

INTEREST: A FIRST STEP TOWARDS BEAUTY AND LOVE

by
Thomas Moore

I have known a few spiritual teachers and psychologists who base their work on this elusive principle of the soul's beauty. Their faces light up when you tell them about some quirk of behaviour or some unusual obsession. They are not numb to pain, but they appreciate the many ways the soul shows itself from person to person. They are slow to moralise, slow to diagnose, and very slow to change or instruct. I believe that any effectiveness I may have as a therapist comes primarily from the example of these teachers, who have a wide capacity to consider the manifestations of human life without requiring immediately that they fit certain norms of health and propriety.

Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying we should sit back and enjoy our own suffering or that of others. That would be sheer masochism and sadism. As Ronald Schenk puts it, first you see, then you know. First you have to be present to what is going on, and that requires at least a modicum of interest. You have to be interested in yourself, almost as an object. Things are happening to you that you don't initiate, and you have to look at those things carefully and closely. This kind of self-interest may then turn into a positive kind of self-love, and that is the beginning of healing.

If you can discover your essential beauty, in spite of all your problems and imperfections, you are on the way towards well-being. A preliminary step is simply to accept yourself with all your failures and imperfections. You must get the ego out of the way - the thought that you are so exalted that in your refined state you would be perfect. Acceptance is the beginning of genuine and honest self-love, a requirement for perceiving your own beauty.

Seeing your beauty, without extravagant self-absorption, is the first step in discovering your soul and eventually giving it the attention and care it needs. This is not so much a love of self as a love of your more vast and mysterious soul. It isn't narcissism, but rather the cure of narcissism. First you see yourself for what you are, then you love your soul, and then you breathe easy.

You have to see your beauty in a way that is focused and concrete. You may not be a great athlete but you may be good at maths. You may not make much money, but you may know how to live a meaningful life. You may not be highly sociable, but you make and keep friends. Personal beauty is a soul quality. You appreciate your character, a few good decisions and achievements, and ordinary talents, but you don't expect to be completely and extravagantly gifted.

The discovery of your own beauty - and I don't mean this sentimentally - is the foundation of well-being. Your beauty is complex. It is not all good and wholesome. It is not a superficial thing but is the very substance of your being. Truly beautiful people are not necessarily physically healthy, emotionally together, easy to get along with, or productive and successful. Beauty usually requires some imperfection, transgression or

lacuna. The whole of your being, the good and bad, is the stuff out of which your beauty makes an appearance. A lover may see it. A parent may embrace it. A friend may struggle with it but love it.

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