

Daily Meditation 06-01-23

Further Wisdom from Gandhi: the Secret of Life & Beauty's Role

Good morning.

We continue to explore the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi in light of an overall theme of holiness. And in today's meditation, Gandhi takes up the subject of beauty in a very simple but direct statement. He says, "Real beauty is my aim."

...Real beauty is my aim. That's his aim in his nonviolent political efforts. And it's quite a stark and rich statement: that in trying to bring balance back, Justice back, dispelling the colonizing empire, and doing it all nonviolently, that "Real beauty is my aim."

During the modern era, Beauty was really lost as a philosophical and theological concept in the West. Descartes has a whole philosophy without a philosophy of aesthetics or beauty. And I think, of course, his influence has been vast, especially in education, when he defined truth as clear and distinct ideas: Truth is only in the head. Not in our guts, not in our heart, not in our lower chakras, not in our anger and moral outrage, but in our head.

So I think we have to throw off that disdain of beauty.

And what's happened is that many people say, well, beauty is purely subjective, it's purely in the mind of the beholder. Well, that makes beauty utterly individualistic, whereas beauty is one of the ways that we bring community together.

Look at the painting behind me: Ralph Davis brought people together. Music does that. The same is true of Hildegard, over my left shoulder, her music and her paintings, mandalas, beauty brings people together; it doesn't separate us.

How can it be purely subjective? Two thousand people can sit in a concert hall and appreciate Mozart, or Miles Davis, or Hildegard. It seems to me that beauty is not purely subjective at all, as it reaches this common language that reaches the depths of ourselves.

Susan Griffith predicted this, she said she's quoting: "Oh beauty, they argue, is only a relative term, and beauty, they say, it's been said to exist only in the eye of the beholder."

That's exactly right. That's what they said. It's a way to dismiss beauty.

I refer to the teaching of Kenji Miyazawa, a Japanese Buddhist poet who says:

If you want to be an artist of Life, you have to discover the galaxy within yourself and remain aware that there is a galaxy within us and galaxies are beautiful.

...You have to discover it and remain aware of it, be with it, be present to it.

Of course as Otto Rank says, when the West lost the sense of cosmos, the galaxies, we became lost ourselves. And with this went Earth and erotic civilization. So Miyazawa goes on:

What then is the art of living? It is simply this: an expression of cosmic feeling for the earth and its products, for people and their activities, and for own individuality. And the way we create is this, using our emotions and intuitions, we affirm real life all the time, while all the time heightening and deepening our experience. What is the essence of this art of living? Of course, even this art should have beauty, as its essence.

...Beauty as its essence. So beauty is the art of living. And that very much echoes the teaching of mystics like Francis of Assisi, who says God is beauty, and many other pre-modern thinkers.

So part of moving out of modernism is acknowledging that beauty is real, like Gandhi says.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.