

Global Wetting

Bodhgaya, 27 February, day 25

7:30 am

Waking up, I noticed I had a sore throat. Last night, before sleeping there was some persistent coughing as well. There were a couple of very dry days followed by a rainy couple of days, then alternating dry and rainy periods in the same day for a couple of days. This can be tough on the immune system. With just 11 hours to go to fulfil the vow, and with heading off to Kolkata tomorrow, I decided to have a quiet morning indoors. Avoiding the morning damp and hopefully letting my immune system get on top of things, before having to deal with the pollution of a very big city tomorrow.

9:00 pm

Had a lovely two hour sit in the afternoon, and then it rained again! It's global wetting I tell you! The angelic novice Indian monks from Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh were right there behind us to help move my things, they are so sweet. We moved to the bell pavilion and sat for another hour, the rain intensified. One upshot was that I was able to ring the Great Emptiness bell at 6:00 pm, three times! It's really loud! The ringer part is locked by a chain to the ground, but the caretaker unlocks it at 6 pm each night and rings it three times. He gave me the honour tonight.

Rather than sit in damp and breezy air for another two hours I decided to head home early. I do want to enjoy the side trip to Kolkata, hopefully in fine fettle. Tahn Joel actually put on a raincoat and sat under the Bodhi Tree in the drizzle for three hours. Geng Maahk! I did fall asleep the moment I lay down at the guesthouse, and woke up two hours later feeling stronger.

A funny thing happened back at the bell pavilion. Some dogs sat on our nice warm and dry mats the moment we got off of them, as we were trying to pack them up. Gautam chased them away and slashed some water on one of them from a drinking water bottle. That dog came back while Gautam was helping to pack things up, and grabbed one of his shoes. There were four sets of shoes, but the doggy sniffed out the water thrower's especially. He and his friends played tug of war with the shoe for a couple of minutes, using their teeth. Once Gautam retrieved the shoe it had many holes in it!

(189 + 3 - 192)

Perturbable Peace... Imperturbable Peace

Bodhgaya, 28 February, day 26

It was a lovely morning of sitting meditation at the temple, mostly. The weather was perfect and the crowds were small. A few days after Magga Puja and the season is definitely slowing down now. As I packed my bag after lunch, I commented to Tahn Joel that it felt quite strange to be breaking our rhythm. We become so committed and immersed during

these retreats, and our routine is very regular, he agreed. We said goodbye to Tahn Sampanno and asked him to keep the banner of the Arahants (our Theravadan robes) flying high in our corner of the temple. Secretly, I think he is as keen as both Tahn Joel and I to get to sleep in just a little over the next few days. I have just 5 hours of meditation to do when we return, gods willing, kamma mara permitting.

(192 + 3 - 195)

There were some exceptionally chatty Vietnamese nuns behind us for the last hour of the morning meditation session. They were having a photo shoot and telling the photographer which angle, which distance, and how to do it again, etc. etc. from what I could tell. They did this literally for an hour. There were four monks meditating about one metre in front of them. I did actually consider admonishing them at one point, but decided against it. You always feel awkward afterwards, replacing one unpleasant sensation with another. So there's nonpoint really. When it turned out that we were on the same flight, I was glad that I had not said anything. They were so sweet, joyful and very happy to see us at the boarding gate. They had been quite well behaved over this past week, but had gotten a bit excited on their very last morning. Please don't think that I have a special aversion issue against Vietnamese nuns. There are just a lot of Vietnamese around at this time, many are well behaved, but a percentage are indeed boisterous. The local Indian monks are worse though. They are all our special teachers, when it comes to the noise they make for us to practise with.

There must have been hundreds of thousands of times over thousands of years, when minds that were about to become very peaceful, were disturbed by sudden jarring noises under the Bodhi Tree. If your mind becomes peaceful first, such noises aren't necessarily an issue. But there are vulnerable moments in the process where a sudden noise nearby will disturb the peace, then one has to rely upon patience and loving kindness, and incline the mind inwards again. It is really a shame that those few square metres in the preeminent Buddhist Holy Site, cannot be held a little more sacred by everybody. Or at least the very least by our fellow practising Buddhists. But it is the way it is.

Luang Por Chah used to teach his monks that disturbing a sincere meditator's mind that was just about to converge into peace, was a very heavy and obstructive type of kamma to make. The monks were expected to walk past other monks' dwellings very quietly, and were trained to put their things down and bow very quietly in the hall, showing deep respect to meditators and to the act of meditation. I do have short chats under the Bodhi Tree myself of course, but only ever in very hushed tones. But not everyone has had the good fortune to study Luang Por Chah's teachings, and learn about his mode of practice and training. I am forever grateful.

There are many frustrating phenomena to practise with if you commit to meditating a lot under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya. The Tibetan prostrators do 100,000 prostrations. The sitters practise with 100,000 frustrations. If the mind does understand how to be peaceful at times under such circumstances, however, it tends to become very resiliently peaceful. And this is very instructive about the deeper potential of good mindfulness and stabilised awareness. Also, if you learn how to practise in and with Bodhgaya, it is much easier in most other places afterwards. The other venerable monks, and Mae Chee, have all mentioned

experiencing much deeper peace than usual during this period, and subsequently feeling deeper faith and inspiration.

Tahn Joel's 3D model file of the Phra Budfha metta has progressed very well, slowly but surely. And it is best not to rush such a thing. This statue is unusual, and does have some very particular and peculiar attributes. Getting the lips, ears, eyes, nose, hair swirls, neck and shoulder line right is all very important. The finer details of the remainder of the body, hands and robe still need work, but the trickiest parts are done. We are pleased with the results. Once this file is ready, it will be possible in the future to make home shrine and travel shrine sized images in several materials, as well as the planned large one. I am confident that many people will appreciate all of this work in the future.

Kolkata

The check in was easy, the flight was smooth, baggage pick up was easy, and walking outside we found Ardil from the guesthouse and Gautam waiting outside within just a couple of minutes. They had both really wanted to come too, so Mae Chee helped them with train tickets. How wonderfully bourgeoisie! Flights, hotels and a museum!

Thinking back over the experiences of the past 6 weeks... the meditation in the mornings in 8 degrees at the Dungeshwari austerity cave and at Vultures Peak, the ash and smoke of the burning ghats blown in our faces. The four bumpy three hour bus drives to and from Ajanta Caves. Ten days of intense shoulder pain while sitting 8-9 hours a day. Being rained upon five times. The wedding grunge music until midnight, the dogfights afterwards. It is okay to be taking some time now, practising with more refined phenomena. I am looking forward to breathing the rarified air of a quiet museum!

The room of the Hotel, which dates back to 1840 apparently, did have a slightly dark and creepy vibe. But I added some sandalwood to the rose and lavender spray that I've been offering at the Chedi, and freshened up the room, followed by some chanting. It feels nice and cosy now.