

Occasional Note #8

"Beauty Will Save the Earth"

I want in this Occasional Note to explore the meaning of this quotation of Dostoyevsky's and link it to what I see emerging as a new spirituality for the Twenty-first century. I am holding that in a particular apperception/ experience of the beauty of the created world lies a key to the embodiment of soul and spiritual maturity, both for the individual and for our species. I posit that this experience of beauty is with us constantly, but we are separated from it and fail to "see" creation in this way. Instead, we see it though various "blindnesses" that only partially and selectively reveal it, and often distort it. One way of conceiving spiritual practice, then, can be as "cleansing the doors of our perception" so that we perceive in the created world what is really there and act accordingly.

Behind this specific inquiry is the larger question of what we need to do as a species to right the imbalances and destructive patterns of our behavior that are leading to increasing violence and alienation among peoples and nations, and to growing ecological extinction and degradation in the animal and plant kingdoms. Here I consider this question through the lens of Spiritual Psychology and the specific question of beauty, as one small means among many to respond to it. I hope that this Note will stir thought and response, as the other previous ones have, and perhaps shed some light on this central challenge that we share, as individuals and as a species, as this century begins.

Initial Premises

To begin on familiar ground, I am positing, as have many, the existence of a natural process of psycho-spiritual development, or maturation, that is inherent in the human being-- a gradual awakening to, and realization of, one's true and deep nature, with a concomitant growing experience of connection to All Life through a full living of one's particular life. This natural process of awakening proceeds over a lifetime by means of a series of identifications which we take, for a while, to be who we are, **and** through the experience of dis-identification by which we, in time, let go of these limited identities and gradually come to experience ourselves as who we truly are-- souls on earth, joined with all souls while still very much ourselves. In this frame soul-realization is conceived as the experience of identity beyond any set of identifications, one of sheer being and vitality, which is then differentiated "back", and expressed through, our particular personal lives. This experience of soul-realization is most often characterized as union, or unity with all beings, for we have transcended all limitations of identification and become "one" with Life, but an equally important aspect of the experience, as you have heard me say before (see Occasional Note #3), is the affirmation of a very particular and unique life within this universal spiritual context. I have said previously, and will say again,

"The stunning paradox of human spiritual maturity is that,

as we become one with all creation, we also at the same time become completely and uniquely ourselves"

At moments of soul-realization we are both deeply connected to All Life **and** uniquely selves. We get glimpses of this experience as we grow, and, as we mature, the state becomes steadier and we are able to see others and the world in this same light of simultaneously both the universal and particular. At those moments, brief, or sustained, everything appears "numinous", to use Jung's word, and we are aware that All Life is both particular and universal, precious and sacred, and the intent to cherish and protect it quickens in us.

Identification as Limitation

Any identification limits this perception of full universality/particularity-- one's own, and others', and the world's. Identification is a lens that lets in some light, but screens out other. It is partial in its perception, and so limited. This is why, in time, we need to let them all go, in order to see more fully who we are and what world we truly live in. We need to be empty of these limitations in order to be full of Life. As identifications fall away, our perception opens to include more and more of what is really there, more and more particularity and difference, held within a universal spiritual context. At moments of soul-identification and realization we are able to embrace all differences, all particularity, and perceive and receive ourselves, others, and the world as we/they truly are. Paradoxically, in our loss of identity and emptiness of identification, we experience the fullness and vitality of All Life of which we are a particular and precious part.

At these moments my sense is that we also perceive how incredibly beautiful creation is, we perceive what I have called "Kosmos", using the Greek word for both "beauty" and "deep order". This apperception of beauty is of the Whole through its finite parts, through its myriad and unique details. It is an apperception that embraces every detail, without judgment, or limitation, or exclusion, and sees the particular in the light of the Whole. It sees the beauty of what is, just as it is. You might say that we see Creation at such moments the way God sees and holds the world, and we touch the love of Creation that Dante speaks of at the end of the Divine Comedy – "the love that moves the sun and stars". We perceive and love ourselves, others, and the world unabashedly and without restraint, but also without attachment, or identification. This is the soul's eye view of the world, one of adoration and celebration of the beauty of the Kosmos. This is not prettiness, or ugliness, nor taste, or culture. These are all criteria for beauty in a more personal sense. This is beauty in an impersonal, or spiritual, sense--beautiful because it is alive as itself and part of the whole of Life. Our sense of personal beauty, our tastes which generate attractions and aversions, can be as much blinders to this beauty as any other identification. Here I am pointing to an experience that is beyond any identification and that comes to us as we become, and are, fully incarnated souls on earth.

