

Beauty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Flowers are true teachers of the foolish vanity of physical beauty. Even now in late spring, the radiant golden lilies fade, curling into a crispy, tanned rigor mortis. The obsession with physical beauty is not new by any means, though hyped to impossible heights by Hollywood, Bollywood and CGI[i]. The Vinaya, rules for the ordained Sangha, rules against any indulgence in beauty. There is a long list of cosmetics and ornaments not to be used. Even in the Eight Precepts lay people take when staying at a monastery, physical beautification is avoided. I undertake [to observe] the rule of abstinence from dancing, music, visiting shows, flowers, cosmetics, the wearing of ornaments and decorations. It does seem as though the Buddha has a grudge against physical beauty! But in fact, these undertakings are based, not surprisingly, on alleviating suffering. For what is it we are trying to achieve when we try to make ourselves look beautiful in others' eyes? It makes us feel good to be admired. But does it not also give us a sense of power, even the ability to manipulate? Both of these have their downfalls. As beauty fades, the comfort and joy of the admiration of others is a mask that falls away to reveal a self-admiration based on the admiration of others, which, as it corrupts, leaves a damaged self-image and a realisation that admiration is, after all, not love. Worse! Beauty's power, based on admiration, is now trapped into a relationship, where it is forced to prove over and over again that it controls the admirer and not vice-versa. Should the admirer look elsewhere, the underlying dependency, which we term attachment, manifests as the acid burn of jealousy. Physical beauty has its time and place. But as far as the cause of suffering is concerned, it is the constant concern of how one looks that is the underlying cause of dissatisfaction with our bodies. So the Buddha advises us to get real. To awaken to our skewed perceptions and establish not just a healthy relationship with our bodies, but one that leads to liberation from suffering. Physical Beauty is only skin deep. So let's begin there, by peeling off the skin. No-one would find a flayed body beautiful. And if we take apart all the different parts and pour all liquids into bottles, that old saying takes on a deeper meaning. Whatever this sense of 'me' is, surely it is foolish to consider itself as a body. In the same way, imagining what happens to the body after death, is another way of undermining that part of the sense of 'me' that defines itself as beautiful. At this point, you may be saying to yourself. This essay does not concern me. I don't think of myself as particularly beautiful. But look again. You may be surprised as to how you are concerned with how you look in company. What special measures do you take when you go out? And what do you wear when alone? Do you bother with perfume and aftershave if you're not going to meet anyone? And if you do, why? And what about those romantic daydreams? One of the discoveries that some people have made in these lockdowns is how these fineries have been dropped. How baths and showers became less frequent. (Often also because of Climate Crisis). There is a distinction to be made between cleanliness and beauty. Becoming more concerned with what the body does, our actions, rather

than what it looks like, our image, we can turn away from caring how people see us towards how people value us. Craving to be valued, of course, creates other sufferings. But that's for another Tip!

Tip! Computer-Generated Imagery See Values in mine own eyes.

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