

A close-up photograph of a woman's eye peering through a large, green, textured leaf. The leaf has prominent veins and some small holes, suggesting it might be a Monstera. The eye is light-colored with long, dark eyelashes. The overall tone is natural and organic.

Just One Look

*Experience the Power
of Human Consciousness
to Free Itself of the Fear of Life*

John and Carla Sherman

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Third edition, revised and updated on October 31, 2017.

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A Proposal

We have something to propose to you that we believe to be of great importance to the future of humanity and to the lives of each and every human being, beginning with you.

If we can make a community effort to spread the news of the simple act of inward looking at yourself as far and wide as possible, it has the potential to save us all from the looming consequences of the self-destructive madness that has so far informed our entire history.

But first we need to tell you the story of how it has happened that we should be speaking of such extreme matters and making this extraordinary proposal to you.

The story begins with John Sherman in a federal prison in Englewood, Colorado, in 1993.

My So-Called Enlightenment

Twenty-four years ago, while serving time in a federal prison in Colorado, I came upon and fell in love with a family of ancient wisdom teachings. I followed as best as I could what I understood from those teachings and quite quickly, within six months or so, there appeared in me the continuous experience of reality as a vast, clear openness, unobstructed by ignorance, requiring nothing, lacking nothing. Beauty and wonder abounded. I wrote to someone during that time that the stones sang silent arias of Being for me. I had found actual enlightenment and liberation from all the misery of human life.

After about a year and a half of this, a yearning for things that I wanted and didn't have, along with a growing disaffection with things I didn't want but couldn't get rid of, and an array of long-standing psychological disabilities and reactive behaviors, it all began to take center stage again and quickly

brought my so-called enlightenment to an abrupt end, leaving behind the continuous experience of loss, torment, craving, and despair. It was again as it had always been.

I blamed it on myself, of course. I believed it was my own doing, my own fault. I had wanted what I should not have wanted; I had thought the wrong thoughts; I had understood wrongly the wondrous teachings that had brought me so much bliss. Maybe I was an irredeemably flawed and broken person, bad seed, and so forth. This was certainly the most likely explanation. I really was a bad person. My entire life up to then had been one despicable, inexcusable act after another, wrapped in a chain of lies, deceptions, and denial.

By the time the spiritual melodrama came and went, I had been in prison for fifteen and a half years. In 1978, I had been convicted and sentenced to thirty years in federal prison for bank robberies, property destruction, gunfights and escapes over several years in the seventies. I was put on the FBI's Ten

Most Wanted list after escaping at gunpoint a second time, this time from a federal prison in California in 1979. I was finally captured for good in 1981. I would remain in prison until 1998, when I was released to a half-way house on parole.

Trying to Find the Act

My life before the seventies had been even uglier. I had lived all my life as a petty grifter and con man. I had been a failed gambler, a credit card hustler, a womanizer and an all-around scumbag. The idiotic politically motivated violence I embarked on in 1977 was a step up for me. All things considered, there could not have been a less likely candidate for enlightenment than me.

But maybe it was not entirely my fault; maybe it was just in the nature of human life to be broken and spoiled, to be endured in quiet desperation from birth to death. Maybe there was nothing to be done about any of it. Maybe that was just the price of being human.

Maybe the gorgeous religious and spiritual teachings were themselves just part of the swirl of madness that seems to be the basic nature of human consciousness. Life is suffering, as they say; original

sin, maybe. And so forth. Either way, the end is always the same: loss, torment, craving, and despair.

Sitting in my cell in a federal prison, in the aftermath of my self-inflicted fall from grace, neurotically wallowing in self-pity and despair, I decided that I had to know. I had to know once and for all whether there was even a shred of truth in all the stories and dreams of redemption, forgiveness, salvation, liberation, realization, fulfillment and eternal love that humanity has dreamed throughout the ages. Despite everything, I wanted desperately to believe that there was some underlying principle of fundamental goodness that breathed hope into what seemed otherwise to be a cold, unconscious, dark and heartless, insentient universe. I still strongly suspected my lifelong yearning for understanding and deliverance had been nothing but part of a pretense that such liberation was possible, and that I had defended that pretense with a cowardly refusal to look directly at the hallucination itself. But now I had come to the point where I had to know, one

way or the other. It felt as if I would die if I could not know whether there was any hope anywhere to be found.

