

The Human Experience Pt 9: Who Am I Really?

Andrew walked into the cafe and noticed Frank and Rose and a third person whose back was facing him sitting at a table some distance from the front door. They all seemed to be enjoying an engaged conversation. Andrew walked over to join them at Frank's gesture of invitation. Standing up, Frank shook his hand as he introduced the third person... "Geoff, this is Andrew". Geoff remained seated, smiled and extended his arm to greet Andrew who, to his surprise, found the expected hand missing, replaced by a stump. Not sure how to respond, Andrew simply took hold of the stump and shook it as normal.

Andrew squeezed past Geoff and sat down nearest the window. Geoff turned to him, saying "Well Andrew, you can settle the matter. Is climate change real or just a political football?"

"Hey, sorry guys," replied Andrew, "I'm not entering into this debate". Their lively conversation continued while Andrew, showing little interest, sat quietly. There was plenty of laughter and jostling of whose position was believable - yet Andrew was pensively disengaged. He was in a world of his own, distracted as if alone and it wasn't until Geoff got up that he was brought back to the group.

"Well Andrew, nice to have met you. I hope we meet again" said Geoff, as he once more extended his arm. Awkwardly and with some unease he shook it again, with a half smile and a nod of his head in response.

After a short lull Rose said, "Gee, you were quiet today Andrew!"

"What happened to him?" responded Andrew.

"Geoff was in a house fire when he was quite young. It was a miracle he survived. Eighty percent of his body was burned and he spent over twelve months in hospital" said Frank.

"He talks and acts as if he's normal, as if he looks like everyone else. His face..." Andrew paused for a moment "I just found it difficult to look at him but at the same time I couldn't stop stealing glances at his melted skin."

Nourishing our inner space

Have you ever been in a similar situation? One which jolts you to rethink what you see as 'normal'? To reflect on self-worth and even 'who am I'?

Over the years I've met people who have had significant disability or injury and at the same time a wonderful natural sense of self. People like Geoff seem to be looked upon by us 'normal people' as extraordinary human beings, whereas in their own self-assessment they don't see themselves as extraordinary, mentally shrugging their shoulders as if to say 'I just get on with living my life'.

It seems that the more extraordinary the human being is in my eyes, the more it highlights and exposes the false self-illusions that exist within me. Rose, Frank and Geoff related as good friends and mates - that is all they could see.

Watching the recent film *Avatar* I was really touched by the phrase 'I see you', the meaning of which went beyond the fact of seeing the physical self and ushered in the powerful gaze in really seeing another's essence. Rose, Frank and Geoff have that gaze. It is the same between parent and child - no matter what they look like; or the uncontaminated look between lovers, friends and even those of the animal kingdom. Even enemies can be transformed by such a look.

Who am I? It is meaningless when I 'see you'.

And when that same SEEING is directed inwardly the 'who am I?' vanishes and with it all the self-doubt, analysing and need to be fixed or to change disappears.

As I look back over my 60 years I can see the many selves that evolved and fell away, only to be replaced with another 'self'. To SEE the shape-shifting capacity of self-making is a powerful SEEING. THE SEEING seems so fragile and easily replaced by yet another illusory self.

We have a wonderful capacity for self-delusion and equally, a powerful capacity for SELF-AWARENESS. Choose wisely. ■ ■

"Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things. Meaning lies in us."

Marianne Williamson (1952 -). Activist, author, lecturer and founder of Peace Alliance and Project Angel Food.