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Communing with Beauty

by Rita G. Patel, guest contributor “Beauty and Its Possibilities” by Rita Patel

The architect Christopher Alexander tells this story in The Timeless Way of Building: I once saw a simple fish pond in a Japanese village which was perhaps eternal. A farmer made it for his farm. The pond was a simple rectangle, about 6 feet wide, and 8 feet long; opening off a little irrigation stream. At one end, a bush of flowers hung over the water. At the other end, under the water, was a circle of wood, its top perhaps 12 inches below the surface of the water. In the pond there were eight great ancient carp, each maybe 18 inches long, orange, gold, purple, and black: the oldest one had been there eighty years. The eight fish swam, slowly, slowly, in circles—often within the wooden circle. The whole world was in that pond. Every day the farmer sat by it for a few minutes. I was there only one day and I sat by it all afternoon. Even now, I cannot think about it without tears. Those ancient fish had been swimming, slowly, in that pond for eighty years. It was so true to the nature of the fish, and flowers, and the water, and the farmers, that it had sustained itself for all that time, endlessly repeating, always different. There is no degree of wholeness or reality which can be reached beyond that simple pond. Not only is the description both vivid and beautiful — conjuring up a lovely image — but the emotion from actually seeing and being with this beauty in nature is profoundly powerful. If I am open, moments where I can deeply see, feel, and be are available in all sorts of so-called common places and interactions. And what happens is that I don’t just observe with my senses and my mind, but I commune with the beauty of it in my heart — that is where it happens, where I actually feel it. The feeling doesn’t stay but the feeling about other things afterwards is always affected. And the more I experience this beauty the more I realize that it does not disappear but is always present. Available to connect to when I am available. A wonderful thing to wake up and remember and make a habit. “Radiance belongs to being considered precisely as beautiful; it is, in being, that which catches the eye, or the ear, or the mind, and makes us want to perceive it again.” ~Etienne Gilson

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