

VISIO



DIVINA

The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision

PLACEBO

Francis of Assisi

These poetic words, ascribed to St. Francis, express a perennial truth deeply rooted in the wisdom tradition. Where we are now, this experience of earth, is not our original homeland. We come from elsewhere. We have journeyed here, and we often imagine that this place is the only place we have ever known.

Francis knows differently. He is awake to remember his origins. He has touched not only the homeland, but his own deep essence—the essential core of his being, and knows that he has, for a lifetime perhaps, been in mourning, missing his essential Self.

This is a teaching that is shared worldwide by many streams of wisdom. It is the remembrance of the saints and mystics. It is also part of the diagnosis of the human condition as we currently know it. We go about our daily lives, putting on a good show, flashing the right face, but something is often missing for us and we feel it. Francis says we have lost touch with our origins and our essential Self, and so we have to pretend that everything is normal. We suppress our deepest grief, the deep sense of the loss of being-in-touch with who we are (or at least once were).

There is, perhaps, inside of us a faded memory of our pre-existence. From time to time we have a brief glimpse of it, or the scent from some other land comes to us and then quickly leaves. Suddenly again there is in us the sense of loss and mourning. This, says St. Francis, is the background of our normal lived experience.

The only cure for this dis-ease, he says, is Light. A little light from the land of our origins (and from our essential self) leaks into our current world, and opens a crack in the door for hope. It is that Light and that Hope which begin to cure what ails us here in the shadowlands of duality. If we imagine this world to be all there is, then we are tormented by the inequities, the disparities, the obvious imbalances. Unless we ignore our world for what it is, and suppress the pain with placebos to cure what cannot be cured without Light we experience an inner torment. But there is always available a medicine, and it is Light—the light that is the opening to our true nature and origins—that becomes the cure.

This is not an easy teaching. This mystical teaching is a diagnosis that is hard for us, here in the rhetoric of modernity that denies the existence of anything but itself. If we take the “cures” that our world says will numb the pain, we only prolong the suffering. Francis would have us awaken to Light that we might know the truth and experience the reconnecting to our essence and our true Self. From a mystical point of view, that is the only known and ultimate cure to our persistent pain.

St. Francis (1181-1226) began his life as a privileged son in a wealthy family in Italy, but the experiences of life as a soldier changed him. He went on to chose 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 and images of him are found everywhere.

Reflections on Image and Text:

1. *How do you feel about St. Francis' diagnosis of the human condition? Is it already part of your understanding or awareness, or is this a new way of seeing yourself and the world?*
2. *Would you agree with him that you are in some sense "in mourning" for your essential Self—your own essence?*
3. *Have you ever had a sense, even briefly, "Yes, I know this! There is some other truth hidden away from my normal awareness?"*
4. *Does your story about yourself include any of these teachings? What, for example, do you consider your origins to be?*
5. *What would you say is essential about you? How would you describe your essential Self?*
6. *If St. Francis is acting both in the role of diagnostician and doctor, what do you think about the diagnosis and the cure that he proscribes?*
7. *How much Light have you taken in? How much of the modern cures for the pain of humanity have you taken in? Has it been a placebo? Is there a placebo effect to it?*
8. *When you look at the illuminations for this meditation, what do you see? What do they help you to understand? Journal your impressions and reflections.*
9. *Which illumination speaks to you most deeply? Spend time with it each day, but do not ignore the others.*

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

*W*e are all in mourning
for the experience of our essence
that we knew
and now miss.
Light
is the cure.
Everything else is
placebo.

—*St. Francis of Assisi*
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Contemplating
THE ILLUMINATION





