



Soul Matters

Nurturing Beauty



Small Group

May 2022

Welcome to Nurturing Beauty

Beauty.
We appreciate it.
How could we not?
We wonder at it.
Get absorbed in it.
Analyze it, if it's got a frame around it.

We make it.
Grow it.
Point at it.
Collect it.
Share it.
Save it.

But how often do we listen to it?

How often do we ask, "What is it trying to get me to hear?"
Rather than, "Do I like it or not?"

It's just so hard to step outside
our mangled view of the world
that sees everything in the light of consumption.
Not everything is here for our possession.
Not everything is here to entertain us.
Not everything is meant to be put to use, even you.

We must find our way back,
to those questions that were once alive
but now are buried deep:
"What if beauty is here to make us wise?"
"What if beauty is the way the sacred speaks?"

Yes! Yes! It does so much more than decorate.
It demands. It calls. It asks for commitment.
It doesn't just say "Love and appreciate me."
It says "Protect me! Fight for me!"
It steps out in front of us and points to a precious world
that needs our help.
It paints a picture of new ways of living
and declares, "Follow me there!"

It says, "Even in hell holes I find a way to grow."
It sings, "This world was made for more than work."
It whispers, "Use me to heal."
It pleads, "Nurture a new relationship with me. One that allows me to talk!"

So, what is it saying to you?

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

The Beautiful Thing You Carry

The philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote, “In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart.”

These are indeed difficult times. They require courage, commitment, hope and self-love. And all of these are sustained by beauty. We find the courage to fight after falling in love with a beautiful vision to fight for. We maintain our commitment only by finding the beauty that nourishes us. We hold on to hope because experiences of beauty remind us that something in the universe is on our side. We withstand dehumanization when rooted deeply in the beauty of our own dignity.

It’s one of the most important secrets to successful social change and social survival: When we carry beauty, it carries us.

So this month, ***literally find something to carry with you, for weeks on end!*** A pebble, poem, torn piece of paper with a quote on it. Might even be a quote from this packet. You’ll likely carry it in your pocket, but maybe it will be in a necklace or wallet instead.

The goal is to find a reminder about beauty that will carry you through as you carry it.

Option B

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. When it happens, it’s beautiful.

So this month lean into the beauty of ordinary things, by picking one ordinary thing to praise. And then figure out how to praise it!

Maybe you’ll write an ode of your own, like the ones below. Maybe you’ll celebrate it by taking numerous pictures of it, from multiple angles at different times of the day. Maybe sharing it or passing it on to someone your treasure will be your way.

Here are a number of poetic praises to help you on your way...

- Ode to My Socks - Pablo Neruda: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GOkypeafdM>
- A Personal Reflection on Neruda and “our things”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRiCUqi-4Y4>
- Burial & To the Fig Tree on 9th & Christian - Ross Gay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=300&v=YRIEgOoF168
- To the Mulberry Tree - Ross Gay: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=jzLx2aRNTRU
- Ode to the Women on Long Island - Olivia Gatwood: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqppip0H1QTE>
- Ode to Thrift Stores - Ariana Brown: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFZJoU44uOo>

Option C

Remind Yourself that You are Pretty _____!

“Will I be pretty?” It’s more than a [song](#) whose tune is stuck in our heads. For so many of us, it’s a burden stuck in our skin. One can’t talk of nurturing beauty without addressing the way our culture distorts and disrupts - our relationship with our bodies and souls.

Poet Katie Makkai takes this head on in her poem [Pretty](#). In it, she unfolds the challenge of reclaiming and transforming the call to be “pretty.”

After listen to Makkai’s poem (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7TS2Z6IAI4>), you are invited this month to turn her call into a spiritual exercise by completing one (or maybe all) of these sentences:

“I am most proud of the fact that I am pretty _____.”

“I hope my child knows they are pretty _____.”

“I love my partner because they are pretty _____.”

“I never knew I was pretty _____ until _____ helped me realize it.”

“The moment I realized I could be pretty _____ was when I _____.”

“I still want to become pretty _____.”

Come to your group ready to share which fill in the blank took you the deepest, gifting you with word of comfort, challenge or calling.

Option D

A Beautiful Cup of Coffee

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to bring them into the conversations you have in your everyday life. Or to put it another way, our themes offer you the chance to deepen and enliven your conversations and relationships.

So here are some conversation starters rooted in the call the Nurture Beauty. Take them into a conversation with someone close to you, or engage them with a small circle of family or friends.

Remember: part of this exercise is about the insights that arise from meaningful conversation, but another part is to notice the beauty that arises when our conversations go beyond the weather and normal chit chat.

Come to your group with the story of your favorite “beautiful moment” from the conversation.