I gave this matter a great deal of thought, and came to the conclusion that I had to find an act that I could do with my own mind that would, even if it failed to save me, at least wash away the last vestiges of hope in me and let me get on with my life.

I could see that the best chance of finding such an act was within the very wisdom teachings that had already betrayed me. I could see that therein could be found the accounts of our best efforts in these matters — in the wisdom teachings and in certain of the religious teachings. I thought that if these teachings were approached not as keys to salvation, but as the records of all the research that had gone before in our so far unsuccessful quest to find salvation, it might be possible to look more closely and critically at those best efforts and maybe find a clue. Perhaps there, looking at things as a researcher rather than as a seeker and suppliant, I would be able to find some

hint of the best direction to look for what I wanted.

I could see that it had to be something that any human being would be able to do; something that had nothing to do with understanding, merit or any other thing. It had to be something that would settle the matter once and for all as to whether human life was worth living. And I fully expected to find that it was not.

The Results

To make a long story short, I settled on an act and began to try with all my heart to do it. There would be no point in recounting here all the false tries, wrong turnings, distractions and false results I managed to create along the way but, in the end, the act of Self-Inquiry brought me home, safe and sane, naturally free, and quietly in love with my own life as a human being.

It took me a while to notice that something had changed. I began to sense that the need to find and fix something wrong in my mind was weakening. My interest in fixing myself was naturally falling away, with neither resistance nor clinging, and I was becoming more interested in the things that were happening in my life.

Not that everything was peaches and cream. Far from it. Early on, there were times of dramatic neurotic wretchedness and fear. But those came and

went, and left no residue behind. Now I see that those times were part of the natural course of a feverish recovery from a kind of psychological autoimmune disease that we now call *the fear of life*. And before too long, within a couple of years maybe, the fever broke.

Within five years of the moment I had sat down on my bunk in that prison cell determined to rid myself of hope, my relationship with my life had settled into sanity—as if ordinary sanity was really all it had ever wanted. Life is now, as it has always been, literally awe-inspiring. Life is difficult to make sense of, impossible to predict, filled with problems and solutions looking for their mates, shot through with the colors of pain, pleasure, and moments of exhilarating terror, and always, always beautiful beyond expression.

Trying to Pass It On

When I was released from prison in 1998, I was taken in by the community of people who had befriended me while I was inside. They gave me a job, and when financial problems made it impossible to keep me on, they began to organize meetings with me in satsang where they continued to support me with donations. A new context for my life was beginning to form on its own.

In June of 1999, great good luck struck, and Carla married me. At the time, she was going through the same recovery process I had been going through myself.

For the last eighteen years, Carla and I have worked together to find a way to tell others about what we have discovered. We have had meetings with people in person all over the country and with people around the world online to bring the news of the power of looking at yourself to the world. In

these meetings, I would listen to people's reports and answer their questions. Carla would organize the meetings and take care of everything. In the last year or so, Carla and I have started conducting the meetings together.

Telling others what we have discovered has turned out to be much harder than we imagined it would be. We knew what had happened to us, we knew what it felt like to do what we had done, and we were living its results, but we couldn't find a way to say anything about either the act of looking at yourself or its results clearly enough to be heard.

The act of looking at yourself requires nothing but the doing of it. It requires no new understanding and no abandonment of existing understanding; no new belief and no abandonment of old belief; no mind reform, no purity of purpose, no special postures or mental preparation, no direct transmission of any kind. It costs nothing. It takes almost no time, and it can be done literally anywhere, at any time, by anybody — with no preparation at all. Because of this, we believed that if we could say it clearly enough,

anyone hearing it would certainly try to do it. And we knew, from our own experience, that anyone who tried it could not fail.

Our Life Mission

In those first years of our work, it seemed that the act of looking at yourself was too simple, and our understanding of things far too complicated to speak about it cleanly and directly. The harder we tried, the more it seemed that we just were not up to the task. But the harder we tried to abandon the task, the more clear it became that that too was impossible. Again, we'll spare you the details, you know yourself that life pretty much just takes its own way, with little regard for our opinions in the matter.

So we decided that since this was the life we had, this was the life we would live with all our heart. The practical purpose of our life together had become finding a way to communicate directly and clearly to anyone who would listen exactly what had to be done to be finished once and for all with the fear and self-hatred that spoils human life. We would find a way to speak of this act and its outcome, so that

anyone could understand and accomplish the act, and recognize the results as they unfolded.

