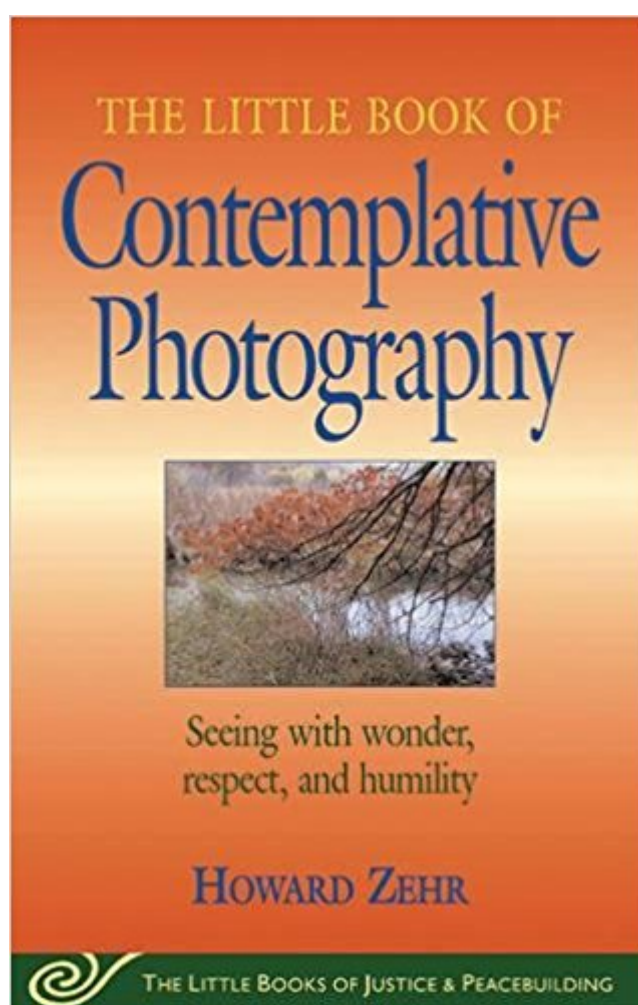


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# Little Book Of Contemplative Photography: Seeing With Wonder, Respect And Humility (Little Books Of Justice & Peacebuilding)



## Synopsis

Restorative justice pioneer Howard Zehr is also an accomplished photographer. He begins his latest book with a confession, "I have written this book in part to encourage myself to slow down, to heighten my imagination, to renew myself while I gain a new view of the creation and the creator." With this book, Zehr makes a gift to anyone who would like to couple photography with seeing and thinking more deeply. In each chapter he offers a Purpose, a Problem, and an Activity with a camera in order to "practice mindfulness." You'll not need a fancy camera, but if you have one it won't hurt. Zehr's chapter-by-chapter exercises are aimed at heightening visual awareness and imagination; all while doing good and working for justice. A title in The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding Series.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Howard Zehr is widely known as "the grandfather of restorative justice." Since 1996 he has been Professor of Restorative Justice at the Center for Justice & Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA, an international graduate program for justice and peacebuilding practitioners.

Howard has published several other portrait/interview

books including *Doing Life: Reflections of Men and Women Serving Life Sentences* and *Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims* (both with Good Books). He has authored numerous other books and publications; best known are *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Good Books) and *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. He is a frequent speaker and consultant on justice issues in North America and internationally. Zehr has also worked professionally as a photographer.

1. Getting Started Photography is not what's important. It's seeing. The camera, film, even pictures, are not important. -- Algimantas Kezys

