

Pain... pain... pain...

February 4

11:00 pm

I've observed this before, that on the 2nd and 3rd full day of these meditation retreats, the pain in the body is the most intense. As the body reacts and adjusts to the more rigid upright posture for many hours. With the pain being more screeching as it were, it was harder to experience collectedness. It was more like simply bearing with it. On top of this, I received news back from Anandagiri, that one of the monks currently in residence there was making some decisions that I did not like. So my mind was wrestling with the pain of some attachments in the heart as well. Pain from body based contact... pain from mind based contact. I am not entirely surprised. It seems that when you push at the edges of samsara, as with yesterday's profound experience of subtle awareness and bliss, you'd better expect some kamma maras to come and kick you in the guts afterwards. And here we are. So altogether, it was a bit of a dreary and gruelling day. I did do my eight and a half hours though, as well as the yoga and walking. And I have suddenly remembered the heat pad plasters that several of the kind pilgrims had given me earlier on in the pilgrimage. They are plastered between my shoulder blades as I type. And I can smell the rose essential oil wafting up from the heart chakra area as well... always good on the difficult days. Patience... perseverance... endurance... essential oils... analgesics and caffeine. All good stuff. Things will probably get better. If not tomorrow, then the next day.

Gautam was kind to his Luang Por today, sensitive and observant young man that he is. He made my coffee in the guesthouse and put it in the flask and carried my bag to the temple. He also gave my tender shoulders a little rub at about 6 pm and walked with me to and from the bathroom. I check in with him about his family members at these times. Angraj, his oldest son, is now going to school. He has moved to live with his aunt who has a son the same age and they go to school together. Some of my kind students from the USA have sponsored his son's education costs for this year.

Coming back to the guesthouse I caught up with Tamim in his mala shop. He showed me an interesting type of rare, dark mossy green amber, to try and pique an interest. He is clever like that. Mumtaz, the family patriarch asked how I was and when I mentioned the challenges with pain he rubbed some Ayurvedic ointment on my shoulders. I gave Mumtaz, Tahir and Tamim their gifts of a bottle of Thai herbal rubbing oil and a tub medicated balm, in their favourite brands. Tahir then gave me a gift of some agarwood essential oil from Assam, a state in the northeast of India. This was a nice way to end a rough day.

Oh my deities! It's 11:45pm and I'm grabbing for my earplugs because the neighbourhood dogs are doing their customary bark-a-thon. Why do they do this at this hour?

Since my experience was a bit dreary today, let's talk about someone else now. JC left this morning, we were all a bit sad to see this cheerful and helpful man leave. There is however another of my students who had stayed on in Bodhgaya after the first portion of the pilgrimage as well. Sister Asoka is from Singapore, and she is very committed and consistent in her practice. She had been wanting to add more disciplined chanting to her

daily practice, as a compliment to tge sitting, but had been struggling with finding the motivation. One day recently, she had the insight under the Bodhi Tree, that she could do her chanting and make it an offering of gratitude to the Buddha. When she had this thought, she suddenly felt much more inspired. Feeling inspired, she made a vow to do quite a large number of the salutation in praise of the Lord Buddha's noble qualities, (itipi so bhagava, araham sammāsambuddho... etc.), and then a large and beautiful Bodhi leaf fell down right before her! Very few leaves fall in January, so it was definitely auspicious. She felt that this was a response from the devas and the merit/blessings of the Buddha.

Maha Bodhi... Maha Buddha Rupa...

4:30 am

I've woken up very alert after just four hours of sleep. It happens sometimes when meditating a lot. My shoulders hurt less. I love the lying down posture!

Another uplifting thing to share with you is news about a big project that myself and Tahn Joel are helping out with on behalf of Tahn Ajahn Anan, and the abbot of his branch monastery in Ubon Ratchathani province, Ajahn Katsuññu. Luang Por Anan mentioned to me on three separate occasions last year that he would like to make one very large Buddha statue at one of his branch monasteries. In the world of kammic causes and conditions, different wholesome projects bring about different wholesome outcomes. Tahn Ajahn explained that building large Buddha statues is conducive to a person's good name spreading far and wide. And that in his mission to spread high quality teachings globally, that such a type of merit, or wholesome kamma-vipaka, would be helpful.

