

Gaze. Glance. Gaze. Glimpse. Gaze.

Gaze: "Look steadily and intently, especially in admiration, surprise, or thought."

Glance "Take a brief or hurried look."

Glimpse: "See or perceive briefly or partially."

As I push "send" it's around 4:20pm in Seattle on December 21, 2021. Today is the longest night of this long dark year. However, if you know me, you know I think that, like the wilderness, the darkness isn't necessarily an unhappy thing. When things are a little bit dark, I get better at **gazing** at what's right in front of me. And that can be good for someone like me who can instead get so enthusiastic about the future.

Gaze. I know I'm designed to get good at doing this. And it's part of what I've tried to learn spiritually for a long time. Jesus said, **"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."** In other words, there's plenty right under my nose for my poor little mortal brain to focus on. Especially when it's a little bit dark. Personally, I like the idea of a "spiritual practice." The idea of a "spiritual discipline" sounds too rigorous for my usually light heart. Practicing something that I like—where there are regular happy benefits—works better. The payoff is that the present is the only place where the possible can become real—and where I can have a little hand in finding my next step. And so, I try to **gaze** at what's right in front of me. A lot. Plus, being present is pretty central to having presence (so this helps me to practice what I preach).

But then, as I **gaze** into the present moment, maybe I **glance** back into the years I've already lived. I think this too is what our brains are designed to do. I **glance** at the memories that are my past. Like you, I cannot **not** make meaning of the there-and-then. The problem is, if the meaning that I make is that everything was either my fault—or to my credit—maybe I fortify my sense of how much I can control. The truth is that I have controlled much of my story up to this moment. But at times I was also like a girl in the surf, standing up and getting knocked down on a regular basis. I remember the lessons, the joys and triumphs, the people, the heartbreaks, and scars (both received and given), and maybe the places where I became either too impetuous or too cautious. **Glancing** back, I usually find and refine something useful.

Gaze. After some **glancing** back, and returning with something generative, I try to bring my physical attention again to the vividness of life in this present moment. Sometimes I succeed. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn, suggests, **"Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile."** This helps.

And then, maybe even in the same dark day, I look up from the here-and-now and consider for a moment the what-if. I believe this too is by design for us humans. I think of this as **glimpsing** (except you can't be worrying when you do it). Maybe you see flashes—**glimpses**—of your personal horizon. *What's possible? What's desirable?* What is it for which those people out there in my future might thank me? And for what might I thank them? I usually take a few notes about what I could create that would enrich and delight my mind and heart and hope.

And then I try to return my **gaze** to this present moment, to the place where my life and relationships are most vivid.

Gaze. Glance. Gaze. Glimpse. Gaze. If you're like me, in the incandescence of this shortest day, and this longest night, you'll make time for reflection, I pray that as you do, you'll find yourself practicing a sweet and gentle mixture of each of those things.