



*"Seeing's not believing; believing is seeing."* – Little Elf Judy, The Santa Clause

I don't usually turn to Tim Allen movies for wisdom, but this line grabbed me as I watched 'The Santa Clause' on TV with my daughter last week. It's about fifteen years old, and though I've seen both sequels, this was my first viewing of the original. (Does anybody actually go to movies like this before they have children?) It was pretty much what I expected – not high art, but fairly amusing and quite heartwarming in that Hallmark-y way one tends to relish this time of year.

Speaking of this time of year... you'll notice that lots of our contributors have done the perennial "New Year's Reflection" in this issue. We writers love indulging in this kind of piece – the ol' Look Back, Look Forward essay – and I, for one, really love reading them. We seem to have an emphasis, this time, on resolutions: We've got articles about getting fit, getting organized, being present, being *happy*... All respectable goals for this, or any, new year. As for me, I've never been good at resolve of any kind, but there *was* a resolution type thingy knocking about in my head as deadline approached. It seemed eager to be written about, but it was amorphous and gauzy and wouldn't let me pin it down...

Which brings me back to those sage words from that unlikely source cited above: *Seeing isn't believing; believing is seeing*.

When I heard those words, spoken by Little Elf Judy, I had one of those "aha moments" that usually happen to me in the shower or on the treadmill at the Y. In the context of the movie, the words refer to belief in Santa Claus. But as I sat and pondered them, I decided our Little Elf Judy had unintentionally (or maybe not?) hit on something more adult, and far more profound. Suddenly, thanks to Little Elf Judy, my New Year's resolution became crystal clear. This year, I resolve to grow spiritually, which, to me – more than anything – means seeing through the eyes of belief.

This concept – “seeing through the eyes of belief” – is difficult to write about, especially for a general audience. Without getting into specific terminology drawn from specific religious texts or traditions, it sounds vague, abstract and terribly wishy-washy. I detest wishy-washy. I don’t like hazy, touchy-feely, let’s-gloss-over-anything-that-might-offend-someone language. It offends me. And yet... I think I have something to say, and I want everybody – yes, everybody! – to get it. I don’t want anyone to be hurt or angered by it, because that would defeat the whole purpose of sharing it. So here it comes: My super-ecumenical, something-for-everybody, one-size-fits-all primer on what it means to “see through the eyes of belief.”

Actually, let’s start with what it *doesn’t* mean, shall we?

Seeing through the eyes of belief *doesn’t* mean choosing faith over science. As a matter of fact, my fascination with science has exploded since I became a... well, you know, since I began to believe. I was never scientifically inclined in my youth; the subject always seemed rather dry and passionless to me. In school, I mostly avoided the hard sciences, gorging myself, instead, on the arts and humanities. Science just didn’t look like much fun back then. But now? Through the eyes of belief? I can’t get enough of it! Each new scientific discovery I read about seems like a little unveiling of the masterpiece... another snapshot of the big picture... Another piece of the puzzle, laid in. Through the eyes of belief, what once seemed cold and prosaic now seems like pure poetry in motion, and I always *did* love poetry!

Quantum physics is one of my current obsessions. I don’t begin to understand it – not really – but what little I

*do*

grasp seems nothing short of divine revelation. Lots of things do when you see through the eyes of belief.

Next: Seeing through the eyes of belief doesn’t mean wearing rose-colored glasses. We live in a fallen world, human nature is flawed, and life is full of suffering. Faith doesn’t obscure these truths, or ignore them, or pretend we can self-help them away. On the contrary, it absolutely, positively insists upon acknowledging them, which somehow makes them much easier to bear. (Faith is full of such intriguing paradoxes! Cool, huh?) Seeing through the eyes of belief means looking at ourselves honestly – with all our broken, ugly, petty imperfections – and knowing that we are deeply and steadfastly loved in spite of ourselves. What wondrous love is this? One that begins to whittle away at those imperfections while inspiring us to love others – some of whom we simply *couldn’t*, otherwise – in the very same way. Trust me, as one who once harbored all manner of vile nastiness in her twisted little heart, I am living proof that this white magic works.

Which brings me to # 3: Seeing through the eyes of belief doesn’t mean closing your eyes to the

“dark side.” I tried that for a while, and though temporarily comforting, the experiment was ultimately a bust. Because here’s the thing – there is no “dark side.” In every area of human endeavor – as in every human heart – darkness and light mix and mingle freely. Seeing while believing, I’ve decided, means simply focusing on the light and letting it guide you. You regular readers know I’ve been assiduously avoiding political news for a while. All the sniping and snark was getting me down, the growing atmosphere of “us” vs. “them,” the constant obfuscations and willful misunderstandings. Well, these things still bother me... but ignoring politics just doesn’t feel natural. Politics matters, and I’m interested in it – both as a citizen and as a writer. This year, I’m determined to see politicians, their “people,” and the pundits who make and break them, through the eyes of belief. The political arena can be a dark place, for sure – all that power floating around, up for grabs – but it can inspire great goodness and nobility, too. This year, I resolve to look for the best in politics, celebrate it when I find it, and try to take the worst in stride. I’ll keep up with it, but I won’t let it keep me up. After all, it’s just politics.

Seeing through the eyes of belief helps put things in perspective.

Because belief changes the way things look. It changes the way things feel. It literally changes the way you experience the world.

There’s a blog I read regularly, called “Conversion Diary,” written by a 33-year-old woman named Jennifer Fulwiller who grew up an atheist in a family of atheists – all highly educated intellectuals – and became intrigued, about five years ago, with St. Augustine’s advice, *“Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.”* As a sort of scientific experiment, she decided to live her life, for a while, as if God existed.

“The results were striking,” Jennifer writes, saying that the more she went through the motions of believing in God, the more the world began to make sense to her in a way it never had before.

“I still believed everything I’d learned from studying chemistry, physics and other sciences, but I now saw a whole other dimension to the world around me. It was like the difference between looking at a picture of a double-fudge chocolate cake and actually having one in front of me to smell, touch and taste. Everything I knew before was still there, but I was now experiencing it at a whole different level full of wonder and richness.”

How I wish I'd written that! Because that's so *it*. That's exactly what it feels like to see through the eyes of belief. Life becomes more vivid, more intense, more meaningful. Just... *more*.

Don't believe me? Try the experiment yourself. You really have to see it to believe it. Or vice versa.

I began this essay by quoting an elf from a Tim Allen movie, so it's only fitting that I leave you with the timeless words of the great western philosopher Steve Perry, who, as you may know, once moonlighted as the lead singer of Journey. These words will be my motto for 2011:

*Don't stop believin'... Hold on to that feelin'...*"

(Something I forgot to mention: Belief can make even the worst lyrics seem insightful. This may or may not be a selling point.)

Happy New Year, everybody. Thanks for reading.

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