



The conventional wisdom among amateur photographers is that to obtain a good image, you should mount your camera on a tripod. The problem with conventional wisdom is that it often results in conventional pictures. If you want to take the creativity of your images to a higher level I unabashedly propose the heresy of cutting the cable-release umbilical cord, tossing away your tripod (figuratively speaking), and experiencing the freedom of unfettered shooting. You may even find that, unencumbered by heavy equipment, your joy of the photographic experience is increased.

Of course there are times when a tripod is essential. Some examples are low-light shooting, certain nature photography and macro work. But improvements in digital technology have made stationary shooting less crucial than it once was. Better-quality high ISO sensitivity with low noise and image stabilized lenses make hand-holding a camera a much more viable option than it once was. During post-processing the photographer has techniques for straightening horizons and cropping away distractions at the edges of the image frame that are so quick and easy to use that the benefit once provided in the film era by using a tripod is largely negated.

On general photographic excursions, I have often seen photographers so obsessed with setting up their tripod, making sure it's level, adjusting and readjusting the ball head, concentrating on that one set subject in front of them, that they miss out on an abundance of visual opportunities. Don't lock yourself into just shooting that lighthouse in front of you, take the time to examine the colors in the sand at your feet, the light falling on the sea, or the rapidly-shifting shadows cast across sand dunes. Or become sensitive to and try to capture the human story as it unfolds in the people about you. Shatter the rigidity of habit. Be open to finding something that has direct meaning for you or may just have an inchoate resonance with your life experience -- something you can't express in words, but only in pictures.

Photography is as much about seeing as it is about technical skill. Seeing creatively is nothing more than being relaxed and open; looking around you 360 degrees, with the freedom to see the close-up possibilities and the broad picture at the same time, viewing subjects from different angles, and most importantly nurturing the spontaneity to react quickly to shifting lighting conditions and the changing relationships of subject matter. All these are made more difficult if your camera is attached to a bulky tripod. Sure, carry the tripod with you if you think you may need it -- and you might -- but only attach your camera to it after examining the entire menu of visual treats around you. You may just be surprised at what you find.