When we are blind to this beauty, when we are identified in ways that keep us from beholding Creation in this way, we wound each other, we experience

separation and disconnection from ourselves, each other, and the world. We are beauty-blind, and in our blindness strike out for ourselves against others. We suffer, and inflict suffering on others. This is the human condition, and it generates the world we live in--one that is familiar to us all. But as we mature spiritually, both as individuals and a species, as we touch this apperception of Kosmos more often and more vividly, this can change. It is in this sense that I understand "Beauty will save the earth".

The obstacles to this experience are clear and many at all levels of organization. Any identification impedes this experience. There are our personal identifications, but there are also cultural, national, and even species-wide identifications that limit our capacity for this apperception of Kosmos and the beholding of the full particularity and beauty of Creation. Ironically, this beauty surrounds us always, but we fail to see it because of these limits in our consciousness. And yet, through working with these very limits, recognizing them and letting them go, we can come to this experience. Paradoxically, and thankfully, the very obstacles are also the means to this end. Further, they are also the very particularity that we perceive when we touch the Whole, so there is no loss in this experience of identification, but rather a shift in perspective that allows us to behold the world in its particular beauty from a place that is not limited by those same particulars.

Another way to say this is that we need to empty ourselves in order to be full, we need to become "no one" in order to be joined with All Life as ourselves. It is the needing to be "someone" that limits us. We need gradually to let go of any identification, no matter how valuable, or good, in order to join all souls on earth, the kosmic tribe, which includes all beings, not just human beings, and the earth herself. Into this emptiness flows the fullness of beauty and All Life. This is the work each, and all, of us needs to do.

Reowning God

I imagine that much of this is familiar to you, though perhaps stated in other ways, for it describes the process of psycho-spiritual development and soul-realization that we all work with, and I am only adding here the connection to beauty/kosmos as another way of working with that process and experiencing its fruits. But there is one step that is less familiar, I think, that I would like also to speak about. This is the subtle identification that comes from projecting aspects of our soul onto the Universe in the form of God, or Allah, or Yahweh, or whatever Deity we may name and empower. This identification limits us in the same way that the other more obvious ones do in that we, then, do not have the full power of our own soul to live here on earth. We split ourselves spiritually and disown some of our soulforce, turning over the responsibility for our lives to the Divine. This is not to say that the Divine does not exist, but only that It exists in us, not out there somewhere. It resides in us at our most mature and responsible, and, if the earth is to be saved, it is we who will do it, not God. As Nikos Kazantzakis said, "We are the Saviors of God". In our reowning of this soul projection, as individuals and as a species, we bring the Divine fully on earth, we are able to see Creation as God sees it, because we become "as God" and we are then able to be responsible co-

creators and participate in, and protect, this Creation. This is a natural consequence of the apperception of Kosmos. We perceive, and so bring, heaven on earth, so to speak, by realizing and perceiving that this divine beauty is here now, not in some other realm, and that we have the power to nurture and protect it. And, as we lift the veil of this projection, and reown the power we have invested "out there", we also are able to see each other and the world in ways that reveal the beauty/kosmos of Creation right here/now and that truly will heal and strengthen us and all beings.

There is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke that speaks of this reowning of God.

All will grow great and powerful again;
 the seas be wrinkled and the land be plain,
 the trees gigantic and the walls be low;
 and in the valleys, strong and multiform,
 a race of herdsmen and of farmers grow.

No churches to encircle God as though
 he were a fugitive, and then bewail him
 as if he were a captured, wounded creature;
 all houses will prove friendly, there will be
 a sense of boundless sacrifice prevailing
 in dealings between men, in you, in me.

No waiting the beyond, no peering toward it,
 but longing to degrade not even death;
 we shall learn earthliness, and serve its ends,
 to feel its hands about us like a friend's.

