

# What Really Makes Us Beautiful

## Inner qualities that create connection and engagement.

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### Key points

- We're conditioned to believe that physical beauty is our ticket to a happy life.
- It is really our inner beauty that draws mature people toward us.
- Cultivating inner qualities—presence, kindness, receptivity, and a capacity to listen—create a safe climate for people to come toward us.

“Great beauty, great strength, and great riches are really and truly of no great use; a right heart exceeds all.” —Benjamin Franklin

Our society places a premium on physical beauty. Rules and preferences for how we should look are everywhere, and they do a great disservice to us. According to one [study](#), Americans spend an average of over \$722 each year on their appearance. One in ten Americans has tried to look like a celebrity.

There's nothing wrong with trying to look our best, but comparing ourselves to models of beauty takes us far away from ourselves. Having a hyper-focus on our physical appearance misses the soulful aspects of what it means to be beautiful. Trying to look like the air-brushed magazine pictures and tv ads of “beautiful” people can take us on a long ride away from what beauty is really all about.

Many of us spend an inordinate amount of time, energy, and money trying to polish an image of what we think will bring [attention](#), love, and connection toward us. In the process, we may fail to attend to ourselves in a way that would move us toward deeper [intimacy](#), fulfillment, and meaning.

### Cultivating Inner Beauty

It may sound trite, but beauty really is only skin deep; it's not the main thing that brings love toward us. Just read about the latest Hollywood starlets whose seeming love curdles into resentment, heartache, and bitter court battles.

Outer beauty can be as much of a curse as a blessing. We may develop a habit of being so focused on maintaining a stellar appearance, that we never cultivate the inner qualities necessary to sustain and deepen intimacy and connection. As I describe in my book, *The Authentic Heart*, it is the courage to be authentic that connects us in a deeper way.

While our initial [attraction](#) may be based, in part, on physical chemistry, it is the meeting of our inner worlds that creates the lasting intimacy and [spiritual](#) chemistry for which we long. If we

redirect our attention toward cultivating inner qualities, we might find a magnetic attraction that moves us from something superficial to something that connects us to our depths.

### **Qualities That Foster Attraction**

As a psychotherapist for over 40 years, I've often seen people who have [shame](#) around their physical appearance. That's not surprising. Yet this conditioned [body image](#) is not based on reality. We can't expect ourselves to fit the images that the [advertising](#) industry touts.

An important part of self-love is accepting ourselves as we are—loving and appreciating our body as it is. We have control over caring for ourselves through radical self-acceptance. We also have control over developing soulful qualities that create a climate for people to take notice and experience a healthy, [secure attachment](#) and intimacy with us that can be deeply fulfilling.

A key to satisfying relationships and a creative life is to nurture inner qualities that create *engagement* with others. To be engaged begins by seeing people as they are, offering and receiving gentle eye contact that allows us to see into each other's inner worlds. Piercing through the veil that separates us, our eyes offer a glimpse into the mysterious and soulful world of another person.

The key to connection is the capacity for presence with another, to listen not only to their words but also to the nuances of their being. Moving toward the precipice of this deeper connection means getting out of our heads and allowing our attention to settle into our bodies in a relaxed way. There is nothing we need to do or achieve in this engaging dance of intimacy. We simply need to *be*—to breathe, to allow our belly to soften, to listen with our third ear—the ear of our soul.

Our quiet presence with another—really showing up as the vulnerable human being we are—makes all the difference. As we bring qualities of courageous presence, tenderness, receptivity, [authenticity](#), deep listening, and perhaps even a tender [shyness](#), we open a secret doorway to love, intimacy, and connection. As we stop trying to be clever, trying to say something smart, trying to look good—and replace these futile efforts with simply being in our body in a gentle way—we might find that we become beautiful to another person—and more importantly—beautiful to ourselves.

The path toward cultivating inner beauty is really simple: We simply need to be ourselves. But what is simple is not always easy. Not everyone will see us and appreciate us as we take the courageous risk to be present and allow ourselves to be seen as we really are. But if they don't, it is their loss, not ours. As we keep refreshing our sense of presence and [openness](#) to others, we'll eventually find those compatible souls who appreciate us as we are—and, most importantly, appreciate ourselves for the beautiful person we are.