

# Beauty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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The Buddha said of the Dhamma that it was beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. In the Parinibbana Discourse where the last of his days are recounted, it is recounted that “the Blessed One getting ready in the forenoon, took bowl and robe and went into Vesali for alms. After the alms round and meal, on his return, he spoke to the Venerable Ananda, saying: "Take up a mat, Ananda, and let us spend the day at the Capala shrine." Indeed, he rejoiced in the beauty of shrines: "Delightful, Ananda, is Vesali; pleasant are the shrines of Udena, Gotamaka, Sattambaka, Bahuputta, Sarandada, and Capala." In the early days, monastics would take leftover white cloth from the corpses in the charnel grounds and stitch them together. When he saw a group of them, the Buddha must have thought they looked scruffy indeed because he then asked order members to cut and sew the pieces together so the robe when stretched out looked like paddy fields – and to dye them in areca nut which gave them a brownish hue. All religions make great efforts to build beautiful places of worship. They fill them with beautiful decorative art, statues and music. But evil can also be beautiful. Mythologically, Lucifer was the most beautiful of angels. Leni Riefenstahl glorifies the Nazis in her propaganda films such as *The Triumph of the Will* (1935). The martial parades of Communist Russia were a marvel to behold. The mushroom of an atomic bomb is beautiful. Beauty then is a category of its own. Just because something is beautiful it does not mean it is true or good. How then do we experience beauty? It has a certain emotional feel to it that uplifts the heart. There is a pure aesthetic mental state when we see something such as a beautifully wrought iron gate or a dry stone wall. But more often than not something beautiful excites conjoining emotions of love, wonder, simple joy, devotion and so on. Whether beauty is in the eye of the beholder or out there in the world, is an eternal philosophical debate. But in Buddhist understanding, it is the body-heart-mind complex that is creating the world we are actually experiencing. Nature may have all the ingredients that make beauty, but without awareness it may as well not have them. So, it is back to us. A mind full of beauty, when that beauty highlights truth and virtue, is a mental state we can presume the Buddha himself would delight in. But if beauty or the beautiful feeling is our aim, then we have lost the path. Beauty has to be one of the many objectives that gather around our central aim to liberate ourselves from dukkha. And external beauty is not necessary. We can liberate ourselves in a stinking slum, with raggedy clothes and only pap to eat. Even so ...

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