitivity to the welfare of all living creatures.

William Blake, who saw this unity of life, said:

A robin red-breast in a cage



Puts all heaven in a rage . . .

A dog starved at his master's gate

Predicts the ruin of the State.

Even by putting a little robin into a cage, the cosmic order is violated; the law of karma is at work all the time in the smallest details of life. Everything is closely interwoven, and even a little hook causing pain in the smallest fish disturbs the consciousness of the Lord.

Respect our kinship with all creatures

We can look at our deep kinship with all living creatures in terms of the long story of evolution. According to this, our friend Garry was a little orchid long, long ago; that is why he likes them so much. He loves orchids and grows them and looks after them because of this faint memory that gives him a sense of unity with the orchid.

Similarly, according to the theory of reincarnation, it is possible that on that pier I remembered in a very dim way the days when I used to splash about in the water. I remembered the joy and the sparkle of it and identified myself with the fish as if it were really I who was swimming about.

This is what spiritual awareness means. It was not just the fish out there on the pier who were suffering, as separate beings — I was suffering in them. Until we become aware of this unity underlying all life, all talk of spiritual awareness is just playing games.

Particularly where children are concerned, it is our duty to remind others, as my spiritual teacher, my grandmother, reminded me, that we must respect our kinship with all living creatures. This can be conveyed in simple language like my granny's. She used to tell me, "Squirrels have grannies, and if you hurt a squirrel, it'll go complain to its granny." I had never thought about animals like that, and it really opened my eyes. Similarly our children can understand the simple story that little fish have grandmas and grandpas to whom they run complaining and crying when we hurt them.

Awareness of unity of life

We should try to practice this awareness of the unity of life in every relationship. I am a vegetarian, for example, because I know that the divinity that is present in my heart and yours is present in every living thing. A vegetarian diet respects this partnership among all forms of life and meets our nutritional needs with a minimum demand on the earth's resources.

Years ago, when I would go to restaurants where my eating habits caused



consternation, the staff would say: “You are a vegetarian; you will love fish.” I used to add, “I do love fish; that’s just why I don’t eat them.” Once we saw a French movie, which you couldn’t say was influenced by the Hindu mystics, in which a little boy who had pet rabbits was served rabbit for dinner. He said, “I don’t eat my buddies.” This is the language of the Gita: “You don’t eat your buddies.”

It used to be very difficult to find a restaurant that served vegetarian food. Now, however, there are good vegetarian restaurants springing up in many cities, and at every chance we get, we can recommend these restaurants to our friends. This is a simple way of showing our love and respect for the Lord, who lives in the lamb, the deer, the cow, and all other forms of life.

Great compassion for animals

When we are conditioned by cultural habits, it can be hard to understand that eating meat violates the indivisible unity of life. Here each person is at liberty to do a certain amount of experimentation. The changeover from nonvegetarian to vegetarian food can be made gradually.

One of the remarkable developments in meditation is that even if we take to meditation without any desire to practice these related disciplines, after a while we will be drawn to them. As meditation dispels the delusion of separateness, we become more and more conscious of a sense of fellowship with all creatures. As our spiritual awareness deepens, we will come to have great compassion for animals and will never want to be a party to their ill-treatment.

The other day, while going to the beach, I was delighted to see the young lambs, some black-faced, some white-faced, running about on the green hills just like children. When we got to the beach, I enjoyed watching the sea gulls and those little creatures that I love so much, the sandpipers, who are like the imp Ariel in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. They go up to the very edge of the water, and when a wave rolls in, they come running back on their thin little legs. We also saw three deer, a mother and two fawns, which had come down onto the beach. The people living nearby must have been very good to these deer for them to have such confidence; they were playing about, sure that the people loved them and wouldn’t harm them in any way.

All belongs to the Lord

It is the urgent need of our time to recognize the unity of all forms of life, and the intimate relationship between water, earth, air, plants, and all creatures. Ecologists tell us that there is an interpenetrating relationship among all things which we can violate only at our peril.

The Isha Upanishad — a short Upanishad consisting of only a page, which Mahatma Gandhi says contains the secret of all life — says,



The Lord is enshrined in the hearts of all. The Lord is the supreme Reality.
Rejoice in him through renunciation. Covet nothing. All belongs to the Lord.

Sometimes I used to see billboard signs saying, “Ford country.” I would say, “No. No. It’s not Ford country; it’s all God’s country.” Mountains, rivers, air, seas, forests: all belong to the Lord.

It is because we have forgotten this, or haven’t even under-stood it, that we have polluted the air to such an extent that our children are paying the price. Air is more important to us than any material possession. When we pollute the air, we are forgetting not just that God made the air but that God became the air. If we don’t take action to correct the situation, our children’s children will pay a very high penalty for it.

For me, not only are all human beings part of my family; so are the seas, the mountains, the rivers, the trees. After all, it isn’t governments and corporations that supply me with oxygen; it is trees, plants, and plankton. They are my dear friends, my kith and kin.

The simple life

I must have talked thousands of times in the last twenty-five years on the subject of keeping the environment clean and wholesome for our children. Anybody who buys things he does not need is not a lover of children. Anyone who produces things that pollute the environment is not a lover of children. The mass production of all these ridiculous items I see advertised takes a staggering toll on the quality of our air, water, land, and wildlife. If we want to show love for our children everywhere, we can make sure that we are not a party to polluting the environment under any circumstances at all.

This is why I quote Gandhi always in a plea for simplifying life. He uses very practical language: “There is enough for everybody’s need, but there isn’t enough for everybody’s greed.”

The simple life can be aesthetically very satisfying. We do not have to become ascetics — vegetarian cuisine, for instance, is thoroughly delicious and satisfying. We can live in reason-able comfort, and have all the necessary supplies without damaging our environment.