2 Why this Little Book? This is the age of photography. Daily we are bombarded -- overwhelmed, really -- with images. Slick advertisements, sensational news photos, dazzling entertainment that seems to recognize no boundaries, hidden cameras capturing our embarrassing moments: we often become cynical about the power of photography to do good. Yet when properly conceived and conducted, photography can accomplish much that is positive. Photos can, for example, reveal what is hidden; they can tell important stories, preserve memories, stimulate dialogue, introduce people to one another, help to build community. I have long been interested in all of these uses, but these are not what this book is about, or at least not directly. Rather, this is about how we might use the medium of photography to stimulate our imaginations, to develop our intuitive and aesthetic sensibilities, to gain new insights. It is an invitation to stop and look and be refreshed. In order to do this, it asks us to "re-image" how we envision and carry out photography. Although this is not a meditation book in the usual sense, it proposes an attitude toward photography that in Chapter 2 is characterized as contemplative. In doing so, it does suggest that photography can serve as a medium for reflection and meditation, perhaps as a form of prayer. This book is included in *The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding* series because seekers of justice and peace are often so committed to their cause that they take too little time to reflect and to appreciate the world around them. Such practitioners may also have cultivated their rational, analytic side to the neglect of equally important intuitive and visual ways of knowing. But the same can be said of most of us: by slowing down to reflect and meditate, by heightening our visual awareness and our imaginations, by cultivating receptivity and a more holistic way of knowing, we can renew ourselves while gaining new insights into ourselves, the creation, and the creator. I must make a confession: I have written this book in part to encourage myself to do these very things more regularly. Although my main vocation has been in the justice arena, photography has been an

essential part of my life for more than 30 years. In previous books and documentary or journalistic projects, I have used photography to try to pursue my justice concerns. Initially I was drawn to photography, I believe, because it was a counter to the linear, analytic ways of knowing that were drummed into me by higher education. Through photography I sought to develop more balance. And photography has indeed provided an opportunity to develop and express my aesthetic impulses. But I am driven by a need to produce some sort of end product. It is difficult for me to allow myself to simply enjoy and appreciate photography as a process. I have needed to be deliberate about approaching photography as a kind of meditative and spiritual discipline. I have used some of the ideas and exercises presented in this book in classes or workshops. However, by forcing myself to structure this as a book, I am also providing a framework and encouragement for my own ongoing spiritual discipline through the medium of photography. When I was younger, I often was frustrated in my attempts to be deliberate about meditation. Somehow the disciplines and approaches to which I was introduced simply didn't seem to work for me. I assumed it was my fault, that there was something wrong with me, until I began to read about the correlation between personality types and meditative approaches. I learned that my entree to meditation often has to be visual. I have since worked with several spiritual directors who gave me assignments that drew upon visual ways of knowing and, through this, I found my way. Photography emerged as an avenue of refreshment and insight for me, and thus this book. About this book This book is intended for both the novice and the experienced photographer. It is designed to help us rethink the medium of photography and to use it to heighten our visual awareness and our imaginations. These exercises offer new insights into yourself and your world or, at minimum, provide a breather in the midst of a busy life. For the experienced photographer, they may offer a way to get out of a rut or to enjoy the process and the medium without so much concern about the end product. The act of seeing and photographing can become an end in itself. This is about photography as play, not as work. Each of the following chapters explores a particular theme. Each begins with reflections on that theme, then includes a series of suggested exercises. While the exercises are offered with an individual in mind, some of them can be used or adapted for use in workshops or classrooms. You also might want to consider teaming up with a friend so that you can share experiences and reflect on each assignment together. Often when reading I copy into my journal short quotations that speak to me in some way. I include a number of such quotations throughout this book in an attempt to make these essays less of a monologue and to provide insights that might serve as additional possibilities for reflection. Only a few photos are included in this book, and these are images intended to clarify points in the text. It may seem strange that a book about photography would be

largely without photos. Indeed, I was tempted to include some of my own photographs, but I feared the purpose of this book might be lost. This is a book about process more than product. It is about your photography, not mine.

