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Invoking Beauty:

A Taste of Paradise and a Touch of Bliss

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Many years ago, I used to hang out with a little two-year-old boy called Ben. One sunny morning, as we were putzing around in the back yard, he got curious about his dad's tool shed. So I took him by the hand, and together, we cautiously, we pushed the door open. The first thing we saw was a dusty table, and on it, a rusty old flash light.

"Wazzat?" Ben demanded.

"It's a flashlight," I explained.

To my surprise, it worked. Crouching down, I showed Ben how by pushing the button in one direction or the other, one could turn the light on or off. Ben's eyes lit up—he loved anything with buttons.

"Try it out," I suggested.

Ben stood very quietly, turning the rusty thing over in his pudgy hands. With a little frown of concentration, he pushed the button and the light came on. Off, on, off, on.

Then, he grew very quiet. For the longest time, he just stood there, gazing adoringly at the beat up old thing in his hand. Then, he sighed—a deep, contented sigh.

"That's beautiful!" he breathed.

Mesmerized, I thought to myself, "What if I could forget everything I've learned about beauty? What if I could forget all the messages I've absorbed about what's beautiful and what's not? What if I just started looking for beauty, listening for it, without any preconceived notion of where I might find it?"

This has been a practice I've been using ever since, and one that never fails to remind me that we're surrounded by a myriad forms of beauty just waiting to be noticed, appreciated and celebrated.

As a workshop leader, I'm privileged to work in some exquisitely beautiful spaces. Surrounded by nature, they're serene and graciously appointed.

But I also work in places like the West Bank, where trees are rare and the luxuries we tend to take for granted in this country are largely absent. Yet here too, beauty is always accessible. Beauty is after, all, not an external set of conditions but an inner experience that opens our hearts, shifts our perception of the world and fills us with joy.

Beauty is firmly rooted in the physical world—in the curve of a cheek, the color of an apricot or the shape of a mountain. At the same time, it's something utterly

transcendent. Carrying messages from beyond, it offers us a taste of paradise and a touch of bliss.

To me—and, I suspect, to most if not all of us—beauty is no mere luxury. Rather, it's a necessity without which life would feel barren and meaningless. Beauty reassures our anxious heart that Spirit abides within this world—we have not been abandoned in a material wasteland.

“Beauty,” said the Sufy mystic Rabiya over 1200 years ago, “helps me to know God cares for me.” I could not agree more. Yes, we live in a material world. And yet, as light shines through a stained glass window, Spirit shines through matter. And when we catch a glimpse of that radiance, we call it beautiful.

Does beauty rank high on your list of priorities? Is it something you value? Then consider whether your life style actually supports and fosters that experience. The truly blissful experience of beauty will elude you when you're harried and stressed or when your whole body feels like a tight knot. Beauty is always present, but to receive it, we must be open, expansive and receptive.

We've all heard the spiritual teachings that tell us to be present, to slow down and to open our heart. Yet often, we misinterpret them. For as I see it, their message is not: “Be present and you'll get enlightened” or “Open your heart so you can be more spiritual.” Rather, the true message is this: “Be present, so that beauty will know where to find you. Slow down, so that joy and peace and love can find you.”

Every time I lead a retreat for women, I'm struck by the beauty that emerges through them. Their skin becomes softer, their eyes shinier, their movements more fluid. They aren't getting facials or beauty treatments, they're just slowing down. They're connecting deeply with themselves and with Spirit. They're speaking their truth, quieting their mind and opening their heart. They're letting go into the arms of love—and as they do, their innate beauty begins to shine through.

Unfortunately, our society doesn't support this. It doesn't want us to take a step back and look at the bigger picture or ask the bigger questions. Instead, it wants us to keep running, running, running. “Forget about beauty,” it tells us. “You don't have time. You have too much to do.”

And so, we worship at the altar of Chronos, the cruel Greek god of time who devoured his children. But where Chronos rules, beauty makes herself scarce. She far prefers the company of Chairos, who represents sacred time—time out of time. Standing on the threshold between the worlds, she welcomes us into a realm of infinite abundance and mystery. And as we enter, we realize that no matter how long we have lived under the spell of Chronos, this other realm is in fact our true home.

Our souls are starving for the nourishment that only beauty can provide. Let us therefore shed our addiction to efficiency and speed and recognize her as the great

goddess she truly is. Let us invoke her, invite her, embrace and celebrate her, each in our own way, so that our lives might be healed and blessed by her sweet presence.

Try This:

Sit down in a quiet place with pen and paper. Ask yourself: "What are some ways in which I could invite beauty into my life?"

Write down whatever ideas you come up with. You might want to some fresh flowers. You might take a simple activity like putting on your clothes, and do it with complete mindfulness, so that it becomes an act of beauty. You might want to clean up a closet that has been neglected for too long or go for a slow, leisurely walk.

Now, chose one practice that you're willing to commit to. Notice what happens as a result. No judgment, no self-criticism, just witness your process with deep kindness and compassion.