

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

NURSING

Francis of Assisi

Shocking!!!

How could it be? Can we ever imagine it—we human beings nursing God? Is this possible? How is it possible?

It is entirely true that in the Abrahamic traditions, Yeshua introduced a new level of intimacy between human beings and the divine that, perhaps, was not known until his radical teachings and experience began to affect his tradition and his world. His students took note of his language of intimacy expressing his deep and intimate relationship to God.

Yeshua was clearly living within the stream of enlightenment which has been called the “Axial Turn.” That crucial moment in human history was a turning from conventional religion to enlightenment religion which knows that the divine Reality transcends any of our anthropomorphic perceptions—our projections of human thought upon the divine Reality itself.

This way of seeing or perceiving Ultimate Reality utterly changed the religious thought of Judaism and in the end created its prophetic, wisdom and mystical streams. These traditions were also a part of Yeshua’s world and teaching. But he took them and went deeper into something we call immanence. As the Gospel of Philip says, he took what was outside and went to the inside and he took his students —and us—with him into that interior space.

It is clear that St. Francis moves radically deeper and changes the equation entirely. He sees a relationship of immanence and intimacy that reverses all our perceptions. We can easily see ourselves being nourished “at the breast” of the divine (or at least sitting in the lap of Mary or Wisdom), but could we imagine ourselves nurturing and nursing the Divine? Again, is that possible? Does the Divine need this from us?

This is a level of intimacy between ourselves and the Christ that is like holding an infant tenderly and lovingly in our arms, and like a mother giving herself to that child. Again, if the image holds, is God or the Christ our “child?” If so, how do we nurture God as music pulses through the universe?

Clearly this is a mystical vision, or perhaps a dream, but one he was convinced that is more true than the existence of the world itself. This vision apparently affected St. Francis deeply. It came as a result of his own prayer, his asking for deeper intimacy. It was the answer that he was given. It also changed the way Francis related to the world, moving him to a deep sense of intimacy. Perhaps we need that same vision or dream to understand this and to change our relationships with everything around us.

St. Francis (1181-1226) began his life as a privileged son in a wealthy family in Italy, but life itself changed him. He went on to choose a life of holy poverty, founding a community of friars who brought a message of love and peace to the world. His message and his memory has spread around the world.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. Upon hearing this poem of St. Francis, what is your immediate response? How does it make you feel? What do you think about it?
2. In your view, is this true? Is it a real experience that human beings can have? Or is it just fantasy? If it is, what truth does it hold?
3. How do you respond to the illumination of the poem? What do you see in it? Does it make you consider this poem differently?
4. If we changed the original lines of this poem to express it more generally and said, "I asked for the most intimate experience with God," would this change the poem for you?
5. Why do you think Francis hears music as he sees this vision?
6. Francis says he was given this understanding (this seeing) as a result of his own prayer to have a more intimate relationship with God. Have you ever prayed for deeper intimacy with God? What was the result?
7. Would you show this poem to someone else? How would you explain this poem to someone else? Would you need to have had this experience to explain it? Can you explain it?

A Place for Notes and your Journaling:

This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for contemplative prayer.

LECTIO DIVINA

The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text

I asked
for the most
intimate experience with the Christ.

No one will believe what happened.

In a vision more true than this world
a sacred chord sounded
and light pulsated
through the universe
as I nursed my own Lord
at my breasts.

—St. Francis of Assisi
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for public reading and illumination by
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from the poetry of Daniel Ladinsky
Love Poems from God
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Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATION

