

Beauty is Beauty Everywhere

By Dr. David DeWitt

There are differences in style that vary from age-to-age and culture-to-culture, but those are just different ways to depict beauty, not a contradiction between what is beautiful and ugly. Consider the Old Testament depictions of beauty given between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago and in a completely different culture. The descriptions we have of, say, Joseph, Saul, David, Rachel, Esther, and Solomon's Shulamite bride sound like the depiction of the same beauty we would recognize today.

Genesis 39:6—*Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.*

1 Samuel 9:2—*Saul... and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel;*

1 Samuel 16:12—*Now he [David] was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance.*

Genesis 29:17—*And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face.*

Esther 2:7—*He was bringing up... Esther... Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face,*

Song of Solomon 4:1ff—*"How beautiful you are, my [Shulamite] darling, how beautiful you are!"*

Eastern and western cultures are extremely different in many ways. Yet we seem to have no trouble identifying beauty in each other's cultures. The Taj Mahal of India was built in the 1600s and the Kinkaku-ji, (Golden Pavilion) of Japan, was originally built in 1397. It is clear that we westerners living in the 21st century, can look at ancient oriental architecture and immediately identify beauty, even though it has never been part of our culture. **Beauty is clearly transcultural.**

But what about some of the isolated cultures that think beauty is depicted by what we would call ugly? What about tribal people who wear very little clothes and put bones in their ears and stretch their skin with certain devices? Don't those people think that is beautiful?

Consider the two gentlemen pictured here. I suspect you would have no trouble putting the title of "handsome" (male beauty) and "ugly" under one of the pictures. The revealing question is not *What does an isolated group think is beauty?* but what do people, in general, think? If the man on the left is an



example of beauty, then why do developing people, who are educated and exposed to what is available throughout the world, choose to look like the man on the right rather than the one on the left? Why is there not a movement among businessmen, professionals, models, and movies stars to look like the man on the left? **I'd suggest it's because we universally recognize the difference between beauty and ugly.**



When you isolate people and leave them to their perversions, they can become perverted into thinking ugly is beauty. There are ugly things that go on in prisons that are considered pleasing under those circumstances. The same thing could be said about people living in certain ghettos and in religious isolation. But also consider that much of this sort of thing is not meant as a depiction of beauty. Much of it depicts power or rank or wealth, or some other kind of importance. Sometimes, it is just an attempt to draw attention to one's self. Some of those also become fads among the less mature, such as excessive tattoos and body rings. But those are usually more about getting attention or being popular with a certain (equally immature) group. **Beauty is usually depicted by moderation rather than excess.** Excess fads seem like a big deal, and then pass away in a relatively short amount of time.