For us this meant to continue speaking with people and allowing them and the conversation itself to teach us how to say what we wanted to say. This is a profoundly human act, and it seems obvious now that it could only find voice in human conversation rather than in solitary reflection or the search for magical understanding from an anointed guru.

Now this simple act has found voice, and its power is beginning to reveal itself more broadly as word of it spreads and more and more people tell us about their own attempts at doing it and their experience of recovery.

Over the years, we have developed [The Just One Look Method](#), which is comprised of the act of looking directly at the feeling of being me and a simple practice of attention that makes the recovery shorter and less conflicted and brings about a radical self-reliance that allows you to participate

consciously in the regeneration of your mental apparatus. More information in the addendum at the end of the book.

Too Simple, Too Good to Be True?

It might seem so, but many people now, from all over the world, have seen the power of this simple act of looking inward at oneself to transform the relationship with life from one of alienation, distrust and fear to the full, natural immersion in its endless wonder.

If you haven't already, try it now, and I guarantee that you will in the end find yourself at home in your life, safe and sane and content with it all. It may take a while before the full import of what has happened becomes clear to you, but I promise that you will be satisfied with the progress of things as they unfold, even though that satisfaction may seem strange to you.

You'll find the complete instructions [here](#).

Now What?

Once you have looked at yourself and started the recovery period, as the fog clears, you might come to see, as many of us have, that the idea of individual, solitary human beings realizing for themselves alone the full and complete promise of human life is just wacky. Humanity turns out not to be a basketful of individual human beings, but a single creature living many individual lives. Turns out that the boundaries separating those individual lives from the life experience of all the other lives are extremely porous. They cannot hold away the sea of misery that is the preponderant experience of the overwhelming majority of us. They leak. You may find, as many of us have, that this heightened awareness of human suffering and discontent, although it no longer has the power to ruin your experience of your own life, soon becomes tiresome — like a loop from a bad song stuck in your mind.

This empathetic experience of the misery of others is called compassion, and it often arises automatically in the human mind that has lost its own layers of protective structures and neurotic reactive behaviors.

And this compassion, when seen for what it is, requires us to make a choice: we can do nothing and live with the minor irritation that comes from the misery of others; we can head for the hills, literally or metaphorically put some distance between us and the suffering others; or we can try to end the misery of all by bringing the actual solution to all of humanity.

A New Possibility for Humanity

Now, probably for the first time in the history of humanity, there is a credible possibility that our collective insanity will actually push us over the edge into an irreversible descent toward the extinction of human beings altogether. This is not an exaggeration for effect, this is the literal truth. Just look around and see for yourself the self-destructive madness beginning to show through everything, everywhere, in every venue, all the time.

Of course, it is true that those of us alive today, especially the older ones, like me, will doubtless live out their lives largely unaffected by the slide downward, and those, like me, from whom the fear has gone will die contented, and untroubled by the darkening outlook for the species. Of course, it's also true that there is no experience remotely as wonderful as the experience of watching another human being go sane.

Now, the discovery of a solution that is simple enough to be engaged in by all human beings has actually opened up a new possibility. This simple act, if done by enough of us, will most likely not only reverse the slide toward extinction, but will usher in a new age of sanity and common sense in which all human beings will be able to thrive and flourish in ways we cannot imagine.

Carla and I choose to try to stop the misery and save the human species. We are certainly far from being the first ones in our history to have made this choice, but the solution we propose is so simple, and the means available to bring it to the world are so powerful and accessible to all, that we firmly believe that we have the chance to be the last.

What Can We Do?

First, let us review the seven assumptions and one fact that form the premise of what we propose:

- The cause of all disaffection from life and all psychological misery in human beings is the fear of life.
- Anyone who hears clearly the idea of this simple act of looking at oneself will pretty much automatically try it at once.
- Anyone who actually tries this act just once will succeed.
- Anyone who looks with their mind's eye directly at their self, at the feeling of *me* that is ever present within, will snuff out the fear of life once and for all.
- It is well documented that if the outlook of ten percent of any group of human beings changes, it will cause the outlook of all in the group to change. ([See Scientists discover tipping point for the spread of ideas.](#))

- Assuming this theory is true, and since there are about seven billion human beings alive today, we need only to bring this idea of looking at yourself to the minds of 700 million of us to trigger a tipping point. And in time, this will drive us all sane and reverse our headlong rush to self-destruction.
- For the first time in the history of humanity, we actually have at our disposal the technologies whereby we can bring this idea to 700 million of us. All that is required is the will and the means to do so.

