

Anandagiri January 7, 9:30pm

What to pack and what not to pack... that is the question

As a sincere Buddhist practitioner, one tries not to hate anything. We have ample tools to avoid giving rise to such unskillful emotions. I am well acquainted with several, having decades of experience with both practice and study. Cultivating the wholesome... abandoning the unwholesome. Even so... sometimes I fail. For I still hate cold sores, and I hate packing. I am not entirely sure why I dislike packing so much. There has been plenty of opportunities to observe the phenomenon however, and so I do have some theories.

Theory one. My character inclination tends towards the right side of the brain very strongly. Intuitive, empathic, artistic. So much so that the left side might be somewhat atrophied due to lack of use. My favourite meditation practice is upon the theme of empty space. And loving-kindness filling space. The shadow side to this seems to be a resistance to having to pay a lot of attention to mundane details. It's not that I'm entirely impractical. I've managed to accomplish a few things in this life. It's just that I prefer to pay attention to practical matters in short spurts and only when necessary, then get back to being a space cadet as soon as possible. It is interesting to notice that there is a lot of energy available for artistic and aesthetic considerations however. Perhaps these are right side of the brain activities. Protracted sessions which require paying attention to the nitty gritty stimulates a kind of internal foot dragging, distracting myself and procrastinating. Which may be why I am writing this journal entry now with suitcases open before me and many things strewn inelegantly on the floor at 9:30pm at night.

Another theory, even less inspiring, is that I may have been a deva for a few lifetimes in one of those heaven realms where the things you need simply manifested spontaneously, and there was no mess anywhere. When you wished to go somewhere, you could just will yourself there with your mind. No suitcases to pack or unpack, no check in counters with clerks complaining about excess baggage weight. How wonderful! How awesome it would be if the past lives of this being had been hundreds of lives as a strict cave dwelling ascetic. Probably wouldn't be as friendly though. There may very well have been some such lives. But glancing down at the lavender, rose and geranium essential oil fragrances prepared for fragrance pujas, and the magnolia scented clothes washing liquid... the camelia scented shower gel... I suspect there may have been more lives as a tree deva than as an earthy smelling ascetic. What to do? We've got to work with what it is we have that can be worked with.

Some students of Buddhism will be appalled that a monk is still so attached to smell. Others will think it's lovely that their teacher smells like a fragrant auspicious cloud. The Buddha did in fact allow for the use of fragrant soaps. And even perfumes in cases where the monk had an odour similar to a horse. I don't smell quite that bad, so I'll just stick with the subtly clean smelling soaps. I am sure you are not that interested. Please remember that I am distracting myself from packing here, indulge me for just a moment.

I encourage myself by acknowledging that a good number of the items destined eventually for the suitcases are to be shared with others. 80 blessed amulets. The books that I will read from... the medicines I will dispense should anyone fall unwell. The speaker, the microphone, the batteries. I massage my resistance by acknowledging the good fortune manifesting as well. How fortunate I am to be able to go to the Holy Sites, and indeed to have so much good stuff to pack in the first place! Alright... 10pm now, only 10% packed. Gotta get busy, thanks for listening.

11:15pm

11:15, 85% packed, and I'm officially turning in for the night now. There have been a few spurts of focused attention. One benefit of taking time to pack slowly and properly, is that I do tend to remember exactly what I brought along, exactly what I didn't, and even the precise whereabouts of where things lie in the suitcase. All that is left now is toiletries and medicines. With the bulk of the packing lying snugly now in the burnt sienna coloured American Tourister suitcase, repacking in Bangkok before final departure should be a fairly swift affair. There is another much smaller suitcase with things not needed on the two week pilgrimage, but which will be useful during the one month retreat afterwards, already completely packed. Ready for Gautam to take and store at the guesthouse where we plan to stay. I am beginning to feel organized. I should be able to take proper care of myself while leading a group of others.

January 8, 6am

Continuing with the packing process, and stopping to distract myself once more, there is a wave of sympathy and appreciative consciousness. Indeed, it is not an easy task to pack for a 7 week period, where you will meet with cool, cold, hot weather and rain. To remember the supplements to prevent illness as well as the medicines to treat it. And extra meds for many others too. (literally 5 kilograms) Having a resident Mae Chee who is a trained pharmacist is wonderful when someone is sick, but terrible at packing time!

It is also not easy to balance the ideal of being a renunciant with the reality of being a teacher who has encouraged scores of people to come on a journey with hazards. There are feelings of responsibility. On one level I am a renunciant contemplative, but I am also an object of refuge to my students. There is a phrase that Thai's use to describe their teachers. 'Por Mae Kruba Ajahn' - Father-Mother-Teacher. There is an expectation that monks should be heroically giving up all attachments, with a parallel expectation that they should also take care of others. And you thought being a monk was a simple matter! I encourage myself. 'You can do this Ajahn! You've done it many times before! Almost finished... go!.. go!.. You've got this!' At least colour coordination is not an issue, everything matches already!

6:45

As suspected, there is simply not enough space in those suitcases! There is going to have to be some delegating. I will ask Ven's Panyasiri and Sampanno to carry one speaker and microphone each, as well as some of the medicines for the group. The Sangha is my Refuge.

8:30

I am packed! Check list checked off. There is a feeling of accomplishment. And now there are 45 minutes of precious time to meditate before the meal. I have to give the transmission to my caretaker after the meal. Then call my mum, then have a power nap. We will head off to the airport at 3pm.