

MEDITATION AND BEAUTY

Translation by Achille Cattaneo

“We are beautiful when we belong to ourselves, we are no longer beautiful when we lower ourselves to the level of our lower nature. We are beautiful when we know ourselves, we cease to be when we don’t”.

Plotinus, VIII book of the Ennead

It may seem strange to connect beauty with a practice like meditation that might seem, at a first and superficial glance, everything but beautiful.

In reality a bond between them does exist and I will try to show it in this paper.

The Dictionary of the Italian Language Devoto-Oli defines beauty as *“The quality capable of satisfying the soul through the senses, becoming the object of deserved and worthy contemplation”*.

This definition already echoes one of the stages of meditation practice, contemplation, that is, becoming one with the object of meditation.

We need beauty in this historical-cultural period, immersed as we are in ugliness, not only from the point of view of the urban landscape, but perhaps even more from the point of view of human behavior.

When we say that something is beautiful, what are we actually saying? Each of us is attracted to a beautiful form according to our own experience, which gives rise to a lived experience, and according to the taste that has been formed through it.

Let’s admit that there is a subjective beauty, for which every human being is instinctively attracted to objects that he considers beautiful in and of himself outside of any defined aesthetic canon.

But there is also an objective beauty, intrinsic to the object, due to the relationships between the parts that create a sense of harmony and order in the observer.

The concept of beauty has undoubtedly changed over time, but according to the writer, there is something that goes beyond the centuries and the taste of the moment, an eternally “beautiful” beauty. Its essence is the orderly union of parts that together give a vision of harmony and balance.

A beautiful thing is an orderly, balanced and harmonious form.

Beauty is one of the Platonic categories together with the Right and the True, a figure of the infinite that is embodied in a physical form, an intrinsic essence that gives the characteristics quality to the form itself.

We could also say that these Principles are an expression of the free will of man and vice versa, make him free.

When the external beauty of a form is completely merged with its essence, which bears its meaning and its profound sense, this combination allows the observer to access a condition of supra-rational, or transpersonal, understanding, as it is defined in Psychosynthesis, the understanding that is beyond personality and linear, rational thinking.

Beauty is an expression of meaning that is manifested through the physical object that becomes for that very reason symbolic, that is, a concrete representative of a principle that is beyond concreteness, it is precisely, its essence. Beauty is a manifestation of Spiritual Reality in us, it is a quality of the Transpersonal Self.

For Assagioli¹ the sense of Beauty is an element of a superior nature, after the moral sense and rational and intuitive knowledge.

He writes: *“Now we will talk about a third upper element that descends from above to illuminate, fertilize and vivify human life. It is the sense of Beauty”*.

Mystics and thinkers have affirmed that “*The Infinite is called Beauty*” and have defined God “*He who is essentially beautiful*” (Dionysius the Aeropagite)².

In every form we find, or should find, a trace of Spiritual Beauty.

The Beautiful elevates the soul of he who benefits from it and takes it to a certain extent beyond himself, that is to say beyond ordinary experiences and the dynamics of the personality.

The experience of Beauty nourishes, elevates, enriches and makes life more worthy of being lived.

Furthermore, the experience of the Beauty can and must pass gradually from contemplation and love of material beauty to the love of beautiful souls, of beautiful actions, of beautiful thoughts and so on in an ascending gradualness of beauty, from matter to ethics and spirit.

To conclude this brief excursus on Beauty I mention Simone Weil³ who, with regard to beauty, states: “The beauty of the World is God’s smile of tenderness for us through matter. He is really present in the beauty of the Universe. The love of this beauty proceeds from God, present in our souls, and goes towards God, present in the Universe. This too is something like a sacrament. “Guarino in his article (op. Cit.) States “In Beauty the Divine recognizes Himself”. And he goes on to say that “praying, meditating, is to sail towards the Unreachable, but precisely in this lies the beauty and nobility of the religious spirit”.

On the other hand Satprem writes⁴ in the Adventure of Consciousness: “*In a sense we are nothing but an intricate mass of mental, nervous and physical habits held together by a few guiding ideas, by certain desires and associations; an amalgamation of many small repetitive forces and few fundamental vibrations* “.

This quote takes us abruptly back to the reality of our daily being and proposes to us to become aware that the human being is in reality a complex individual, made up of many parts.

He lives mostly blindly following instincts, impulses and desires of the moment. He is acted upon by all that is part of the lower nature, by complexes and by unconscious conflicts. He reacts to stimuli and emotions caused by external events or by his own thoughts. Reacting, and not acting, he ends up not seeing how things really are and consequently acts randomly, without a project or purpose.

He lives automatically, not aware of what moves him.

In Psychosynthesis the metaphor of the carriage and of the horses driven by a coachman sitting in a box seat is often used.

Normally the human being goes here and there aimlessly, exactly as horses would do if they were to decide where and how to go and not the coachman, who in our metaphor is the “I”.

Not to mention the profound ignorance that contemporary Western man has of the Transpersonal Self, the divine essence in us.

A synthetic definition of the Transpersonal Self is “*our true being*”.

Psychosynthesis defines the Transpersonal Self as the Soul in man and, in fact, the terms Superior Self, Soul and Transpersonal Self are synonymous, being they the first of a religious-philosophical vision of human life, the last of psychological models which, like Psychosynthesis, include the “quid” of a spiritual nature in man.

The Transpersonal Self represents a plane or sphere of reality that is above, or beyond, those generally considered to be ‘real’. In other words, transpersonal means something that is beyond ordinary states of personality.

