

Compassion: Looking Through Soft Eyes

By Trina Swerdlow, BFA, CCHT

Becoming deeply acquainted with oneself is no small task. For this reason, connecting to one's inner workings is an ongoing, ever changing, and lifelong process. What makes this endeavor a slow but rich experience is that the essence of oneself may be buried under many layers of the personality. Therefore, getting past the encrusted layers to connect with the precious, authentic core can be quite an excavation process.

Similar to a real geological excavation, chipping away at your outer (hardened) rock formations to get to the gold beneath can take perseverance and patience. For this reason, it helps to not make the journey alone. Having the support of fellow seekers and a seasoned guide may inspire a more productive and fulfilling excavation.

Another gift of having other *hands to hold* is that if your own flashlight becomes dim and tired, the light from companion seekers can help you navigate until you feel recharged. In addition, having the love and support from others can assist you in finding compassion for some of the parts you may discover directly under the surface. For example, you may react with harsh judgment when you face shadowy, previously buried parts of yourself for the first time. For this reason, seeing through another's empathic eyes can be a wonderful help until you find your own *soft eyes*.

In my book, *Stress Reduction Journal*, I share that for me, letting go of harsh judgments toward some of the vulnerable, "less-than-perfect" parts of myself is an ongoing process requiring periodic updates. To see myself (darks, lights, and grays) through compassionate, loving eyes, I find that I first need to identify, and then remove, my judgmental glasses.

In my early excavation work I began to see that the *prescription glasses* through which I harshly viewed myself, dated back to early childhood. These distorted lenses belonged to people who were projecting their pain and frustrations onto me. Even though these glasses were clearly outdated, I carted them around because I believed that they were accurate. It was painful to realize that I had unconsciously renewed the prescription for these incredibly distorted glasses—year after year.

By no coincidence, a rich experience came my way that increased my ability to look upon *all* of myself more compassionately. It happened while I was attending a

daylong workshop about speaking from the Authentic Self. The purpose of this seminar was to create a safe container from which to access one's authentic voice and share it with others.

In preparation for the first exercise, the workshop facilitator paired us up with someone we didn't know. We were asked to face each other and then take turns speaking from our hearts. As you might imagine, this was initially quite scary. However, as the day went on, defenses melted and many people began to truly enjoy the experience. Laughter could be heard throughout the room. Many of the participants discovered that hearing others and being heard by soulful, safe strangers could feel quite wonderful.

For the final exercise of the day, our facilitator asked us not to speak at all, but just hold a partner's hands and experience being authentic without words. "Let the body and the eyes do the speaking this time," he suggested.

I was paired with a fellow in his mid-forties named Anthony. His arms and hands appeared deformed. I nervously began thinking about how Anthony must be struggling with this new version of the exercise. A heavy sadness filled my chest as I looked at his hands and connected with parts of myself that sometimes feel different from, and *less than*, others. Shame began bubbling up from the center of my being. Thank God this painful spiral was interrupted when the facilitator signaled for us to begin.

Anthony reached toward me first and offered his warm, misshapen fingers. As I reached back and looked into his eyes, I saw a loving, compassionate confidence I had *never* seen before—*from anyone*. He extended his fingers with such exquisite grace that I, too, was able to experience and feel their beauty. Clearly, Anthony was much more at peace in his own skin than I was in mine.

This realization sent a wave of sadness through me. I breathed into my vulnerability while continuing to look into Anthony's gentle blue eyes. The pale blue reminded me of a quiet pool of water—a still and smooth surface, yet deep. As I continued gazing, my sad feelings gently began to melt and the muscles around my eyes started to relax...they became softer. Anthony and I smiled at one another. It was then, in that sacred moment, that I joined him in the precious silence of *simply being*.

Graciously, Anthony shared his authentic core with me. He turned his flashlight in my direction and modeled compassionate, confident, self-love. Anthony was a fellow

excavator offering me a priceless gift. What a soulful blessing I received that day—a truly radiant experience!

As a Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist, I offer tools to my clients that assist them in peering below their own Topsoil. Letting go of seeing their shadowy or vulnerable sides through harsh eyes can be a powerful first step toward finding their own *soft eyes*. For this reason, many of my clients assess how old their visual lenses are. I often quip, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if our optometrists sent out periodic postcards reminding us to have our *inner vision* checked?"

The first guided-imagery session that I facilitate with new clients, also known as hypnotherapy, assists them in relaxing deeply. During this relaxation process I ask them to think of a relaxing color and if it feels right, then invite the relaxing color into their feet...relaxing all the muscles and tendons of their feet...to the tip of each toe. Next I invite the client to visualize the beautiful relaxation spreading into their ankles... legs...hips...spine and eventually we work our way up to relaxing the muscles around their eyes.

When we reach the eye areas, I invite my clients to think about someone who has looked at them in a compassionate, nonjudgmental, and loving way. Someone who is not looking at them lovingly due to how much money they make, how physically beautiful they are, or what kind of car they drive. I encourage them to remember the look in these unconditionally loving eyes that are seeing into their *exquisite core*.

Sometimes the unconditional love they envision is coming from a spouse, a child, or a grandparent. Other times it is coming from a beloved teacher or a neighbor who was kind to them in childhood. However, more often, this unconditional love is being beamed from a pet they either currently have or had in the past. As many of us have experienced, cats, dogs, and other animals are often *great teachers* of unconditional love.

While in this relaxed and loving state, I invite my clients to notice how their bodies feel...particularly their hearts. When they gently breathe into this experience they allow the unconditional love to nurture and to nourish them. By receiving this unconditional love, many clients go from having a busy mind with a tense body, to having a peaceful mind with a relaxed and warm heart.

Numerous clients who have used tools that I offer, have peered below their Topsoil and received more clarity about where or who some of their harsh self-judgments have come from. These clients imagined taking off their negative eyeglasses and handing them back to their original owners. They then worked on forgiving themselves for wearing the distorted eyeglasses. Eventually, they also forgave their caregivers who were simply passing on the painful glasses that they too received and wore as children.

These courageous and empowered personal growth excavations have assisted many of my clients in releasing beliefs and behaviors that no longer served them. As a result, they were given an opportunity to try on the lenses of Anthony's compassionate, self-loving...*soft eyes*.

Looking at the world and at oneself in a mirror, through these compassionate lenses, could benefit many of us...*each and every day!*

This article is a partial excerpt from *Stress Reduction Journal: Meditate and Journal Your Way to Better Health*, by Danville author, certified clinical hypnotherapist, and artist, Trina Swerdlow, BFA, CCHT. *Stress Reduction Journal* is available from www.amazon.com. You can reach her at info@TrinaSwerdlow.com or call (925) 285-5759. www.TrinaSwerdlow.com

Copyright © Trina Swerdlow, All rights reserved. No part of this article may be used or reproduced by any means without the written permission of Trina Swerdlow.