

Gratitude to Lord Buddha, to Lord Indra, to Lord Shiva.

Bodhgaya, February 15, day 13

Apparently in the Hindu cosmology, Indra, who the students of Theravada know as Sakka-Devaraja, is in charge of rainfall. Thank Indra!... it didn't rain today. Although things were still a bit damp, the overall sense of cleaner, fresher air was nice. We all got back to our previous routines diligently, and I passed the 100 hour point of my aspiration for 200 hours for this retreat! Although in general I am sitting at my spot for at least 8.5 hours, and walking for a half hour, I am only counting 8 in the official tally, because there is a little bit of chatting here and there.

The sweet Ladakhi novice, Samanera Saddasila, approached me as we were leaving for the meal. He had a big bag stuffed with offerings of toiletries, allowable tonics, socks and shawls for us. He said that now that his preceptor, Bhante Kassapa was coming back, he wouldn't be at the temple so much, so he wanted to make some offerings while he had the chance. I asked him a little about his life and his family, and wished him all the best for his aspired-for bhikkhu ordination. He was holding back tears when I encouraged him with a few kind and appreciative words. Ladakhi people really are lovely and sincere and have a lot of heart, from what I've observed.

Later in the afternoon, a young Swedish man by the name of Carl, approached for a little chat. He paid respects and asked for the precepts, explaining that he would be entering a three month retreat soon. Normally I might not agree to doing this in between my own meditation sessions, but he was another fellow meditator who was utterly effusive with wholesome aspirations, sincerity and faith. And it was just clearly the right thing to do. He also got a bit teary in moments during the ceremony and chat. It is important for younger practitioners to simply be seen and blessed by older one's. There's something archetypal about it. It was necessary and helpful to me when I was younger, and so now I must encourage the younger generation at times as well. Just showing a little bit of interest, giving a kind smile, answering a question when asked, and wishing them all the best.

I passed the 100 hour point in the morning today! Whenever I pass another 100 hours of meditation here in Bodhgaya, I always feel tremendous gratitude. Grateful that it is still possible to practise here and in this manner. Grateful to the Buddha... grateful to my generous students... grateful to my spiritual friends... grateful to our community of friends here in Bodhgaya... grateful that my body and general health is still up to it. Grateful to the Mahabodhi temple, to the Bodhi Tree, to Phra Buddha Metta. Grateful for so many things! Gratitude is such a lovely emotion to meditate with.

Today we had a meal invitation from Tahir, Shalal, and Adil, Mumtaz's sons, as well as from Tamim and his elder brother, who are the cousin brothers. Shalal did not join in the offering, but he is a very good cook and helped with the meal preparation at home. Our group of 5, consisting of 3 monks, 1 nun and 1 laywoman from Malaysia, Ya-Ting, who has recently joined us, were served by these four men. It does take a little getting used to, the hovering over the table and the constant replenishing on the plate. Especially for monks who usually (when not on pilgrimage retreat in Bodhgaya) take just what they is required in one serving and then eat their meal in silence. But I have come to understand that this is the way that

Indians show you that they care, they want to serve you and fuss over you on these special occasions, and the gracious thing to do is to just let them do it, and to enjoy the sweetness. Getting them to stop putting food on the plate requires some firm resolve, and firm hand gestures, but I've learned to do this with a smile as well.

They served us rice and chapati with curried vegetables, dhal, fried fish and mutton curry, and sweet creamy rice for dessert. The womenfolk back at their homestead all helped in preparing the food, we were told. Mothers, wives, sisters, everyone. Tahir said that he supervised. You could tell by the extra special flavours that the curries were all made from freshly mixed and specially prepared spices. At the end of the meal, Tahir put his hand on his heart and said 'Shukriya', which is Urdu language for thank you. And then he said, smiling, 'it makes me very happy that you have received this food from us today.' And he added that he'd like to do it one more time before we leave.

These meal offerings occasions are important, because they are when you can really feel the genuine goodwill and affection from these people, who can otherwise be busy and distracted with business and with life's goings on, as we all can be at times. I really appreciate that they take the time and make the special effort. I always bring nice gifts for them from Thailand as well. They have their favourite types of Thai made rubbing oils and balms.

With the cooler, very damp weather, it had been a few days since I'd done my washing. Seeing that there was a good amount of hot water at midday, I took a shower and washed my clothes, sitting in half lotus under the shower spigot. You kind of kid yourself, walking around the Mahabodhi temple in socks, that the floor is cleanish. And also that they protect your feet to some degree. But seeing the black colour flowing out of the rinse water of my legendary socks, again and again, after many rinses, was a little disturbing! I put a cap of dettol disinfectant into the last tub in the final rinse and somehow it made me feel better.