Divine Ordinariness

In all this, paradoxically, as we do the work required and learn to sustain a connection with our soul, to perceive this beauty and cherish it, life becomes more vital **and** more normal. It does not become a super-human life. Rather we have the experience of "divine ordinariness" and even self-forgetfulness, in the sense that, in our emptiness, we no longer need to pay so much attention to the intricacies of our psycho-spiritual development, but can simply be and do who we are in particular in the world. Personality and psyche become aligned with the soul and naturally express our spiritual force without resistance and reactivity. Our life simply takes care of itself as part of the Whole. We participate in All Life as ourselves, but experience no separation from It, even while at the same time we sense ourselves unique within Creation. We recognize our place and part in the larger Whole of planet and Universe, and are content to fulfill these with our given lives. In our ordinary lives, whatever they may be, heaven and earth become one. We experience the "rapture of being fully alive", as Joseph Campbell puts it, and the present moment itself, without going anywhere else, as divine and beautiful. We also realize that every moment on earth counts, and we live this realization in

the present moment with ourselves, others, and in the world. We realize we are responsible and that we have the opportunity to respond in ways that will make things better for us and for all. And we truly enjoy life, whatever it brings, knowing that every experience is something to learn, and grow, from, as souls on earth. Our experience of living becomes our spiritual practice (see Occasional Note #7).

Body as Soul

This apperception of Kosmos is a visceral more than visual experience. It comes through all the senses, not just one. It is the embodied soul resonating with the Universe through the particulars of our human experience moment to moment. It's as if each of us, each being, were a cell in the body of the world, and when we are connected, when we experience being part, and participating in the whole of the Universe, then we are both ourselves and joined with all other cells in the organism through a resonance which is harmonious and vital. This resonance is felt in the body and the feelings and mind, so they "thrill" with the energy of the apperception of Kosmos and the full embodiment of the soul. The soul's force is fully present on earth at that moment. These are sometimes referred to as "kingdom moments" and we all have experienced them. The challenge is to live and work in ways that these moments become more steady and sustained in our bodies and lives, moment to moment and over time and through space.

Kosmos

As I have said, "Kosmos" is the Greek word for the Universe and also the word for "Beauty", in its representation of a deep and vast harmony and order among all living beings. This beauty and order are always there, growing and changing constantly, and it is we who become separated from this reality, through our soul woundedness, and compensations, our disconnections and consequent suffering. Psycho-spiritual work restores the connection to Kosmos in our individual lives and in this we discover our place and part in the Kosmos right here and now. We awaken to the beauty of the earth, and of all creatures and beings on this planet, our blinders fall away and we perceive what has been so all the time, but we had missed, due to our wounding and consequent preoccupations. This is a beauty which we both see and participate in, it is a deep order that we feel ourselves part of, and contributing to, in ways that promote not only our well being, but the well-being of all other beings. We are far from this at the moment, but we are in a new century with new possibilities. Beauty could indeed save the earth, and this possibility is in our hands.

A New Spirituality

Behind this awakening to beauty/kosmos, as I said at the beginning, is, I believe, the emergence of a new spirituality on earth--one that will both affirm our common humanity **and** celebrate the infinite differences between person and person, culture and culture, nation and nation. As the planet has shrunk and we have become aware of the relativity of all religious form, spirituality has begun to

liberate itself from these constraints and be accorded the central position it deserves in human life. Increasingly, it is clear that religious forms are derived from spiritual experience rather than the other way around and that they serve, at their best, the function of containing and channeling spiritual energies for large numbers of people. But the source of the spirit is not in religion, but in our immediate experience as human beings, regardless of whether we are religious, or not, and it is the birthright of every human being.

This emerging spirituality has been termed "experiential", "earth based", or "incarnational", by a growing number of people who are realizing that the experience of the soul is not the property of any one sect, or denomination, but is common to all human beings. This experience of soul-realization and the apperception of Kosmos is available to all, even if a person is not religious, and it can be supported, therefore, by secular psychological understanding, and indeed, by economic, political, social, and ecological thought and practice.

