

The Most Beautiful Sunset

When seasoned travellers meet, one of things they often like to share is their experience of having watched a beautiful sunset, even of what they regard as the most beautiful sunset. Searching the Net, I notice that I am not alone in claiming that the most beautiful sunset I have watched is the one at Sentosa, Singapore. As the sun is setting, it displays a dazzling natural canvas of bright colours, and as the ruddy ball of day descends low enough on the horizon, its ruddy reflection spans the still waters towards us.

The Buddha throughout Buddhist history is often seen as the sun. The ancient scriptures call him the “kinsman of the sun,” linking him to the most ancient race and family of mankind. However, if we look deeper and wider into the texts, we would see this metaphor as representing the fact that the Buddha is spiritual light, the sun that awakens us to a new day.

No matter where in the world we watch the sunset, we are still watching the same sun setting. Only the ambience is different, and each of us might swear that we have watched the greatest sun. And we are all right. We are right because we have watched one of nature’s most beautiful events, one that occurs daily, but missed by many.

One of the most beautiful memories we can have is that of having watched a beautiful sunset with our loved one or as a family. It is such a taste that is naturally beautiful that not even the best food from the most expensive high-class restaurant can compare. This most special experience is not only free, we do *not* need to do anything, but just be there to imbibe it. Indeed, we *must* do nothing in order to fully experience a sunset.

In my childhood days, in Melaka (ancient Malacca), Malaysia, there was a beautiful beach behind our family house, before it was “reclaimed” and built up in the name of human progress. Occasionally, I used to sit on the soft sand and use my outstretched right arm as a kind of theodolite to measure the time it took for the sun to set over the length of the nail of my upped thumb. It took about fifteen minutes.

I would often simply sit there and watch the sun dip down the horizon, leaving in me a profound sense of fullness of a day done. No wonder, I thought, John Gray, was inspired to write the most beautiful poem in the English language in the last light of day. “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,” he begins in the autumn of 1752.

Like Gray, we can see the setting sun as marking the end of day. The Dharma however connects the lines of meaning in our lives so that we can see a sunset as epitomizing nirvana. As the sun sets, so we let our sorrows sink away into the horizon of the past, where it should be. The moments after the sunset would then be the most beautiful in our lives as we sit in peace with ourselves or with our beloved.

The Most Beautiful Sunset by Piya Tan

A sunset is a good reminder for us that our day, well done or not, is done all the same. Our day of karma shines upon us, or clouds over us, or thunder away in storm. But our days always must end up done. Blessed are we if allow the healing night of rest and sleep to take its course, just as even the might sun must set.

The sun was setting behind the Buddha, as he sits under the Bodhi tree on Vesak eve. As the darkness arose, Mara and his host descend upon him to distract him from his meditation. The Buddha touches Mother Earth, calling her to witness all his past efforts towards awakening. Beautiful Mother Earth (we call her Gaia today) rises heavenward and wrings her lustrous wet hair, so that the waters come flooding down to wash away all evil. As the sun rises, the Buddha, the Kinsman of the Sun, arises in the world.

Happy Vesak!

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