**Equipment and knowledge** The exercises in this book require very little knowledge of photography and minimal equipment. The emphasis is on seeing and experiencing rather than how to photograph or produce a "fine print." You will need access to a camera. It could be as simple as a disposable or homemade pinhole camera. A small "point-and-shoot" (unfortunate terminology, as we shall see) will do well. A more sophisticated camera will give you more control, but if you are put off by technology, it will also offer more challenges that may get in the way of experiencing photography meditatively. I've also found that I'm likely to carry a small camera more often than a larger, more complex camera, and thus have it available when I see something interesting. Because of its instant results, a digital camera is ideal for these exercises. I've found myself using photography as a meditative discipline more readily now that I can make an image, then immediately put it on my computer and contemplate it there. Even if you don't have a computer, you can view your images on a television by using a connecting cable that usually comes with the camera. You may want to consider doing some or all of the exercises in black and white rather than in color. With black-and-white images, it is easier to remember that we are looking at a photographic image. Black-and-white images represent a kind of abstraction. Without the realism of color, we often are encouraged to see things that we might not otherwise notice. Patterns, textures, shapes, and visual movements that we easily miss in color often are revealed more clearly in black and white. Black-and-white images are especially useful for helping us to see and appreciate light. With digital cameras, it is usually possible to set the camera for black and white or to convert the images from color to black-and-white with your photo software. (The conversion command in your software may be called "grayscale," "remove color," or "desaturate.") For film cameras -- assuming you don't have your own darkroom -- I suggest you use one of the newer color-processed "chromogenic" black-and-white films (e.g., Ilford XP2 or Kodak B&W). These can be processed at any color lab or drug store along with color film. When they are machine-printed on normal color paper, their color cast may range from a pleasant warm tone to an objectionable green or magenta. Many labs, however, also offer prints on black-and-white paper at a slightly higher cost. In most cases, you should not use flash for these exercises as it will overpower and ruin whatever light is present in the scene; this is especially true for Chapters 2 and 5. For dark subjects, you may need to use a tripod or something to brace your camera (e.g., the back of a chair). Otherwise, the shutter speeds may need to be too long to allow you to hold the camera steady. With film cameras, you may want to use a film with a high ISO/ASA (a measure of film or sensor receptivity) in order to

allow shorter shutter speeds. In fact, I use 400-speed film for most of my work (I find that the film speed of most black-and-white film is overrated. I suggest you set your ISO/ASA to about 250 with 400-speed film.) On digital cameras, you may want to increase the ISO. Be aware, though, that ISOs of 200 and especially 400 or more in digital cameras will usually increase the "noise," i.e., the appearance of tiny grain-like spots. For most of these exercises, however, this will not be a significant problem as the quality of the final print is not what is most important. Journaling The value of these exercises will probably be increased if you journal during or after the exercise. The act of writing often helps us to think more clearly, and the written record provides a way to go back over time and observe how your experiences and insights have developed. I suggest that you make or purchase a journal specifically for these exercises. You may want to consider inserting photos from the exercises as you go, either by gluing them in, using plastic sleeves, or, if you are digitally printing your own photos, using a loose-leaf notebook and printing your photos on larger paper that can be punched and inserted as pages. Alternately, if you are using a digital camera, you may wish to journal on your computer and keep your photos there. If you are using a word processing program, you can even insert photos into your journal. (For Microsoft Word, the commands are In...

What a great book. I recently taught a class on photography as a spiritual discipline and had a hard time finding anything written from a Christian perspective. (By contrast, there seems to be an endless supply written from a Zen Buddhist perspective.) Howard Zehr is a distinguished professor of restorative justice at Eastern Mennonite University and he found that his work was so cerebral that he craved something more intuitive. He tried meditation with little success until someone suggested that since he was visually oriented he needed to find a visual form of meditation. He had a longstanding love for photography and suddenly saw that photography and meditation could be the ticket to the kind of meditative process he was looking for. While the book is fairly short, it is packed with great tips on how to duplicate the process in your own life.

Zehr guides photographers toward a new relationship with the subject matter of their photography. Bringing awe, gratitude and mindfulness/heartfulness to each photograph can not only create a positive influence on your photos but also on everything you see. Step-by-step suggestions and practices ease the photographer along the path. Highly recommend this little book.

This book, as a part of the Little Books of Justice & Peacebuilding Series, offers us complementary tools to, as the series title says, build peace and bring justice into our lives and also to our families

and communities, through meditation and contemplative practices. I recommend this book and the whole series!

What a delightful book! I read it quickly and then decided to read it meditatively, one chapter at a time, trying to apply its wisdom to my own photography and my own spiritual life. Zehr captures the essence of photography as relationship, using few words, lots of excellent illustrations, and a distinctive concept. You will see the world differently after you read it.

I love the way the author lays out the chapters in a weekly work-book style. The format is perfect for the individual as well as for a group study. A challenging way to change the way we see.

Very informative little book.

There's not too many pages to this book, but it does offer some very mindful exercises. It will help me look at photography from a different perspective.

Inspirational, motivational, am delighted with purchase.

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