

## **Maths and Musings,**

Bangkok, January 9

In this life thus far I have made 18 visits to the subcontinent of India. Most of these have been in and around the main Buddhist Holy Sites in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in the Northeast. But I have also been as far South as Bangalore, as far North as Ladakh, as far East as Kolkatta, as far West as Mumbai, and as close to the very centre as is possible at Sanchi. Most of the visits have been combinations of teaching and leading pilgrimages followed by a period of more personal retreat time. The average length of stay has probably been around 5 weeks. If you add it all up, it's about a year and three quarters of my life that has been spent in India. And now we're about to add another seven weeks.

All of these visits have occurred in the past 21 years though, which adds up to being about ten percent of my adult life after the age of 30. Subsequently, on a feeling level, India feels to me like one of the places where I live, rather than a place that I visit. I cannot speak Hindi though, which is a little embarrassing. But that doesn't take away from the feeling of being at home there. After so many visits, one knows the seasons, the birdsong, the quality of light at sunrise and sunset. The smell of the different foods being cooked in the morning and the evening, the sound of the children singing. One knows good incense, cheap incense, good chai, bad chai, real sandalwood oil, and fake chemical duplicate wallah as well.

Since I spend most of the time in India meditating in ancient Holy Sites, or gazing at ancient sculptures at these sites or in nearby museums. There is also an ineffable, difficult to describe feeling of connecting with impressions from the past as well. A weird consciousness expanding melding of imprints from others, imprints from this life, and the undercurrents of imprints from past lives as well. For example, there is *always* a 'coming home' like feeling when walking down the steps into the Mahabodhi Temple, or when driving through the walls of the ancient city of Rajagaha. When meditating up on top of Vultures Peak, and even when walking along the ghats of Varanasi. When having pleasant meditation sessions where the heart finds deep inner stillness, there is a different kind of feeling of coming home. Even more profound. Opening the eyes and finding the body and eye consciousness in India, certain feelings of love, appreciation and gratitude are inevitable. When meditating a lot, there is a strange kind of timelessness which seems to engulf the past, the present and the future as well.

I expect that it is the case that most people who are practicing Buddhists in this day and age, no matter where they find themselves now, have developed affinities with Buddhist practices and accumulated auspicious merits in doing so in some part of India. It has been my good fortune that Bodhgaya is just a short 3 hour flight from Bangkok, and that the past twenty years of my life have synchronized with the precise period in history when low cost airlines came into being.

## **Holy Land... Holy Dust...**

But visiting India is always a rich experience. It is not just orange sunrises, dizzying aromatics and jubilant children singing. This body and mind knows what it is soon likely to be in for. And as such, I have been poignantly noticing the clearness of the sky both at

Anandagiri and Phitsanulok yesterday. As well as the relative speed and ease of traffic flow, and smoothness of the roads in Bangkok. (Yes! Compared to Bihar the roads are smooth and the traffic flows smoothly... and nary a honking horn to boot!) The good people of Bangkok are complaining however, that the current Air Quality of 140 is terrible. The AQI Index says that it is 'Dangerous for Sensitive Types' Doing a quick search of Bodhgaya however, we have an altogether much more impressive 266! The AQI Index says 'Dangerous for All Types.. avoid going outside!' What to do?

I've learned to go with the flow and embrace the experience of breathing in Bihar during the winters. There is definitely a certain viscosity to the air. Many people wear masks, but I do not, as I find them too restrictive and frustrating. I breathe it all in, considering it to be sacred holy dust. Let the dust of Bodhgaya turn into relics in my lungs! (And let echinacea, zinc, vitamins C and D deal with the pathogens upon arrival.) If I practise diligently enough, people may even pay respects to rare and special lung relics long after this body has died. Nice little orange ones, the colour of Bihar dust, the warm tones of orange complemented beautifully by lovely cool grey ones, the colour of cow dung smoke. Yin and Yang, warm and cool, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Wonderful smells... terrible smells... delicious food... stomach pains... beautiful horizons... bumpy roads. Best price for you!... ripped off and lied to. Beautiful weddings... no sleeping. Mother India, we love you! And we're 'Coming Soon.'

But before then, I'll be meeting with Khun Jintana's staff for chanting, meditation and Dhamma discussion. Jintana is one of my long-term students in Bangkok. She will be joining the final portion of the pilgrimage as well. Then tomorrow, the five other monks and I will go to meditate and pay respects to the Emerald Buddha. A number of the pilgrims who are already in town will join us there. We are beginning to converge, to coalesce... this pilgrimage is growing more legs and feet!