

## Showered with Blessings, Forced into Equanimity

Bodhgaya, February 17, day 15

Yesterday's wish that the volume of Bhutanese puja could be turned up was granted today, and it was a beautiful backdrop to the morning's meditation. There were also no other pujas to speak of, and so it was one of those rare occasions where the external auditory field at the Mahabodhi Temple was genuinely harmonious. Perhaps because the Bhutanese still have their beautiful mountainous country, and because they are mountain dwelling people, they still possess a lot of gentle reserve and natural politeness, and somehow this is communicated in their pujas as well. There is grace, calmness, and love.

At about 10am a large portion of the gathering of monks circumambulated the Chedi 9 times, loudly reciting the long sanskrit mantra of Amitayus, one form of Amitabha. They chanted energetically and loudly, but it wasn't a distraction at all. As they filed around and around behind us, waves of joy, of metta, of purity and of merit seemed to reverberate from the bodies of the scores of monks and permeate into our minds. Well at least my mind. I love it when these Bhutanese monks do this.

There was some frustration at the end of a three hour sitting period in the afternoon. The mind just would not find a still, immovable quality of peace. But when I took off my hat and removed my earplugs, preparing to stretch my legs when I took a glance around, an interesting shift in awareness occurred. It is a strange thing to say, but I could actually hear the relative silence of my mind, and feel it flowing outwards, quieting the noise for a distance of about two metres all around my body. Outside was noisy, but inside was hushed. The throngs of people filing around the Mahabodhi Chedi seemed like perceptions in a dream. The mind was actually considerably aloof and tranquil.

Sometimes in meditation, one can be looking at the mind as though through a microscope, and there is often more that could be cleaned up or let go of. With the focus upon the minutiae, the relative serenity of the onlooking awareness can go unrecognised. I took a few minutes to appreciate the sense of relaxed, clear, tranquil awareness. And to simply notice that there are tangible results that come from sitting longer and inclining the mind inwards consistently. Sometimes, like one zen analogy explains, when walking through a light mist, you don't notice that the moisture is seeping in.

We had our nice simple meal in the guesthouse, which Ya-Ting requested to sponsor. Ya-Ting, a Malaysian Buddhist was not able to join the pilgrimage, but came for around a week to practise with us during this retreat period instead. She has been diligent, determined, good humoured and even tempered. Clearly she can work with the situation and opportunity here very well. She also succumbed to one of Tahir's lovely malas late one evening. I actually suggested the white lotus seeds mala, which is lightweight and inexpensive. But the turquoise and coral spacers ended up costing more than the mala! Even so, having a customised meditation aid is both a good souvenir and a support for future practice.

There was some tension under the Bodhi Tree in the evening. While the western nun was once again reciting a beautiful, lofty minded treatise about the perfect form... conduct... mind... speech, and enlightened activities of the youthful Manjusri Bodhisattva, to the foreign

students attending her retreat. Five or six young Indian men, a different type of youth, were guffawing and he-hawing loudly just a few metres behind. That around fifty people from many different countries were trying to meditate in silence under the sacred tree just a stones throw in front of them evidently didn't mean anything to them. And that twenty or so of these were intent on listening to the beautiful spiritual prose uttered softly by their venerable teacher, but we're being distracted by their reverie, was something that they did not even notice. Trying to listen to the reading was too frustrating. I did my best to place awareness on the space element instead, within which all speech, wholesome or unwholesome, skillful or unskillful, pleasant or unpleasant to the ear, is just sound... arising and ceasing in empty space. The garrulous gang eventually left after about an hour, and once again we were rewarded for our patience with another lovely puja. This time by the same Sri Lankan group from last night.

It is a good thing that full psychic powers take a long time to develop. If you had amazing samadhi but not perfect mindfulness, you might make a mistake in a moment of irritation. I am grateful that I don't have psychic powers tonight, otherwise, with my love of sculpture, I may have turned those boys into stone. Art enthusiasts of the future may have found them as a feature in a gallery titled, 'Belligerent Bihari Boys, circa 2024'. Similarly with the wedding party revellers, with my love of emptiness, they may have all been vaporised! As it is, patience and circumspection are prevailing, and these irritations are the grist for the mill. I am reminded however of why I took a week in Mumbai and visited some friends in Delhi before returning to Bodhgaya. To balance the perceptions with regards to there being many different types of Indians. It's just like the Lay potato chips bag says, India's magic masala mix.

Sometimes when conditions under the Bodhi Tree are pleasant, they are extremely pleasant. And when they're unpleasant, they can be extremely so as well. Which is why it is such a great workshop for cultivating equanimity. The Bodhi tree is seeding now, which brings new challenges. Tahn Joel was shat on twice by a bird this morning, and I was shat on once in the afternoon. The poo is 90% Bodhi seeds though. Until this day Bodhgaya is still the place affirming enlightenment potential, with Mara's army swirling all around trying to obscure it, simply doing their job. The opportunity continues away from the tree as well. It's 12:30 am, and once again we have the wedding boombox grunge and the midnight fireworks as our lullaby. I'm not sure if fireworks is the right word. They're more like firecrackers. They don't splash any beautiful, awe inspiring colours into the sky, they simply make an obnoxious 'bang!'. And you know I really do actually feel concerned for these newlyweds. If obnoxious bangs without any beauty and music without any melody is how the union begins... where does it go from there? We wish them all the best.