After the mid-day rest, I noticed that my left shoulder blade area was still painful. Normally it settles down after a week or so, but this time it has persisted. Last year here in Bodhgaya, I met a Sri Lankan lady who was a friend of a long term student from Melbourne, who had offered to do some psychic healing. She has a real gift and her assistance had been genuinely helpful, so I decided to send her a quick email, as she'd given me permission to do so if I ever needed it last year. While meditating at the temple in the evening, at about 7:00pm, I noticed that the area did become less tender, warmer, and lighter somehow. When I got back to my room at 9:30 pm, checking emails, this lady informed me that she had commenced a remote healing session at 6:30 pm. Although I had not mentioned any other issues, she said that she could also see pain in the legs, and mentioned that I wasn't drinking enough water. Both observations were true. My lower calf area hurts when walking after sitting for hours, and to avoid taking too many pee breaks, I've not been drinking much during the day. With her prompting I remembered that I must rehydrate in the evening at least.

When I asked this lady, (not mentioning her name in case she prefers to remain anonymous,) how did she heal people, what energy or method does she use? She explained that Lord Shiva, the deity of the Hindus had appeared to her in her meditation one day, and had said that he could help her to heal people of certain ailments if she was interested and

willing. Although this lady is a Buddhist practitioner who aspires for the liberation of nibbana, she decided to use her gift and this connection to benefit others. I would surmise from this that she had made a close and wholesome connection with this deity in previous lives, and that due to this, the relationship continued. I am not entirely sure how it all works, but I am very grateful that it seems to!

I will be making some lifestyle changes once I get back to my monastery, Anandagiri, in Thailand. Adding certain types of exercise throughout the week to try and bring back some more muscle flexibility where it has become stiff.

(96.5 + 8 - 104.5)

Dee dee dee, Wee, wee wee

Bodhgaya, February 16, day 14.

The Thai word for good is 'dee'. Today, the weather was good, the atmosphere at the temple was good. The volume of the many lovely pujas was good. In fact, for the first time I can remember, I actually wished that the volume of the speakers of the Bhutanese group doing their Tibetan style puja under the Bodhi Tree was louder! The pain behind my shoulder blade was also about 80% less.

Tahn Sampanno had been looking for a statue of Maitreya at one point yesterday, his brother was happy to offer one, but he hadn't found the right one. The one's made in India tend to be a little rough in the finishing. After the midday rest, I popped into one shop on the way to the temple that has had nice images in the past. And sure enough, there was one solitary, very nice statue of Maitreya there. I mentioned this to Sampanno when I saw him at the Bodhi Tree, and Gautam took him to the store nearby to check it out. This one, a gold plated and delicately engraved copper one from Nepal, with a hand painted face, met with Tahn Sampanno's liking.

I have a real gift for shopping, I can usually find exactly what I want very quickly, if ever there is the need, which is a terrible quality in a monk. I think it's because I have a very strong visual memory and can remember where I've seen things before. I can also maintain a disciplined focus amongst clutter until I locate the precise thing that I'm looking for, whereas others may vague out or become overwhelmed and give up. It's nice to be able to help a friend out from time to time though. Today's shopping assistance effort literally took just 5 minutes.

The afternoon and evening meditation sessions were also quite good, and there were some especially lovely Sri Lankan pujas, where the leading monk was chanting and making announcements line by line, with his followers repeating it. There was no microphone used, but the sense of harmony and tightness was great, and the Pali and Sinhala languages seemed to sound just right under the Bodhi Tree, giving a very holy ambiance.

Tahn Joel has been working on the 3D file of Phra Buddha metta for about 2-3 hours everyday for about a week now, and the face and rasami (aura) are almost complete. It is coming along very nicely. Tahn Joel used to be a professional kickboxer, and now he is

bringing his determined and honed discipline and applying it with warrior-like patience to this task. He also commented that for the first time in his life he has been able to sit in three hour long sessions.

Something a little peculiar did happen just before closing time, and just before we concluded the day's practice. At 8:30 pm, a large mouse-like creature (I think it is a palm squirrel) fell in my lap from the Bodhi Tree above. It then scurried over Tahn Joel's lap. It did this back and forth a few times before disappearing around the corner. Then a minute or so later, about 8 dogs were chasing the poor little thing, and as it scurried back in our direction, the dogs all surrounded Tahn Joel and I, growling and barking. A few of the dogs then ganged up on one female dog, who squeezed right in front of us, and unfortunately, in her fear, she pee'd on Tahn Joel's leg and bag!

My interpretation of this incident is that it contained two messages. One, that Ganesha, whose vehicle is a rat, is pleased by the way the Phra Buddha Metta graphic design is coming along... hence the mouse falling from the sky. But Mara is displeased! Hence the growling dogs and smelly pee aimed directly at our diligent 3D file editor. I was 30 centimetres from Tahn Joel, and I was not pee'd on! Some may say that I am reading too much into such things, but I take it as a good sign. You only get the flack when you're right over the target.

(104.5 + 8 - 112.5)