I have personally benefited enormously from Ajahn Anan's teaching, advice and encouragement. And so naturally I hope that as many people as possible might receive similar benefits. Tahn Ajahn is busy with many things these days. Running his large monastery. Ordaining new monks. Sharing teachings in person and online, as well as encouraging the monks and laypeople at his many branch monastery. He is also building a large Chedi at his main monastery and a large meditation centre at one of his branch monasteries. So the resources that are offered are primarily being channelled to these two important projects. Seeing that he had mentioned his wish to me several times, and noticing that nothing was getting off the ground as it were, I offered to help liaise.

I asked Tahn Ajahn if he would mind, or if he thought it would be a good idea, if the statue would be a replica of the 900 year old stone Buddha rupa housed within the Mahabodhi Chedi Vihara? affectionately known around here as 'Phra Buddha Metta'. Luang Por felt that this would be auspicious. Then, as I have many friends in Ubon and also know the abbot of the branch monastery there quite well, I asked if that branch monastery might be a suitable place? Tahn Ajahn agreed that it was, as it has a large flat area available, and Tahn Ajahn visits there several times per year every year when attending meetings at Wat Nong Pah Pong, the monastery founded by Luang Por Chah.

We are working with the same team of sculptors who have made beautiful stone statues for Anandagiri in the past years. This time they will be working with concrete that will eventually be gold-leafed. The Buddha statue will be 8 metres from knee to knee, and 12 metres from

the top of the head to below the feet. But including the stand below the rupa (body), and the aura that protrudes above the crown of the head a little, the statue will be approximately 16 metres tall. I am helping to raise the funds by mentioning the project to those my students who have asked me to mention auspicious opportunities to them. Then having those funds transferred to Ajahn Anan's monastery, where Tahn Ajahn can then liaise to have the various parties involved paid for their work. This way Tahn Ajahn is officially sponsoring the project.

Tahn Joel has a natural talent for sculpting statues in clay. He has already made several beautiful statues on behalf of Ajahn Anan. He has also developed some dexterity with editing 3D computer files, refining, tweaking and perfecting the details inside the 3D file, after doing an initial 3D scan. I was very happy when he volunteered to help me to get our prototype model up to a suitable standard of excellent quality and likeness. Our sculptor will use the 3D file to have his robot sculpt foam portions to scale, and then he will make a concrete layer over the foam. So the digital file is important. I have a small replica of Phra Buddha Metta that was purchased from the Royal Wat Thai, here in Bodhgaya, which is quite a nice image. But Tahn Joel and I both felt that it wasn't quite right in every respect. We scanned that image as our basic file, and now Tahn Joel is tweaking and editing this file for a couple of hours each day during our time together here. While we're in Bodhgaya, he is able to go and look at the original image every single day. He alternates time meditating with time doing the editing in his room. I am sure that the blessings of meditating at the Mahabodhi Temple will also be helping the final outcome.

Yesterday, mid-morning, we went inside the vihara and asked permission of the original 'Phra Buddha Metta', and then paid our deep respects before the image. (An Indian man stood on my left hand while I was prostrating on the stone tiles. I am not sure if This is inauspicious or just inevitable.) We then stood before the image for several minutes afterwards making our noble intentions clear. We also asked for the appropriate support and blessings to manifest accordingly, should the merit of the Buddhas and good forces of the universe feel that it is appropriate.

I wonder in moments if I was mad in offering to help with this enormous project? But then again, I am sure it is not the first time that I've been involved in such things. It is possible that Tahn Joel and I were involved in the sculpting of some of the stone Buddhas that we have recently been paying respects to at the sites of the ancient cave monasteries in our past lives. And it is also possible that some of the lay supporters who joined the pilgrimage had supported us then as well. Some very big blessings have manifested in my life this lifetime, from quite a young age, so I am grateful to whatever similar madness got me involved in big projects in the past. As well as any and all efforts have been made in the practice of sila, samadhi and panna.

May all auspicious activities of body speech and mind increase!