The fact is that the overwhelming majority of human beings live in the experience of psychological misery and live their lives in an incessant search for relief from the sense that something is wrong, something needs to be done or undone, gotten or gotten rid of.

Experience the Power of Human Consciousness to Free Itself of the Fear of Life

This community—you, Carla and I, and all the hundreds of others who have now experienced the power of the act of looking at yourself—has plenty of compassion and fellow-feeling to provide the energy needed to fuel this experiment and all that's needed to bring it home.

Having seen this, we have taken as the sole goal of this community, of our work, and of the foundation that manages and supports it, a campaign to exponentially expand the reach of The Just One Look Method, and bring us closer and closer to the goal of having every human just hear of it.

We truly are all in this together. We can do this, and we can do it ourselves, as a community of ordinary human beings, without the need for saviors or heroes to rescue us from ourselves.

Reports of Success

On [our website](#) and [discussion forum](#) you will find hundreds of reports sent to us over the years, attesting to the results of [The Just One Look Method](#). Here are a few examples:

After searching for “enlightenment,” I did eventually experience a wonderful few weeks of “wowness” for want of a better term. Searching stopped and there was no separation and life was flowing all by itself. Then I woke up one morning and the “wowness” had gone.... I felt very depressed, to be honest. One good thing was loads of beliefs I held had disappeared. But I felt very empty.

I came across Just One Look in June of this year. I tried the looking and, to be honest, I didn’t experience anything at all. But John had said in a video and in writing that that doesn’t matter.

Whenever I felt inclined I did the looking again, until that stopped. Now I have started carrying out the Self-Directed Attention practice.

Although I knew John had said that once you've looked that's it, I was still worried I had missed something. Well, tonight I had the pleasure of asking John and Carla this on the phone. I now feel so much better, and I realize that now all I need to do is practice SDA. But do it, I must, and regularly , to aid my recovery and rid myself of the psychological fears that have alienated me from truly living life, so I can start to enjoy my humanness to the full.

John and Carla were so helpful. No fluffy fantasy promises. A simple practice that leads us to being fully functioning mature self-reliant humans.

K.S. (UK) September 23, 2017



I was involved with alcohol for many years and attended many AA meetings. I got the best results when supported by friends. After doing the act of Looking however this interest or need for alcohol simply fell away. I don't know exactly what happened and it wasn't really necessary that I know. The Looking along with the Self-Directed Attention exercise did the trick. I strongly suggest doing the latter, the Self-Directed Attention. It will help to alleviate some of the difficulty during the recovery process i.e. any mental anguish, anxiety over leaving alcohol, etc.

A. I. (Mexico) August 27, 2017



In the period of 2010-2012, I was very active in this work. I knew for certain that I had done the looking and was headlong into recovery. I was a regular contributor to the forums, and even

made a trip to Ojai to attend a meeting and to meet John and Carla in person. In early 2013, I changed jobs and moved into one of the most challenging times in my career. In 2015, we lost both of our dogs in the short period of four months, and two very close associates of mine had near fatal accidents.

What I have come to discover is that I was new into recovery and the shock of these events sent me running to what was more comfortable for me... the satsang world complete with the music, pictures, malas, guru-worship and, of course, dumping the responsibility of my life on to someone else. This was my way of escaping from these very difficult things and running away from life.

This wasn't a bad time. Great experiences were had. But, the great experiences came and went... just like the big personal traumas that sent me running into the satsang world came and went. Over the past couple of years,

I found myself moving deeper and deeper into a satsang community, where, to be certain, lots of excitement is there to be had, and big, blissful experiences are the order of the day. The people there seem to live from one retreat to the next, from one encounter with “the master” to the next. Some, making it their life’s goal to live on the land that he occupies at the moment. The machine around this teacher is top notch and they keep the community involved, engaged and running to the next event. It is easy to get caught up in the spectacle. The group energy is also very profound. It is easy, in the midst of the pomp and circumstance to miss the fact that aside from a rock concert type elation, no real change is happening.

The seeing of this dawned on me a couple of months ago. In my disillusionment, I checked back in with Justonelook.org and started reading the material that has happened during my absence. I watched the new videos and listened

to all the new podcasts.