It is also defined as transcendent, to distinguish it from the immanent or personal level, a dimension of existence different from the sensible and understandable world with which we normally deal, which not only produces effects on the latter, but sustains it and justifies its existence.

Ignorance of the Self makes us possessors of a beautiful building, of different floors, with many richly furnished rooms, but we live only in the cellars or at most on the first floor. We do not know of the existence of halls and rooms that belong to us.

Man generally lives in two dimensions, action and reaction, losing the depth of field, the different nuances of life. This means not grasping the meaning of things, their profound meaning.

One of the consequences of all this is that it causes suffering to ourselves and to others, and it is precisely the pressure of suffering that at a certain moment leads us to decide to do something, to wonder why, and at that point can begin the process that will lead to awareness.

In summary, man lives split off in himself, often torn between dualities: beautiful - ugly, good - evil, masculine - feminine, essence - form, invisible - visible, etc. It is his duty to rediscover the path of unity in himself. One of these roads is the search for harmony through Meditation.

A Sage⁴ stated "*He who knows himself knows God within himself*" and God, as Weil reminds us, is Beauty. Meditation is an ancient practice known in the East as well as in the West.

Why should the sophisticated and intelligent western man turn to this practice?
One meditates because meditating is the greatest creative act that man can do.

The result of his creation is himself, the harmonious construction of his personality first and of the conscious relationship with his own Soul or Self after. Meditating is not an escape from reality but a mental technique whose task is to develop consciousness so that man can understand his true nature.

If we question the great spiritual traditions with regard to human development, we realize that everywhere we talk about three fundamental goals that are:

- knowledge and realization of ourselves
- liberation from suffering and from the bonds of ignorance
- encounter with the ultimate reality or knowledge of God

and we are told that these goals are achieved by obtaining within ourselves the "silence" that is nothing but the detachment from the continuous incessant noise made by sensations, emotions and thoughts.

Translating this into terms of modern humanistic and transpersonal psychology, the aims of meditation practice are:

- integrate the various aspects of the personality (body, emotions, thoughts)
- getting in touch with the Higher Self
- expressing the inspirations of the spiritual world in everyday life, through the development of intuition.

As with any human activity, however, to obtain some results, a certain discipline is required that indicates constant and continuous training over time. Meditation is an orderly and harmonious process that already expresses beauty in itself.

I'll explain it better.

We must follow certain rules, take certain steps and overcome certain phases, before man can reap the benefits.

All this is part of the evolutionary process and, like any other natural process, it is slow, but sure and infallible in its effects.

Meditation requires self-control in every act and if it is not accompanied by the requisites that are part of the "orderly process" (such as self-control and active service), it will not achieve its purpose.

Traditionally the practice is divided into 7 steps, but in reality it is a single act that we will have to learn, over time, to practice correctly as a whole.

The seven steps are:

Alignment - The act of making our parts work as a single, free channel. It is the result of progressive disidentification from the physical body, from emotions and thoughts and from self-identification in the “I”, center of Consciousness. When the body and mind are calm and relaxed, from here we can start to know ourselves. “To know ourselves is to know God within oneself”.

Concentration - the act of concentrating the mind, learning to focus it at will on a chosen object and then using it.

Visualization - It is the ability to create images in a conscious and deliberate way.

Meditation - The prolonged focus of attention in any direction and the firm adherence of the mind to the desired concept.

Contemplation - Activity of the soul, detached from the mind kept in a state of quiescence.

Illumination - The result of the three previous processes, involving the transmission in the brain consciousness of the acquired knowledge.

Inspiration - Effect of enlightenment, as manifested in the life of service.

The practice of Meditation brings into being different effects which we summarize below, although each of them deserves a separate exposition.

It purifies the space that is full of thought forms that vary from light to darkness, from love to hatred, from beauty to ugliness. Meditation sheds light in these piles of thoughts and causes them to disintegrate. By placing order and beauty in our mind we will have better beauty, health and communications in our environment and better conditions on the planet.

Meditation generates energy because it purifies the mental plane of everything that constitutes an obstacle.

Meditation leads to service and a life of service removes the inertia of the physical body, the glamour of the emotional body and the illusions of the mental body. Meditation keeps our intellect clear and healthy until the last day of our lives. We grow older but we do not lose the power to reason and our creative skills.

Meditation awakens the sense of responsibility and we will realize that life is one, that we cannot perform a single action that prevents the progress and development of our brothers and the Whole, that we must understand the needs of others and try to satisfy them intelligently.

Meditation opens up a permanent source of joy in us.

Meditation requires effort, work, need for commitment, self-discipline, but it is only through these passages that one arrives at the source of joy. This is why meditation is the evolutionary process through which man gradually becomes an essential being and becomes his True Self.

As can be seen, the effects of the meditation practice are many, but for our purpose they can be summarized in the integration of our different parts into a harmonious and orderly whole that is the best definition of Beauty.

- 1) Roberto Assagioli, doctor, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, founder of Psychosynthesis (1888 - 1974).
- 2) Dionysius the Aeropagite, jurist and Greek bishop of the 1st century, judge of the Athens Aeropagus.
- 3) Simone Weil, French philosopher, mystic and writer (1909 - 1943). Quote quoted in the article “The beauty symbol of the true” by Sergio Guarino: Magazine of “Psicosintesi” nr. 22 - October 2014.
- 4) Satprem: Sri Aurobindo. The adventure of conscience, Mediterranee.