

# Vision

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Often the most important lessons come to me by way of mundane experience that by analogy sheds light on prior, much more important, aspects of life.

Ron and I have been friends for almost thirty years – since high school – and have more or less together ridden the hopeful swells of Mormon missions, university education and young marriage; seen the terrifying storm troughs of serious illness, depression and change of belief systems; and been increasingly awed by the wonder of life as we have matured.

A short while ago Ron decided to have his eyes “fixed”. We are both out-doorsy types, and freedom from lenses that fog and have to be continually pushed up one’s sweaty nose would be a wonderful thing. He came to stay with my family and me for a few days to have the surgery performed. D-day was yesterday, and surgery was preceded by an enjoyable round of golf with one of our university roommates.

Ron drinks deeply from life’s cup, and so it was no surprise that he reacted like a three-year-old on Christmas morning when he arrived back at our place post-surgery. Things had gone well, and a few hours after going under the laser he was ready to hit the golf course and had already been driving his car up and down a highway, just to see if he could do it. That last detail will remain our little secret, OK?

Ron described the immediate aftermath of this surgical procedure as the greatest miracle of his life, and suggested to me that if I couldn’t otherwise afford it, I should sell one of my children into slavery. I told him that I would consider that, but thought that since slavery required work, I would likely have to pay someone to take my kids off my hands, but thanked him in any event for his use of hyperbole to catch my attention.

I have thought for years about having my eyesight surgically corrected. One of my cousins used to help run the very clinic Ron visited, which happens to be one of Canada’s best. I took a scout troop on a tour there once, and even arranged for the lead surgeon, Dr. Gimbel, to receive an award granted annually by a community service group I used to lead. I have read several articles respecting this type of vision correction, and while I am intellectually convinced that the risk something might go wrong in my case is miniscule, and know that I would enjoy being glasses free, for some reason that risk has closed my mind to the potential benefits of the procedure. Any chance that I might lose my sight - or even have it significantly impaired – was off-putting enough that I have never been close to having the procedure done. And, ironically, I am not a conservative guy in most ways. I am a risk taker.

Things changed, somehow, yesterday when I experienced first hand Ronnie's contagious joy at having had his sight renewed. That kindled something that has me thinking about eye surgery, and that this morning has me at the keyboard.

Ron told me about a relatively new surgical technique, one of which I had heard but did not know much about. The risks related to it are even lower than those related to the former procedures, and it is deigned to help cure dry eye conditions, which I have. One of the reasons that I have not wished to consider surgery is that my eyes are sensitive in a number of ways, and I thought that if things could go wrong for anyone, they would likely go wrong for me. So at a minimum, I have decided to update my research in terms of what this procedure might mean in my case.

But the thing that got me going, I have to admit, was experiencing vicariously the undiluted joy Ron displayed yesterday as his eyesight emerged from the blur of surgery's immediate aftermath. He was able to see the world differently, and seemed to be experiencing a renewal that seemed familiar to me. Perhaps his sight was the same as it had been as a child, but the world had somehow changed. And in any event, the experience was so novel that it bowled him over. It wildly exceeded his expectations.

I thought of my recent experience while emerging from orthodox Mormonism. Ron went through the same thing many years ago, but did so in such a private fashion that I interpreted it is simple faithlessness and lack of discipline. And yet we remained friends. As he said to me recently: "I thought you were supposed to be smart? It took you this long to figure this stuff out? And for hell sake, why did you have to tell everyone about it? Why not just go quietly inactive, and enjoy life?"

My self-removal from Mormonism has peeled many of my senses. The present moment now seems as expansive as the Rocky Mountain foothills among which I live. I smile more often. Colors are either brighter or more noticed. Each non-Mormon human being with whom I work, live, brush shoulders in the street, or even read about, is more meaningful. My world as opened up, as if spiritual eyes were reconstructed.

And I recognize in many of those I love most the same fear that has kept me for all these years away from the eye clinic. Fear of the unknown. They cling to what they have as to my poor, but workable and well understood, eyesight. Surely I should not risk losing what I know works, even if it is often irritating and easily improved upon? And why should they toy with something so precious and basic as their belief system. Some things are just not meant to be messed with, no matter how attractive the alternative may appear.