Conversation Starters about Nurturing Beauty:

- What is the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen or experienced? How did it leave its mark on you?
- When did you first feel beautiful?
- Have you ever been healed by beauty?
- What do you wish your 16-year-old self knew about beauty?
- Do you think beauty can save or heal the world?
- Have you ever found beauty in the brokenness?
- Have you ever experienced a “beautiful goodbye”?

Option E

Make Some Beauty and Share It

Mandy Hale writes, “There is nothing more beautiful than someone who goes out of their way to make life beautiful for others.” In this spirit, get to work this month on making something beautiful and then give it away.

The challenge of this exercise is not so much in the making of a beautiful object as it is in figuring out what you want your gift to mean to the other person. Maybe your gift will be to thank them for who they’ve been for you. Maybe it will be to help them hold on to a memory. Maybe it will just be to remind them that life is beautiful even when it’s hard.

And remember, you don’t have to be an “artist” to do this. The beauty is in the gift and the way it will make life a bit more beautiful for another.

Option F

The Story of the Most Beautiful Thing

When was the last time you thought about the most beautiful thing you ever saw or experienced?

For this exercise, simply remember it and bring the story of it to your group.

Why? Because sharing our stories of beauty helps us hold on to them. And sharing it with others helps them hold on to theirs.

Option G

Which Quote is Yours?

In the Companion Pieces section below, there are many quotes about the practice of *nurturing beauty*. Engaging these quotes and finding *the one* that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, as your spiritual exercise for this month, reflect on those quotes until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of nurturing beauty.

After you’ve found it, consider writing it out on a small piece of paper and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? And what is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. When were you first healed by beauty?
2. When were you first protected by beauty?
3. When did beauty first teach you something?
4. When was beauty a doorway to the divine?
5. What makes a beautiful soul? What do you do to beautify your own soul?
6. What did your family of origin teach you about what it means "to be beautiful"?
7. What parts of life have grown more beautiful as you've aged?
8. What's something you know now about beauty that you didn't know when you were 16 years old?
9. "If the words spoke appeared on your skin, would you still be beautiful?" ([source](#))
10. Is beauty a private thing for you? Or do you need to share it with someone for the experience to be complete?
11. What if beauty isn't something we encounter but something we become?
12. Who in your life needs to be told they are a beautiful soul?
13. Have you ever experienced a "beautiful goodbye"?
14. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead, they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of imagining the spiritual practice of Nurturing Beauty.

Word Roots

The Greek word for the beautiful is [kalon](#), “which is related to the word *kalein*, which includes the notion of ‘call.’ Suggesting that there is something about beauty, wherever we find it, that tugs at us, pulls at us, draws us into the divine.”

A second Greek word for beauty is *hōraios*, from *hōra*, meaning "hour." Beauty was thus associated with "being of one's hour". Thus, a ripe fruit (of its time) was considered beautiful, whereas a young person trying to appear older or an older person trying to appear younger would not be considered beautiful.

Wise Words

Beauty is that which glistens on the edges of our yearnings and lures us into the depths of things.

[Patricia Adams Farmer](#)

When we approach with reverence great things decide to approach us. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and the arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace. Beauty is mysterious, a slow presence who waits for the ready, expectant heart.

John O'Donohue

Under the spell of beauty, we experience a rare condition called plenitude, where we want for nothing.

[André Aciman](#)

Beauty isn't all about just nice loveliness. Beauty is about more rounded, substantial becoming. So I think beauty, in that sense, is about an emerging fullness.

[John O'Donohue](#)

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

Monet Refuses the Operation

Lisel Mueller

Full poem found at

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52577/monet-refuses-the-operation-56d231289e6db>

I tell you it has taken me all my life
to arrive at the vision of gas lamps as angels...
to learn that the line I called the horizon
does not exist and sky and water,
so long apart, are the same state of being...
if only you could see
how heaven pulls earth into its arms...

This a wonderful day. I've never seen this one before.

Maya Angelou

Beauty always has rules. It's a game. I resent the beauty game when I see it controlled by people who grab fortunes from it and don't care who they hurt. I hate it when I see it making people so self-dissatisfied that they starve and deform and poison themselves.

[Ursula K. Le Guin](#)

One of the huge confusions in our times is to mistake glamor for beauty.

[John O'Donohue](#)

Human beings have a hard time regarding anything beautiful without wanting to devour it.

Barbara Brown Taylor

There is nothing more beautiful than someone who goes out of their way to make life beautiful for others.

Mandy Hale

The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

The ability to see beauty is the beginning of our moral sensibility. What we believe is beautiful we will not wantonly destroy.

Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

In such ugly times, the only true protest is beauty.

Phil Ochs

In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart.

Blaise Pascal

Spend all you have for loveliness,
Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
Count many a year of strife well lost,
And for a breath of ecstasy
Give all you have been, or could be.

[Sara Teasdale](#)

I will believe the truth about myself no matter how beautiful it is.

