

Zoom, Zoom, Zoom!

June 2, 2007 by [lifeshifting](#)

Whenever I meet a potential new client for the first time, I introduce them to two of my favorite children's books: *Zoom* and *Re-Zoom*, both by the wonderful illustrator [Istvan Banyai](#). Together, my new client and I typically read these two books, which sit on the coffee table in my office, in about five minutes. They are quite easy to read, for there are no words, just full-page breathtakingly beautiful illustrations of scenes from daily life: children playing on a farm, a family on a cruise, a old lady on an airplane, a taxi cab in Manhattan. The books are nonetheless life-changing...or should I say, *life-shifting*, for every person who encounters them. They basically set the tone for all the work that is to come. So what, you ask, is so special about these books?

It's very simple. Each illustration that we see on one page is found replicated somewhere, in part or whole, on the next page, embedded in a new illustration. Page after page, the illustrations move you through a wide range of worlds both microscopic and panoramic, depending upon what direction you are going in the book. In this way, each book reveals a narrative that starts with a "normal" view and then shifts your focus either inward and downward (e.g. a full color, full page carnival scene on one page shows up on a postage stamp on the next page), or outward and upward (e.g a tropical rain forest scene on one full page turns out to be the cover of a book being read by a child sitting in the window of an airplane crossing the sky on the next page). In this simple yet powerful way, Banyai reminds us of a very poignant truth: *how we experience the world depends greatly upon what we choose to see.*

Think about it. From the moment you wake up in the morning and open your eyes, what you experience as "real" is made up of a strange and sometimes awkward collision of internally generated thoughts and emotions (memories, dreams and reflections) and external images—sights, smells and sounds. So how do we make sense of anything? Clearly, our ability to not come apart at the seams in the face of the sensory and cognitive assault we benignly call "waking up," is due to our ability to do one thing: *focus*. What we focus on becomes real for us. In the moment that I turn in bed and attend to the cat lying by my side, most everything else (not everything, but close) disappears. There's the cat. He needs/wants to be petted (of course, I'm making this up!). I pet him. I stroke his fur and watch his eyes glaze over in pleasure. Everything is as it should be. All this is "normal" and doesn't feel or appear particularly special to us.

Yet, as Banyai's books remind us, what we see, feel, or ignore at any given moment is always a choice. We can get laser focused and we can span the horizon. We can get tunnel vision *and* we can get lost in universe. The work of a life-shifting coach/therapist asks: where are you? Are you seeing the big picture? focusing on the positive? honoring what is right in front of you? Are you aware of the past, but not caught in it? Are you envisioning the future, but living in the moment? Or are you caught in the dark, tied down to an old routine, an old pattern, and old way of seeing that diminishes you and

keeps you small? Sometimes breaking out of worn out patters is as simple as turning the page, opening our eyes to a wider view, seeing anew.

So today I want to remind you that *life-shifting* is about mind-shifting. From the Eastern perspective of Buddhism the practice of enlightenment begins and ends with accepting what is. Being present. Still. Grounded in the moment with what is right in front of you—chopping wood, carrying water, doing the dishes, or making love. Yet, our Western cultural conditioning adds an ocular layer to the experience of what is as well, for “what is” is also a matter of what you choose to see; how you choose to dance with the fluid boundary of inner and outer worlds; how *you decide to be*.

I did the following exercise yesterday and I highly recommend it. From about 3pm in the afternoon until I went to bed at midnight last night, I made a point of constantly re-assessing my visual experience of the world around me. For example, I stood on the street corner, gazed downward and closer, narrowing my vision to take in the mail box next to me, the overflowing trash can, the poster on the street light post, the stains on the sidewalk, the misshapen stonework, all the way in to my toes on the pavement, my multi-colored flip-flops, the ripped up hem on my jeans. Then in equal measure I brought my gaze upward and outward, taking in the broader landscape— the street filled with cars, people walking in a multitude of directions, and more: a cacophony of buildings, windows, arches, stone gargoyles, water towers, trees, puffy clouds behind the spire of a church, and finally, the great expanse of blue sky.

Sounds like a simple practice and it is. You can do it anywhere. I tried it in a crowded movie theater last night: moving my gaze from the cat hairs on my pants, slowly, ever so slowly expanding my vision to include my body in a chair, the chair in front of me, the back of the head of the person in front of me, the row in front of me...and onward and outward until I could bring the whole screen, theater and room into my field of vision. When was the last time you noticed the lighting that brings a warm glow to your favorite theater? Last night I discovered that my neighborhood movie theater has a beautiful, antique chandelier! Does your favorite movie theater have a curtain across the screen? Does it matter? Of course not...and yet...

These simple exercises are practices for becoming present and awake to your surroundings—the beauty, diversity, the presence of life—that swirls around and in us at all times and all places. We need only pay attention. Give it a try...and if your not sure what the hell I’m talking about here...get hold of Banyai’s books. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Happy Seeing!