

Austere in the morning, Comfortable at midday, Devotional in the evening.

Bodhgaya, 13 January.

1pm

This morning's excursion went very well. Having a smoothness to its rhythm which is quite rare, and which was also unintentional, it just kind of happened that way. The punctual departure was not a fluke of course, as I'd been hassling everyone about being on time the night before and had also enlisted Khun Lek and Shun Xiang's assistance. (Shun Xiang is a Singaporean who was a monk for a period of time, and who enjoys being helpful to his ajahn :) But everything after this was serendipity. The bus ride took about a half hour, as did the walk up the hill. Then we sat for a half hour, chanted for a half hour, sat another half hour. I then gave people time to bow inside the small cave one by one and go to the bathroom, which took about a half an hour. Then we discovered a newish meditation hall not far from the entrance of the cave, and we sat in there once again, also for about a half an hour.

The strategy worked very well today. We left at 6am on the dot, arriving at Dengeshwari mountain just after dawn, we were the first to arrive, securing the limited space in front of the small cave for ourselves. We were all sitting by 7am. I had ensured a little pathway in front of our group so that other determined pilgrims could file though as they arrived, which they surely would. It wasn't that cold once the sun got up. The sit, chant and sit approach was nice, as the chanting brightened my mind, chasing away some fogginess and then the second sit was much nicer.

The barren, rocky terrain of the hill where the small cave in which the Bodhisattva practised does have a beautiful kind of austere harshness to it. It is not difficult to imagine the Bodhisattva accomplishing the extreme of utterly determined patient endurance here. And one can feel tremendous gratitude and awe when doing so, considering the unflinching sincerity, motivated by profound compassion and determination. It is an excellent place in which to contemplate determination, and then set one's own determinations. I encouraged the pilgrims to do this after each of the first two meditation sessions.

Curiously a heavy mist descended just as we were about to descend the hill, but we discovered the new meditation hall and had a nice protected meditation session behind the protection of solid walls. It was pleasantly warm inside and the sense of security and lack of intrusion was a very nice way to end the morning's practice sessions. I feel very grateful to the donors, those who arranged the sponsorship as well as those who supervised the construction of this new hall. It is an excellent new development. While sitting in there I was recollecting how many times I've had the good fortune to visit the austerity cave, I believe this was the eighth time. It was also the most pleasant experience I have had here. Arriving early and avoiding most of the touts, crowds and begging mothers and children, at least on the way up the hill, makes the excursion less taxing.

The pilgrims and the monks got to have a leisurely paced lunch and a mid day lie down after lunch today. We will be having a Dhamma talk at 2:30pm, getting on the bus at 3:00pm, and heading to the Root Institute to make our group donation. I have a sense that this one is going to be the largest one to date. There are many good-hearted, generous folks in the

group. Saaadhuuu!!! Then, since it is not far from where the buses have to park, we plan to visit the Japanese and Bhutanese temples, and then make our way to the Mahabodhi, where we plan to be from around 5-8:30pm. It was good to have the intense immersion experience yesterday, but it will be good to be able to chant the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta together as well as sit together under the Bodhi Tree at a less crowded and noisy time.

10pm

The Dhamma talk on the theme of 'The Enlightenment', took longer than I'd thought. As did actually getting to the Root Institute through the traffic. But everyone appreciated the peaceful, nourishing atmosphere behind the Institute's walls, and the warm cup of tea that the staff kindly offered us. Joyce and her helpers had collected donations from the pilgrims in several currencies, they were then able to count it and tell me what it would eventually convert to in Indian Rupee. Around IRP485,000, which is around US\$6000, or \$9000 in Aus/Canadian/Singapore dollars, or around 200,000 Thai baht. A handsome sum indeed. Sally, the Australian born director remembered me from previous visits and was actually a bit teary eyed, feeling very touched by our support for the Institute's projects. I told her that we are grateful to, grateful that there is a trustworthy place for us to support, and appreciative of the services that they offer.

The international temples close their gates to visitors at 5pm, arriving in the vicinity at around 5:15pm, we had to forgo our visit, and made our way to the Bodhi Tree directly instead. We sat for about an hour and a half, with the sound of various pujas reverberating all around. At 7:15pm there was a wonderful lull in the cacophony of chants, and so we recited the Dhammacakka sutta just metres from the very spot where Lord Buddha had experienced his liberating Insights into The Four Noble Truths and formulated the Eightfold Path for us to cultivate, following in his footsteps.

Having visited the austerity cave, and the place where Lady Sujata had offered the milk rice recently, as well as having considered the Bodhisattvas earnest striving and process of Enlightenment just a few hours before, there was a real sense of respect and reverence as we chanted those profound words together. It was a very seamless and elegant puja, and I was proud of the group for our sincere and composed deportment. We bowed together with love, gratitude, respect, awe, and sincere aspiration.

After the formal puja we attempted to pay respects to the Phra Buddha Metta statue contained within the Chedi. It was very crowded and it was clear that to try and do anything as a group just then was not going to be possible. The pilgrims enjoyed filing in one by one and offering some flowers nonetheless. Some good fortune did manifest for our group though. A Thai acquaintance who I know from previous pilgrimages was waiting outside the entrance to the vihara holding a set of gorgeous robes, and he invited me to join in his offering of the robes. I asked if I could invite my entire group to join in as well. He explained that if we waited until just before closing time, it would be possible to get the vihara more or less to ourselves for a few minutes. We had to meditate in the cold weather for another half an hour, but it was worth it. Offering the robes and chanting together inside the vihara was a lovely way to end a rich and fruitful day. I could see by the smiles on their glowing with contentment faces, that the pilgrims were all very moved and grateful. The chanting was

great! And the Buddha statue looked very regal with his snugly fitted maroon coloured robes with their gold ribbon trim.