Living with people

But while it is good to be friendly with trees and animals, it is most important to be friendly with human beings. It is above all in our human relationships that we realize the unity of life. Only when you have lowered all the barriers between yourself and others will there be no barrier between you and the Lord within.



When we were living on the Blue Mountain in India, we ran into a young fellow from the Northwest who used to come to our place now and then and had become very fond of us. He had led a very lonely life: if ever there was a lone spiritual wolf, it was he. He used to avoid people completely, staying in lonely places so as not to come in contact with them.

An altercation

Sometimes he would twit me affectionately for always being with people, and would invite me to go on long walks to see the trees and hills. But even though I admire a beautiful landscape, I pleaded guilty to the charge of being fonder of people than of trees. I didn't try to argue with him when he praised the virtue of solitude, but one day a suitable opportunity presented itself, and I explained my point of view.

He was fond of talking about "flower power" and about being able naturally to love everybody. One day he was working in the garden in the midst of the flowers with the gardener's son, who was given to fist power. There was some altercation between them, and the gardener's son, being a simple boy, took a spade and threatened our young friend, who retaliated by threatening him with the hoe.

Someone separated them before they could do each other any harm, and our young friend came to us so agitated that his hands were trembling. His teeth were clenched and he was bursting with fury.

Instead of arguing with him, I asked him to join us at dinner. It is difficult to be furious when eating, and this gave him a little time to cool down. After he had finished his dinner, I said, "What happened to all your flower language? What happened to all your love? Why didn't you show him the universal love that you are capable of?"

He didn't know what to answer. He said, "You tell me what happened."

I said, "You are not used to people. You have never had the opportunity of living together with people who provoke you. You haven't learned to grit your teeth, repeat the mantram, stand firm, and move closer to people when they provoke you. It takes a man to do this. To be angry, to take a spade and hit the other person — that is not worthy of a human being."

He said, "How do you learn to do this?" "Oh," I said, "by living with people like you!"

Chipping away

For ordinary people like you and me, the solitary life is not particularly conducive to spiritual growth. In the sometimes painful give-and-take of life every day, you learn to draw upon the power released in meditation to love and support the people around you — even at the expense of your own comfort and convenience.



Meditation and selfless action go hand in hand. When we try to live more for others than for ourselves, this will deepen our meditation. When we deepen our meditation, more and more energy will be released with which we can help others.

Only when you have lowered all the barriers between yourself and others will there be no barrier between you and the Lord within. Deliberately, then, from the very first, you begin to chip away at those walls in consciousness. You do it in little ways, throughout the day, by trying to see the needs of others as clearly as your own and to act in harmony with them.

When we purify ourselves by learning to be patient, by learning to forbear, we come at last to see the Lord hidden in our own heart and in the hearts of all.

This continuous awareness of unity is our native state. Mystics speak of it as the soul's true home. In the evolution of consciousness, it is not only the state of being from which we come, but also that to which we must one day return — not in some afterlife but here on earth — by discovering in our own consciousness our oneness with the rest of life.

Ready for the vision of God

In order to do this, we don't have to change our religion. We don't have to go to another country. We don't have to leave our family. We don't have to throw up our job — unless it is at the expense of life. What is called for is a long, difficult, sometimes dangerous training of the mind.

If you are following the method of meditation that is associated with my name all over the world now — if you are using the Prayer of Francis of Assisi, or the first chapter of the Dhammapada of the Buddha, or the “Invocations” of Ansari of Herat, or “The Wonderful Effect of Divine Love” by Thomas à Kempis, or the last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, and you are able to drive those words deeper and deeper into your consciousness through years of regular, systematic, devoted practice, morning and evening, focusing all your attention on the passage and bringing your mind back when it wanders — then the day has to come when your concentration will be so focused on the inspirational passage that there will not be even a wisp of attention to wander about.

There won't be any distractions; there won't be any division of attention; you won't hear the barking of the dog or the mewing of the cat. For that moment, at least, the mind is still. When it is completely still, the mystics say, you are ready for the vision of God.

In the classical school of ancient Indian mysticism, to which I belong, it is only through an infinite act of grace that God reveals himself to us. All that you or I can do is to prepare the stage: to make our life as pure as we can, as selfless as we can,



serving everyone around us and trying never to hold anything against anybody because of anything they may have done, knowingly or unknowingly.

That is what it means to extinguish self-will, and the extinction of self-will is the very basis of love. Most conflicts in personal relationships arise because of self-will; when self-will is extinguished, you have a tender romance with all life.

In Buddhism this is called *nirvana*, from *nir*, “out,” and *vana*, “to blow.” Self-will is blown out like the flame of a candle. When you are celebrating your children’s birthdays you say, “Now take a deep breath and blow all the candles out, asking for what you want in your heart.” That’s all right for children, but for older people who are celebrating their birthdays, I suggest that when you blow out your candles you say “May my self-will be blown out like this!”

The One appearing as many

When we attain nirvana, we discover simultaneously that we and the universe are one. The world of multiplicity dissolves; the world of separateness falls away. We no longer see people as separate, and we no longer see any form of life as separate. We see everyone, every creature, as the One appearing to be many.

Afterwards, we order our life in such a way as to express this oneness. We come to have love for everybody, so our love is multiplied billions of times. When we hear of the people of other countries suffering, we feel as grieved as when those in our own country suffer. Everybody becomes our kith and kin.

One Western mystic says that when you have been looking at the sun for a long time, you will see the image of the sun wherever you look. Similarly, when you look at people, when you look at animals and birds, when you look at nature, the mountains and the seas, you will see the light of God everywhere. And you will conduct yourself accordingly, with love and respect always.

