

Re-remembering what you Knew/Know

Bodhgaya, February 9th, day 7

There were two shifts in the mode of practice today that were interesting. One was that the meditation seemed to become easier and to deepen, and the other is that our lives became a little more socially busy. This is kind of incongruous, like being torn in two different directions, but it does add another element of creative challenge. The mind seemed to click into a groove and was able to rest within the effort more right from the first morning session today. But as soon as I moved sideways to try and do a fifteen minute walking meditation session, to stretch the legs and support blood flow, people started manifesting beside me and behind me to invite our group for a meal.

The sweet nuns from Myanmar and Tripura were first, they invited us to have a meal on the 13th. Then Pema, an elderly Tibetan lady that I have been bumping into in Bodhgaya for years, invited me for afternoon tea tomorrow, for the Tibetan New Year. Yesterday we were actually invited for today's meal. By the parents of the wife of our friend where we stayed in Delhi recently. And a few days ago we were all invited to Om Tibet restaurant for tomorrow's meal. Our card is quickly filling up! I find that if we keep the mealtime within a one hour period, and get back to the guesthouse in time to have a little rest, the afternoons practice will go okay.

I turned back around and continued to sit because my walking time had become talking time. At 11am we took our leave and headed to the restaurant where we'd been invited for the meal. I remember that Vimal was the name of the Indian gentleman, but unfortunately I've forgotten the name of his charming wife. They are in Bodhgaya to do a 45 day meditation retreat at the Vipassana centre, starting this afternoon. I was thinking how cool it is that my friend's wife has parents who do 45 day meditation retreats! And how fortunate he is to have such in-laws. They were very sweet and generous, and excited to offer a meal to monks, as it was their first time.

In the afternoon I had a chat with my meditating friend Ajahn Satien. I wanted to know what his meditation object was? that was supporting the ability to sit for many hours contentedly. He said that he focuses upon seeing the different body parts as the different elements. Bones as earth for example, and blood as water. This was a helpful reminder for me, as I've had some good results from doing this type of practice myself here in the past as well. My Kalyanamitta inspired me to pick it up again. I didn't quite fulfil my meditation quota due to the chat, but the timely Dhamma discussion was helpful.

When observing the breath in the afternoon, I also tried to see that it was the wind element coming in and leaving the body, and this was helpful. I also placed awareness on the bones in certain places for periods, and there was a nice sense of letting go, and then being more easily content with the breath and less affected by the pain in the body. After about a week of intensive practice, it becomes more possible to hold and place mindful awareness differently. With more nuanced focus. Overall there was a sense that the practice has some momentum and is getting easier now.

(57 + 8 - 65)

Losar Tashi Delek! Happy Tibetan New Year!

My special yoga practice this morning was to lay under the covers for an extra half an hour and then to drink a second cup of coffee once I did get up. It was 8 degrees outside you see. We've had a sudden cold snap. Nevertheless, I did get to the Mahabodhi and do my meditation. The cooler weather was actually okay, which surprised me, because there was no damp fog. With enough warm clothing and a shawl, it was pleasantly fresh and then it warmed up quite quickly. Doing some yoga and not having a second coffee would have been better, but the mind did become peaceful after some time.

Many Tibetans came to do pujas and offer flowers at the temple today, and they were all in nice bright, colourful, traditional clothing. After the morning practice we had our meal at the new Om Tibet premises, and I was happy to see that it is a large, light and bright space. I was able to offer the nice new thangka and wish this lovely family well for the New Year. Tsering the mother, Dassan the son, and Yangzhon the daughter were all as happy to see us, as we were to see them. Dassan served vegetarian bean curry... Manchurian style cauliflower... fried momo dumplings... steamed broccoli, carrots and spinach... chapati bread... steamed buns... apple pie... sweet rice... yoghurt... and masala tea! You will not be surprised to hear that we could not even finish half. We chanted a blessing after the meal.

After a little midday rest I went to visit Pema at the Namyal monastery guest house. Which is just a few hundred metres away. I met Pema through Tokme, who is a Tibetan monk. Seventeen years ago, when I decided to take on the Tibetan style full length prostration practice here in Bodhgaya for a while, Tokme was the monk who had the bowing board next to mine. He had recently fled Tibet then, and couldn't speak any English, but somehow we became friends. Whenever I have seen him over the years since then, I have asked my steward to share some funds that were given for my needs with him. He usually invites me for a meal that he cooks himself. (The Tibetan monks in exile are more flexible with some of the training rules for the sake of pragmatism, it is cheaper to cook simple food than eat out.) We exchange a few small gifts on these occasions, and as Tokme speaks Hindi now, Gautam usually translates for us.

I'm not sure where Pema and Tokme first met, but they usually share a room. Pema is 78, and Tokme must be in his mid forties. They are like a mother and son. Pema likes coming to Bodhgaya every year, and as a single, older woman, she appreciates some company. I'm sure that Tokme who came from Tibet alone appreciates the mother-like qualities of Pema. The way karmic connections manifest is so striking at times. Around two years ago, when circumambulating Boudnath stupa in Kathmandu Valley, I bumped into Pema as well.

Tokme made tea and we chatted a bit. Pema speaks some English, she has moved to Boudnath from Dehradun in recent years, as her son married a Nepali woman. She said that her daughter in law is really lovely. She circumambulates Boudnath stupa nine times each morning. Here in Bodhgaya, she does 138 full length prostrations each morning. She said she does 108 to the Mahabodhi Temple, and 30 for Boudnath back home. We had a fun time sharing tea and half understanding one another, but the goodwill was understood by all.

They are such sweet people and it was nice to hang out with them a little. Tokme invited the monks to a meal cooked by him on the 14th. Gautam will come on that occasion and I'll learn a little more about what Tokme has been up to.

I was a bit late to the Tree, but with determination I completed my quota. Sitting was fine, but walking afterwards was a bit stiff. Tomorrow I'll definitely be doing my yoga!

(65 + 8.25 - 73.25)