Macrina Wiederkehr

Music

We create a playlist for each of our monthly themes on YouTube. They are organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on Nurturing Beauty

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Surprising Things of Beauty

- [Eye-popping, hand-painted trucks rule Pakistan's roads](#)
- [Puffer Fish Creates This Blue Water Art](#)
- [15 Beautiful, Abandoned Places Around the World](#)
- [Plastic Waste Art](#)
- [Yarn Bombing](#)
- [Street Art](#)
- [The Beauty of a Black Hole](#)

Videos & Podcasts

The Inner Landscape of Beauty - John O'Donohue: On Being Podcast

<https://onbeing.org/programs/john-odonohue-the-inner-landscape-of-beauty-aug2017/>

“No conversation we've ever done has been more beloved than this one. The Irish poet, theologian, and philosopher insisted on beauty as a human calling...”

How Beauty Can Heal Us

Jason Silva

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W6wJniitTU>

A meditation on the soul-shaking, heart-stirring power of beauty. You become what you behold. So choose carefully what you behold. Chase beauty friends, so you become it.

Reclaiming UGLY as an Act of Queer Pleasure

<https://queerhealingjourneys.com/vanessa-lewis/>

A must listen!

The Body Is Not An Apology

[Sonya Renee Taylor](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLcT5qi3lZBNzMhaUlqjrUXKfByJNYZM&time_continue=75&v=B7lKPdh_y-8

Lean into the blessing, beauty and divinity of your body...

Video Interviews - What is One Thing You Want to Change About Your Body?

On our relationship with our bodies, before and after culture takes hold...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0tEcXlDDd4&app=desktop>

Youth React to Being Called Beautiful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW8BDgLPzkl>

Articles

Nature's Beauty as a Gateway into Deep Time and a Lens on the Interconnectedness of the Universe

[Maria Popova](#)

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/07/17/oliver-sacks-beauty-deep-time/>

"Standing amid the rainforest — a place governed by the beauty of interrelation — Sacks reflects: 'The sense of deep time brings a deep peace with it, a detachment from the timescale, the urgencies, of daily life... a profound sense of being at home, a sort of companionship with the earth.'"

Ugly: How Beauty was Built upon White Supremacy

[Vanessa Rochelle Lewis](#)

<https://wearyourvoicemag.com/body-politics/bopoincolor/ugly-white-supremacy-beauty>

"In this essay for #BodyPositivityInColor, Vanessa Rochelle Lewis explores the concept of "ugly" and how it depends on white supremacist, colonialist, cisheteronormative, misogynistic, and ableist constructs of what defines beauty. She explores these ideas through history and how it exists and thrives within our current society."

Books

Beauty: The Invisible Embrace

[John O'Donohue](#)

https://www.amazon.com/Beauty-Invisible-Embrace-John-O'Donohue/dp/0060957263/ref=asc_df_0060957263/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312281483245&hvpos=1o1&hvnetw=g&hvrand=9334313553809628817&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvgmt=&hvdev=c&hvdcml=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9005606&hvtargid=pla-435452636568&psc=1

"An enchanting meditation on how beauty lays its claim on the human spirit in such disparate realms as music, love, imperfection, death, and desire." - [Maria Popova](#)

Old In Art School: A Memoir of Starting Over

[Nell Irvin Painter](#)

https://www.amazon.com/Old-Art-School-Memoir-Starting-ebook/dp/B0771HQPNX/ref=pd_sim_351_4?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B0771HQPNX&pd_rd_r=bdb3678a-2ae1-11e9-9464-d972d800d7c3&pd_rd_w=5UUVB&pd_rd_wg=o44Mq&pf_rd_p=90485860-83e9-4fd9-b838-b28a9b7fda30&pf_rd_r=JMHTPPQQVEEMY4PF4GH8&psc=1&refRID=JMHTPPQQVEEMY4PF4GH8

"Painter claims her birthright as an artist, a black woman, and a woman of a certain age at a time and in a cultural milieu that ignores all three." —CNN "Shows how being an 'artist' is more about designing your life, defying the kind of giving up that retiring sometimes implies." —Hyperallergic

Six Names of Beauty, by Crispin Sartwell

"In this elegant, witty, and ultimately profound meditation on what is beautiful, Crispin Sartwell begins with six words [meaning beauty] from six different cultures... Each word becomes a door onto another way of thinking about, and looking at, what is beautiful in the world, and in our lives..."

Wayward, Dana Spiotta

"When Sam falls in love with a beautiful, decrepit house on the wrong side of town, she buys it on a whim and flees her suburban life - and her family - in an attempt to find beauty in the ruins..."

Movies

[A Beautiful Mind](#)

[Little Miss Sunshine](#)

[Before Sunrise](#)

[Cloud Atlas](#)

More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Our Instagram Page:

Find us as "soul_matters_circle"



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