

Intro

Where do you look for beauty? There is universal agreement that we all must make time to visit museums and sit before stunning sunsets. But seeking beauty there is not enough. Every religion agrees: The secret to encountering spiritual beauty is to visit and observe the unlikely places. Indeed, one could argue that this is the job of religion. It exists to teach us and to help us observe beauty in the less noticed places. Here we are reminded that beauty is not just an elegantly painted portrait. It is also the artistic force of the universe that is constantly painting us. Pulling out the elegance in each of us and the world around us to create the portrait that is life. So, by all means, get yourselves to the museum this month. Make time to gaze at the color-laced sky on your evening walks in the woods. But let's not forget to also visit the unlikely places and the beauty that awaits us there.

Spiritual Exercises

1) **The Beautiful Thing You Protect:** Rev. Sean Parker Dennison writes, "The ability to see beauty is the beginning of our moral sensibility. What we believe is beautiful we will not wantonly destroy." Beauty creates commitment. It lures us into loving it and becomes something we can't live without. We protect it at all costs. What is that core beautiful thing you defend like a mama bear because you know you'd be lost without it? For some of us, it's a form of nature. For others, it's a type of justice. For still others, it's a way of treating each other, like kindness. Or treating ourselves, like self-love. Whatever it is, we all build our lives around it. Look closely and you'll notice how deeply it defines us. By protecting it, we protect ourselves. Spend some time this month getting clear about that piece of beauty that turns you into a mama bear. After all, isn't getting clear about it is what life is all about?

2) **Enter the World of Ordinary Beauty:** We've all had those moments. The ordinary suddenly appears extraordinary. One minute the objects around us blend into the background, sit there as "things." The next they come to life, so clearly carrying meaning and memory. What once seemed possessions, now somehow possess us. They are a part of us, and us them. All it takes is a different kind of attention for their appearance to change. When it happens, it's beautiful.

This month make some time to lean into this sacred form of attention and re-enter this world of ordinary beauty. Maybe you'll explore poetry and literature in a deeper way (the full packet offers a list of poems for your consideration). Maybe you'll spend a little more time touching, smelling or sitting with the lovely things that surround you. Maybe you'll pull one of those lovely things out of the pile it's been lost in and put it in a place you pass by each day. Whatever it is, come to your group ready to share.

Chalice Lighting

Beauty, as a philosophical concept, is rather mysterious — a slippery elf, hard to catch hold of, impossible to define. But let me try anyway: Beauty is that which glistens on the edges of our yearnings and lures us into the depths of things. -Patricia Adams Farmer

Check-in *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

At some point in life the world's beauty becomes enough. You don't need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough. No record of it needs to be kept and you don't need someone to share it with or tell it to. -Toni Morrison in *Tar Baby*

We can argue about the reason for the universe and the meaning of the universe but not about the beauty of the universe... We all share beauty. It strikes us indiscriminately. It may be when our child was born into this world; or a simple flower; or a song; or a smile on a face; or a great act of courage; or a dance well done; or a child's laugh; or a loaf of bread baking; or finding a worthy job; or a snowfall; or when drawn to the Source of Life itself. There is no end to beauty for the person who is aware. -Matthew Fox paraphrasing Ernesto Cardenal

Beauty has no function, no utility... It greases no wheels, it bakes no puddings. It is a gift of sheer grace, a gratuitous largesse. It must imply behind things a Spirit that enjoys beauty for its own sake and that floods the world everywhere with it... Our joy in it shows that we are in some sense kindred to the giver and revealer of it. -Rufus Jones

If only our eyes saw souls instead of bodies how very different our ideals of beauty would be. -Anonymous

In my youth I am aware of it
and in my old age I shall walk quietly
the beautiful trail.
In beauty it is begun
and in beauty it is ended.
-Navajo Blessing

Questions

Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of beauty means for you and your daily living.

1. When did beauty first teach you something?
2. When was beauty a doorway to the divine?
3. What parts of life have grown more beautiful as you've aged?
4. Is beauty a private thing for you? Or do you need to share it with someone for the experience to be complete?
5. What if beauty isn't something we encounter but something we become?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection and Gratitude *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.*

Singing

"Beauty in the World," by Macy Gray
<https://youtu.be/0qX7ZsxD3Ik>

Extinguishing the Chalice

In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart. -Blaise Pascal