Self-reliance and personal responsibility were what I was missing. Over a period of a few weeks, my interest in the satsang community and in the worship of the satsang teacher began to fall away. Although some nostalgia for this very charismatic and loving man still arises at times, what I am experiencing now so far outweighs anything that happened there.

I reconnected with John and Carla on the very first “Talk with John” meeting on Wednesday, July 5th. I have attended every Wednesday since. The meetings in this informal setting are really great. I feel that I have picked right up where I left off in 2013, but with a deeper perspective. I have started at step one of the process and I am practicing the Self-Directed Attention exercise a few times a day. This has been enormously helpful in dealing with the barrage of thoughts and emotions that are kicking into gear now.

Here is what I am finding as a result of my return to the JOL work:

- I want nothing but my own life, exactly the way it is;
- Life is slowing down for me. Because the fear is not propelling my every movement, things are slowing down and sanity is prevailing;
- A lifetime of people-pleasing is coming to an end;
- The smallest things interest me greatly such as the skillful concise writing of an email to my staff, doing the laundry, and hanging out with our dog;
- In the light of sanity, healthier choices are being made and I am feeling much better!

These are just a few things that are happening. The recovery isn't over, but these things are the result of self reliance, not the result of the "grace of the master." I hope some people may be able

to relate to this and are possibly helped by it. I am happy to be back and I look forward to reading your insights and sharing more of my own. Thank you.

B. A. (USA) August 5, 2017



I've known John and Carla for many years. I can't remember how many years ago I sat with them in a little group in Ojai. It was in the very early days of Just One Look before it was called Just One Look. But that was all John told us to do.

Something radically changed inside of me back then. I don't think I realized it at the time. It began with this simple, sweet, joyful experience of just being me. The me I have always been. It was so simple, I didn't talk about or even share it much.

I don't know what inspired me to go on

Facebook at 2 am this morning and go to the Just One Look site. Perhaps it was missing John and Carla. After reading just a short time, I realized I have been experiencing the simple joy of being me all these years and not even thinking about it.

So my dear friends, I urge you to check out Just One Look. I promise you, you will not regret it.

L.R. (USA) June 5, 2017

Addendum to the 3rd Edition

This ebook was first published in 2011. Since then, our work has evolved based on feedback from several hundreds of people around the world who have tried to look at themselves in the manner we recommend and have come to us for conversation, support and encouragement. This is how we have developed [The Just One Look Method](#), which is available to all on our website.

The Just One Look Method brings together the essence of Ramana Maharshi's Self-Inquiry (which is the act we call "looking at yourself") and a very simple, but amazingly powerful work with attention (we call it "self-directed attention exercise"). And no, this is not mindfulness meditation; it's more like its opposite.

We have spent the last ten years or so introducing The Just One Look Method to people of all walks of life, and helping them through the process of

recovery, and it has been proven over and over to truly achieve liberation from mental suffering.

John & Carla Sherman

Ojai, California

October 31, 2017

Other Titles by John & Carla Sherman

Lookers Tell Their Stories (2017)

No More Fear, No More Anxiety (2015, 2017)

Just One Look, the Story (2014, 2015, 2017)

*The Fear of Life and the Simple Act of Inward Looking
that Snuffs It Out* (2011, 2014, 2017)

Look at Yourself (2010)

*Meeting Ramana Maharshi, Conversations with John
Sherman* (2004, 2017)

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Recommended Reading

“The Radical Act of Inward Looking” is a corroboration of John and Carla Sherman’s work written by mental health professionals Paul Freedman M.S.W., R.S.W. Jonathan Goldberg M.S.W., R.S.W., and psychiatrist Jaak Reichmann M.D., FRCP(C).

ABSTRACT

In keeping with the new wave of context-focused behavioral treatment approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), we discuss an innovative behavioral intervention referred to as the Act of Inward Looking. The theoretical underpinnings of this intervention are based on the assumption that the primary cause of human psychological suffering is a pervasive fear of life which is established at

birth and thereafter operates as an unconscious psychological context or core belief. Problematic symptoms, negative behavioral traits and reactions as well as our attempts to get rid of them are seen as effects of this lifelong pernicious context. The Act of Inward Looking primarily targets and modifies this context and is thought to subsequently lessen or extinguish many of the aforementioned effects. The Act of Inward Looking is described in detail and viewed, in part, through the lens of In Vivo Exposure Therapy, as well as contrasted with mindfulness-based practices.

[Download the free PDF](#)

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