

**“Walking a Path of Beauty”**

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Now I walk in Beauty  
Beauty is before me  
Beauty is behind me  
Above and Below me  
Around and Within me. - *Traditional Navajo Chant*

Beauty is everywhere, and on a sunny, warm day such as this, we readily believe it. Most of us would claim that we encounter beauty quite a lot in life; our children are beautiful, the sunrise is beautiful, a piece of art or music is beautiful. Beauty is all around us – it only takes us opening our eyes to see it. Even in the darkest and coldest of winter we can find beauty in the moonlight on snow or the clear vivid stars in the night sky, the trees that hold onto their green and the lights of the Holidays that brighten the gloomiest day.

Even in the dreadful moments of life there is beauty; even in the midst of disaster there is beauty. In the war torn countries or poverty-ravaged neighborhoods, there are still kindnesses and human attempts to bring something of beauty to their environment whether with paint or cloth, music or laughter. We human beings are tenacious this way. We seek to have beauty around us...and if it is not there by nature, we create it.

David's and my first apartment in Berkeley, California was not what you would call beautiful. In fact, it was plain and boring and the kitchen teetered on the edge of downright ugly. Most of us have lived or will live in such a place, one where there is no character, no interest in anything but providing a room with four walls and a roof. One of the first things I did, since I wasn't working and my graduate school classes hadn't started yet, and after spending two days trying to replace the broken toilet seat, was to

hang what posters and pictures we had. I found an inexpensive Indian shop that sold colorful bedspreads, which we used as curtains, and a nick-knack store that offered weird little ornaments for \$.99. Of course this helped a little, but we didn't have much and the bedroom walls were still bare after several weeks.

But that changed the day we went to Ghirardeli Square in San Francisco. We stumbled upon a small, crowded shop with Native American art in it. There we found the first piece of art we bought together. Though it was way more than our budget allowed for we couldn't leave without it. The piece is an 18-inch circular hand made iron 'man in the maze' – the Native American image symbolizing humanity's journey through life. It is a human figure either entering or exiting (depending how you look at it) a twisting and turning path. It is beautiful and it has hung on the wall of our bedroom in every home we have had since.

It isn't beautiful just because of the quality of craftsmanship or that its simple lines and black color suit David's and my taste; it is beautiful because it reminds us that our lives are full of choices and though that offers freedom it also demands care and attention.

The Navajo chant "Now I walk in Beauty" does much the same thing. On the surface it is calling us to recognize that there is splendor all around us and within us, but to understand it more deeply we must put it on context of the larger Navajo tradition.

In the Navajo faith, which is integral to their daily living, beauty is a spiritual attitude, it is a way in which one lives. To live in beauty one lives in harmony with all of

creation and with oneself. It is a life of balance, a life of sacred and right relationship not only with other human beings but also with the world at large.

For those who have lost this balance, the Navajo tradition offers religious healers that will through song and ritual bring back into harmony the individual who is suffering from an illness. It is like coming to church when life is out of sorts and through worship and the community here you find a sense of comfort and your troubles are eased.

The desire for balance isn't solely about the individual, either, it is also about the Navajo community and all of creation. For every person out of balance, everyone living out of harmony throws the system and cycle of creation off as well. The work to return to harmony is a responsibility that every Navajo has.

Not unlike our seventh Principle. "We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

There is a story about a boy, who was "told that everything in the world was part of a Oneness, but when he looked around and saw so many different things: the sun and moon, trees and rivers, houses and cars, plants and animals and people. He just couldn't understand how all these things that were so very different could be a Oneness.

One bright and sunny day, not unlike today, he lay in the new growing green grass. As he lay there watching the big puffy clouds float slowly by and tried to find shapes in them. He saw an elephant, an airplane, a teddy bear, and a dragon when he finally noticed a small brown spider slowly dropping down from the branch of a shrub next to him. He watched her as she came close and closer, he didn't like spiders, they walked funny and moved so fast you never could tell where they went...and they might

have gone up your pant leg, but he had to admit she was pretty all different shades of brown and white.

As the spider got within about a foot from him he could have sworn she talked to him. “You are wondering how you and I could be One?” He thought she asked. He just sat there blinking and thinking he was a little nuts, but then she said it again, “you are wondering how you and I could be One?” The boy nodded, but didn’t say anything.

“Well, I will show you she offered.” And began to build the largest and most perfect web he had ever seen. There was not one broken thread and they all glistened in the afternoon sunlight. When she was finished the spider crawled to the very edge and said to the boy, “Do you understand now?”

“No,” the boy managed to say quietly.

“Well, if you are this thread here,” and she walked ever so gently to one of the largest threads on the edge of the web “and I’m this thread here” and she walked to the opposite side to one of the smallest threads near the center. “Are we connected at all?”

“Yes,” answered the boy “we are part of the same web. But what does that have to do with anything?”

“Touch your thread.” Instructed the spider. And the boy touched the thread she had pointed out as him. The thread broke and the whole web shook so hard that the spider nearly fell off altogether.

“Oh My!” the boy cried. “I nearly destroyed the whole thing.”

“Exactly!” said the spider. “Even my thread moved and shook. That is how we are all a part of the same Oneness. What happens to you affects me and what happens to me affects you. That is why we must be careful and take care of one another.”

Beauty is not always something visible - it is what we believe; it was how we live our lives. We Unitarian Universalists believe that humanity is not the only sacred and important life form on the earth and we believe it is part of our duty and responsibility to work to live a life in harmony with creation. To walk with beauty, as the Navajos call it, is to live a life in balance with our environment; to learn how to live in right relationship; to live with respect and honor for others; to live taking only what we need and offering back our gratitude and our care.

‘Now we walk in beauty’ is not only a chant of affirmation, it is a call to action. It calls us to be as attentive to our spiritual and inner selves, to what our dreams are, to what matters most to us in our lives as to the justice work of equality and ecology. It is a reminder that we must learn to be in harmony within ourselves as much as with the world around us.