Meanwhile, news from back at the monastery. My floozy of a purebred Siamese cat went into heat and slept with the first tom to come along! Now she's very pregnant, with protruding nipples and all. Apparently the dad is a grey tabby. Doesn't she realise she's part of a bloodline family? A member of an elite cabal? I'm not sure if sepia seal points work with grey stripes! How could she do that!? Kaew Mani is personally ushering in the New World Disorder! Okay, it's getting silly now. The obnoxious bangs have stopped. And so must my midnight musings. The pillow calls, I am my father's son, and there is snoring to be done.

(112.5 + 8 - 120.5)

## Rehydration

Bodhgaya, February 18, Day 16

Upon awakening this morning I felt a bit queasy. The general feeling of ikky yuckiness lasted for a few hours under the Tree, and I was grateful to the Bhutanese chanting for being a friendly and auspicious support. What I think was going on, is that now that I am drinking a proper amount of fluids, after being quite dehydrated for a month, the body is having to do a bit of a clean up. This combined with just four hours of sleep after the wedding party that ended at 1:30 am last night had led to a general feeling of malaise.

It is a bit strange, I acknowledge, that you could just forget to drink enough water for a month. (And that I need a psychic healer in a different country to remind me!) Part of it is not wanting to have to get up and pee in the middle of a three hour session of meditation. Or when we were up on Vultures Peak, or at the burning ghats etc. etc. Another factor has been that because the weather has been cool in the mornings and evenings, and as I normally live in a tropical country, I haven't had the perception that I should drink. Because drinking water is something that we do when it's hot in Thailand. So I forgot to rehydrate, that was my bad. I have remembered to do it in the evenings on past trips. Anyway, I am being sensible now, and my two walking meditation sessions at the temple now integrate a walk to and from the bathroom. One mid-morning, and one in the early evening. Tahn Sampanno mentioned that my complexion looks better today, less dry and shrivelled than before! Lol.

The shoulder pain is less, but continues to be something of an issue. Sometimes the way that pain manifests in bodies is not always related to an injury or strain in particular, but perhaps related more to a specific kammic ripening. I have had some dreams and mental impressions that this current shoulder pain is related to having harmed some large animals in a distant past life. Many cultures have a misguided belief that offering animals as a sacrifice is a way to make merits. There may have been some of that. I've been asking for forgiveness and dedicating merits. But even if the said beings have long since forgiven and moved on, sometimes the kamma of the way our actions made other beings feel has to play itself out for a time. There was some deeper peace in the late evening meditation, when the merits of focused good efforts kicked in for a while.

Yah-Tyng (the corrected spelling of her name) returned to Singapore today, where she works. She had a good experience and good practice here. In the evening, old friends from Thailand, Victor and Elle arrived. This time Victor brought along his mother, a work companion, and his and Elle's three daughters. They are here for just a few days, making merit together as a family. Which is quite beautiful really.

(120.5 + 8 - 128.5)

## Fragrance pujas and Forgiveness practices

Bodhgaya, February 19, Day 17

Another wedding party went till midnight, and then they had some kind of out of tune puja amplified loudly, starting at 3am. The event of the wedding was the VIP Guesthouse. (Very Inconsiderate People.) Which is just 15 metres from my window. So I got two and a half hours of sleep, then another one hour later. I was grumpy when Tahn Joel came to my room for breakfast at 6:30 am, and a little traumatised. (Vexatious Impulses Pulsating.) I don't like feeling helpless, or resentful, both emotions seem pathetic to me. So if this happens again, I am going to have to be more proactive. The Australian in me would just go over there and tell the proprietor that I'm calling the cops if he doesn't stop the racket. But this is Bihar, and I could wind up in a ditch if I tried the Aussie approach. So the other alternative is to request to use one of the spare rooms on the other side of the guesthouse when it's happening again. Two more layers of concrete wall would definitely help. I'm sure Mumtaz and sons will oblige.

I decided to make a new fragrance puja blend before brekky, and give myself an aromatherapy treatment in the process, by spraying it on my face while I tested the smell. Today we went with jasmine and lavender essential oils, and putting myself in a cloud of this really did help. The jasmine was enlivening, the lavender calming. The world seemed a little better afterwards, and Tahn Joel made me a stiff cup of tea, which helped as well. Walking to the temple I did feel a little conspicuous. Because I don't usually walk around smelling quite so much like such an expansive auspicious cloud. The essential oils really had stuck to my robes. But there are so many fresh flowers being offered at the temple in the morning I figured that no one would really notice.

Once again the Bhutanese puja was helpful, and after about an hour of metta practice I had forgiven those particular Indians of the night before, and could then get back to wishing all beings well. The lamas circumambulated with their auspicious mantra incantations, and as always it was a joy to receive their blessings.

Coming back from the bathroom, I bumped into Mae Chee Ying with Elle and her daughters. That was another uplifting sight. Mae Chee was explaining what the Buddha had done in the vicinity around the Bodhi Tree in the weeks after his enlightenment. The three daughters, Michelle, Thera and Minerva, are coping with Bodhgaya much better than I'd thought they might. They thought the drive from the airport was exciting, and they love all of the colours everywhere. Their parents are even letting them eat Thai style instant noodles at the Hotel when they want them, something they don't do at home. Victor and his mother are enjoying their time here as well.

(128.5 + 8 - 136.5)