

# Can There Be A Sustainable Future without Beauty?

The word "sustainability" has become fashionable in our world. It is a necessary goal if our society is to continue, but what does it mean? Is sustainability a technological problem, a social problem, a spiritual problem, or is it a combination of all of them and more? How do you make a whole out of the many complicated needs?

The best example of sustainability in nature and past cultures, is that they are sustainable because of a profound sensitivity to their surroundings both large and small, and the elegant, beautiful, relationships to their life in a particular world.

The context that sustainability must exist in, is an infinite compassion for the world we live in, and a balance of the many parts. Beauty can be arbiter of the myriad decisions needed to build whole, ecological, truly sustainable solutions, whether it be a building, a sewage system or agricultural plan.

We have lived in a century that has made technology and what we thought were its benefits, God. Technology devoid of a sense of the whole is an attempt to dominate life and nature. Can we build a sustainable world and leave out the mystery of that world?

Beauty can be a guide in helping us put together a complex world and be a tool to help us make changes for the better. Our particular time in history is marked by indecision and misdirected efforts, not only in the technical fields but in such diverse worlds as politics, architecture, philosophy and culture. We are unsure about life and why we are here. How do we fit in, and how do we decide where we wish to go? We are beginning to sense that even those paths laid out by science and logic may not take us to where we wish to be. Beauty may not be "the way" but it can help us in choosing "the how." Einstein wrote that, "The theory that turned out to be true, was also the most beautiful."

At the present time, we have a great many of the tools and technical know-how to make a new world...everything from stainless steel hipbones to sustainable houses and cities. But how do we relate this know-how to life and each other so that it truly serves life? It is here that a sense of beauty and esthetics can help us give form and meaning to what otherwise would be a scattering of possible solutions. It is as if we had all the parts of a human being laid out before us. How do we put them together into an elegant and sympathetic whole?

There is a connection of Beauty (both inner and outer), to love. Both of these qualities can open within us feelings and sensings that seem to be outside of fear. Putting aside fear even for a moment begins to change things. Somehow Beauty and love awaken the part in us that allows us to be ourselves. I call this, "to give light." It can come through an individual or a work of art. It is very much one human reaching to another and allowing for the wholeness of the other.

I believe we underrate even our traditional concept of Beauty. Why is nature so prolific in endowing its creatures with magic of form, color, and diversity? Is it merely for competition and precreation? Or does the beauty of the flower or an Indian maiden dressed in her beaded buckskin change the rules of the game? For the Hindu woman, to adorn herself is to "decorate the temple of the Lord." Is Beauty perhaps the physical manifestation of love? Does Beauty open the door and allow love in?

It is my hope that we are rediscovering Beauty. Not the pretty of the 19th century or the ugliness of our century, but a robust kind of beauty that accepts the intertwining of chaos and order, and of darkness and light...one that guides and transforms life because it seems life as a whole. We can learn to put a sense of beauty to work for us.

When we treat things, schools, our homes, ourselves as if they have the right to be beautiful, we give these a new and vital life. It makes life special and celebrates the magic of our world.

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