Further, in this new emerging spirituality we are realizing that the soul wants most to be on earth, to be expressed here, and not wait until this life is over, and that there are ways in which we can help this happen. The soul is seeking to fully incarnate, to be embodied fully, and the psycho-spiritual work is a means to this full aliveness that we seek. Transcendence is part of this experience, for it brings freedom from attachment and perspective, but it is complemented by what we could call "descendence", or "embodiment", through which the spiritual force of the soul finds fit, form, and expression in our physical, earthy life and is realized, in the sense of "made fully real", on earth here and now. It is a truly human spirituality, common to all humans, and "of earth"--the root meaning of "humus".

Global Spirituality

Any spiritual/religious discipline can lead to this; Life does itself. The key is dis-identification and emptiness and the apperception of beauty of Creation. It is the natural outcome of the process of psycho-spiritual development and it is there at any time we let go of the limitations of identification. These moments can arrive unexpectedly and leave again before we know it. But they also can be cultivated so that this perception of beauty is sustained and we live as souls and see each other as souls, on earth.

This is the birthright of all human beings, and it is in this experience that we come to know ourselves as deeply joined with each other and all Creation. To do this we need to let go of any cultural and national identifications that would separate us, as well as personal, so that we can be joined in our differences. Again, this is not a matter of eradicating differences in order to belong. Rather, it is just the opposite. It is accentuating differences within a context of union, so that the full beauty is in the particulars while we are joined also by this perception.

In this sense this new spirituality is global, it can be touched through any path, but only if that path is transcended and its particulars held in a universal context. At the moment people are killing each other over religious paths, and the identification is separating and polarizing us in increasingly violent ways. But there is no reason why we cannot, as a species, come to realize that we are one and

infinitely different at the same time, and learn to perceive at that moment the beauty, or kosmos, that holds us all.

I want to close with several quotations from different perspectives that speak to this apperception of beauty. The first is from Thomas Merton, monk, the second from my grandfather, Edward Yeomans, educator, the third from Abraham Maslow, psychologist, and the last from me, poet. These voices speak to this experience of beauty, each in their own way, and its power to save the earth.

For the rest, I send you all every good wish for your life and work and look forward to hearing your response. warmly, Tom

"Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin, nor desire, nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time, there would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other."

--Thomas Merton

"Children are naturally heliotropic, but they are fearfully misled. They are given compasses that point every way, and the compass they are entitled to points one way only, namely, to Beauty. For underneath Beauty is moral order, and moral order is the one thing indispensable."

--Edward Yeomans, Sr.

"One very important aspect of the 'post-mortem' life is that everything gets doubly precious, gets piercingly important. You get stabbed by things, by flowers and by babies and by beautiful things--just the very act of living, of walking and breathing and eating and having friends and chatting. Everything seems to look more beautiful rather than less, and one gets the much intensified sense of miracles."

– Abraham Maslow

Love Now

Strange this journey leading
 in the end no where but here,
 the path our breathing,
 the road our blood.
 Yet every step is needed to arrive
 where beauty inundates our veins,
 suffuses living flesh with darkened light.
 No wonder we, so long the wanderers,
 can't see at first we're home,
 and reach among our gatherings
 for further guidance and a map of God.

It seems we've garnered just the things
 we needed to resume our way--
 wisdom, knowledge, skill, endurance--
 but no route opens-- up, or down--
 no inner finger points, or probes,
 no voice conspires to draw us on.
 And yet such sweetness now surrounds,
 such nearby celebration,
 we scarce can breathe--
 no more from ancient fear,
 but from this standing still
 so close to God.
 Amazed, we wonder can this be--
 our bodies rooted in the firmament,
 sun, moon, stars, and earth confiding
 in our hearts and minds?
 What is this marvel of a world
 that no more falls away
 and leaves us longing,
 but presses close to see
 its cherished progeny?
 Stunned by love, we sense
 the primal innocence returned,
 but nearby dark still spreads its wings.
 No, this is new, unknown and intricate,
 something of earthy fuse and force
 that pours through every living thing.
 Here, yes, here is home at last!
 We step across the threshold stone,
 alive as we have never been,
 yet somehow also knowing this was ours
 at every step along the way.
 And God, who once embraced,
 then bade farewell, is here again
 so near we breathe together one vast love.

O who can say when earth will end?
 Not I, nor you, nor one,
 but some sweet breath
 that sweeps the planet's face
 to keep us company as we lose
 and find again our O so ever
 human grace.

– Thomas Yeomans