



told I would have to work harder to achieve anything in my life. I resented being told life was going to be different and difficult for me. As I write I recall being stopped in the street and told I was beautiful, up until I was about five. Even at such a young age it meant nothing to me. I was merely a novelty, dehumanised by people and soon the phrase 'Oh! Isn't she beautiful' was replaced by a new description of 'blackie', 'nigger', 'blackdrop', and the rest.

Beauty was not a word in my vocabulary, least of all one that I would use to describe myself. Observation in my later years led me to see I was not alone, many of us do not own our beauty. A lot of money is spent trying to buy beauty. Nylon hair, plastic nails, and facemasks are now the norm. Beauty has become something to be applied. Then there is the ready availability of lightening creams and plastic surgery all suggesting that

around us at all times. It is the harmony of body, mind and spirit. The wisdom of the Ancestors heard in the silence of meditation at full moon or the beating of a drum. It is the inspiring flow of poetry and laughter from your belly that shakes your whole body. It's an upright spine and the rhythm of a confident step.

George Benson sang 'I decided long ago never to walk in anyone's shadow'. Stepping out on purpose is beautiful, knowing why you are here now and answering your calling with passion, this is the beauty I love to see. When I see a Sistah Queen rising, moving against the normal flow and establishing what is natural to her very essence I recognise beauty. When a Brother King ceases merely talking but begins his walk I rejoice in the beauty I see. The more we come to know and be ourselves without censor the more love and beauty we will share.

**T**he sound of George Benson played loudly, touching my soul and filling me with joy. Happiness, too much to contain, caused me to sing out as I opened my car door and entered the quiet street where I live. It was dark and late but something inside me unfolded. I resonated with the words, 'Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all'. My volume went up as I realised the powerful impact of learning to love ourselves, recognising our own beauty, teaching our children. I was high, singing out loud and feeling the vibes. Such beauty-filled lyrics... and then I heard, 'Shola... have you been drinking?' I laughed, 'No!' This was me learning to LOVE myself.

As Blacks or Africans in the Diaspora what does it mean to really love ourselves? Do we even know ourselves? Are we forever destined to live in search of that which was stolen away, or is it time to redefine ourselves? We struggle to do both, to claim our rich inheritance and move in a new world. The scarring is so deep it invades all aspects of our livity. With our very nature distorted how can we know what is natural for us? We have learnt what is normal, in the world in which we live, but what is natural? Our eyes deceive us, our ears play tricks, our taste buds lie and our mouths whistle a new tune. This is normal but it's certainly not natural.

I grew up in a very white environment; only five black families lived in the City of York, when I was there. I grew up being

## **LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF IS THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL**

By Shola Arewa

beauty is not something we already possess. And those who apparently do possess beauty don't look like me. We perpetuate the idea that our hair needs a total makeover to look beautiful. Acrylic nails that seep poison into our blood streams, polluting our bodies are commonplace. Is this the way we wish to redefine ourselves?

What message do we want our children to receive about beauty? I would like them to know that real beauty shines from the inside out. Beauty comes from being proud of knowing who we are and the formative role we played in world history. Beauty is knowing where you are from, and where you are going. Beauty is like the elements of nature, forever changing. In a drought there is nothing more beauty-filled than rain. Beauty is relative. The sun shines, creating power. We have an inner sun, the solar plexus, which fuels our sense of worth and power in the world. When put to good use our power, as people, can be radiant and life giving. Sometimes, however, our behaviour can be down right ugly, yet inner beauty never leaves us, even if we can't see it. It's the devotion of a parent towards their child, a house turned into a welcoming home and the pull of two people in love. Beauty is both within and

Today I give thanks; I am blessed to have many people stop me in the street to comment on my beauty. I receive the compliment and it enriches me. It also affirms that my inner beauty, excavated from the scarred ruins of my very nature, shines out. I also know that those who see beauty in me recognise it because they know the beauty that resides in them. When you don't know your own beauty you will not recognise beauty when you come face to face with it.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder – those holding the power. When we truly claim our power-full inheritance we can redefine ourselves as beautiful and walk in the richness of all our divine beauty.

Shola Arewa Life Coach, International Speaker, Workshop Presenter, and Trainer. Author of 'Opening of Spirit' and 'The Way of the Chakras' Shola has just released her third book and audio series 'Spirit of Success'. For further info: Lifecoaching@shola.co.uk www.shola.co.uk Inner Vision PO Box 22032 London SW2 2WJ