

## Artists and Photographers

For the love of learning, learning to love

Inspired by the (Catukka) Mahā Cunda Sutta (A 6.46), SD 4.6

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The works of both the scholars and the meditators have fascinated me ever since I started reading books on Buddhism, which was in my late teenage (more than 50 years ago). **The scholarly** discipline and style invite and engage me to examine the arguments of these deep thinkers, relate to their sources, examine them, and better appreciate what they have artistically painted.

Very often, such readings have helped me better understand the knottier points of early Buddhism in my own way. In short, the scholars are never wrong; they are never right. They are just as right and true as the sun-lit cloudless sky. This is what makes an academic paper on early Buddhism beneficial and enjoyable to read.

The works of **the meditators**, too, deeply fascinate me when they talk Dhamma, when these talks become books that I read. Most meditators are not as sophisticated in their words and ideas as the scholars are. Yet, in their earthy language, even the occasional bad grammar, uncomfortable English, and exotic idioms, they enthrall me all the more with their almost coquettish manner in confiding their profound experiences in daily words.

While the scholars speak from their **minds**, the meditators sing from their **hearts**. And I, who embrace their minds and hearts, bask divinely in the sun-bright spacious sky and the full-moon lit heaven of these two visions of the same awakened teacher, the Buddha. On the one hand, the scholars have taught me to keep my **mind** open so that the rich lessons of scholarly views work like diligent gardeners weeding and tending my Dhamma garden.

On the other hand, the meditators, to this day, coach me in letting my **heart** embrace their engaging visions just as they are, and befriend them so that I will understand their visions better than I may see the Buddha more clearly and closely. These are truly the most beautiful ways of learning and growing in truth and beauty.

The **scholarly** dialogue is ongoing and never-ending, so long as there are new and young scholars, quietly apprehensive about some self-supporting career, and trying to make sense of Buddhism true to its roots, a personal learned quest, for which they hope to remain relevant, read and revered: they enrich our libraries and learning for posterity. Without them, we are relegated to mindlessly run the rut of the daily chase of endlessly having this and that.

A good scholar is like a brilliant Artist who studies his subject as Artists like them before them have done. They know the colours, the style, the imagination of past Masters. It is the living Art of looking at the same timeless model as if for the first time: Pygmalion creating and loving Galatea all over again.

Then, this young Artist paints and sculpts his vision of his model of boundless truth and beauty on fresh new canvas in his own colours, style and imagination. He sees his work as

unique, and with time his uniqueness grows. His ideas change and shape him unlike any other good things that can be known.

When **the meditator** talks, when we read his writings, we flow along on a timeless stream sourced back to the Buddha himself. No two streams are the same, yet they flow with the same water: it transports us to a fresh idyllic country with bright lofty cloud-crowned mountains and endless colourful valleys of clean air and clear light.

A good meditator, one mindful of impermanence, is like a master **photographer** who forever preserves the mind's vision of inner calm and clarity in keen focus, full depth of field, and inimitable composition. These are faithful images of their heart's vision of true reality. These are precious work-of-heart photos for our album, for us to mull over in quiet moments so that we too see, even taste, the same calm and clarity as the Buddha and arhats have.

I can't decide who is better—the Artist or the Photographer—they are as different as night and day, as the moon and the sun. Yet they shine in the same sky, the same heaven. Our lives will be dark and sunless if not for them. With this unconditional embrace, we too begin to see the Artist and the Photographer in us. Truth breeds truth, and beauty beauty. That's all that matters when we share the same love, the Buddha Dhamma. That's all there **is** to know, that's all we **can** know, that's all we **need** to know.

For the Artist is painting what we daily see, hear, smell, taste and touch—we sense these same visions but each with our own **mind**. We see the same mountain all around: every view is true and glorious. For the Photographer preserves timeless visions that fully open up to us when we close our eyes and see these very same truth and beauty alive in our own being. Then, all we do, all we are, are a joy forever. Perhaps we can feel this joy even here and now.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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