

Reflections



Winter Issue
February 2011
Vol. 1 Issue 3

A Quarterly E-Magazine of the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County

Three disciplines for progress
on the Buddhist path are
study, reflection and meditation.

The Pilgrimage's Itinerary - *continued* (from day eight onward)

by Chris Higgins

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Editor's Comments:

We are back! After a too long hiatus, this e-mag is back in action. In this issue, we continue with part 2 of the pilgrimage to India taken by our members under the direction Lama Gursam. You will also find a great article on the Buddha's contemplation of truth and the Four Healing Powers of the Mind...Enjoy!

– Dan Lee–

Note: Pictures are palced randomly and do not relate to the surrounding copy conetent.

Introduction

In one of his last utterances before his Mahaparinirvana, the Buddha said to Ananda, his favorite attendant:

There are these four places, Ananda, which the believing man should visit with feeling of reverence and awe.

Which are the four?

“The place, Ananda, at which the believing man can say, Here the Tathagata was born–**Lumbini**

The place, Ananda, at which the believing man can say, Here the Tathagata attained to the supreme and perfect insight–**Bodhgaya**

The place, Ananda, at which the believing man can say, Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathagata--**Sarnath**

The place, Ananda, at which the believing man can say, Here the Tathagata passed finally away in that utter passing away which leaves nothing whatever to remain behind”–**Kushinagar**

The four places mentioned by Gautama Buddha: **Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath** and **Kushinagar**, constitute the Dharma Yatra. (Source: www.IncredibleIndia.org)

Our March 2010 pilgrimage In the Footsteps of the Buddha, conducted by Drikung Kagyu monks, Lama Gursam and Lama Jamdor included all four of these sites!!

March 8 – Day 8 – Varanasi and Sarnath

Sarnath – is only 10 kms from Varanasi, the holy city of the Hindus. After the frenetic volatility of Varanasi, also called Benaras and Kashi, Sarnath welcomes you with a serene smile.

In search of the abandoned ascetics. After Sakyamuni gained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree on the banks of the Nairanjana river, he walked for over 250 kms from Bodh Gaya, crossed the Ganga by ferry to reach the ghats of Kashi. He was searching for the five companions who had abandoned him at Rajgir. The five ascetics deserted him when Gautama forsook the path of self-mortification because they felt that spiritual salvation was not possible through any other means.

The Buddha found the five ascetics at ad eer park in the outskirts of the
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The Silence of Buddha and his Contemplation of the Truth

A. J. V. Chandrakanthan earned his doctorate in theology at St. Paul University, Ottawa, where he also teaches Eastern Religions. This article is based on a talk he gave in July, 1986, at the Christian Meditation Centre, London.

SPIRITUALITY TODAY

Summer 1988, Vol.40 No. 2, pp. 145-156.

A. J. V. Chandrakanthan:

The Silence of Buddha and his Contemplation of the Truth...despite the doctrinal differences that separate the various schools of Buddhism, a remarkable unity exists among them in recognizing the indispensability of silence as a powerful catalyst for dhyana or meditation.

BUDDHA: THE SILENT SAGE

Buddha was born in or around 563 B.C. into a religious milieu which had in its tradition two distinct approaches to the pursuit and personal discovery of the Truth. The first approach was that of sharpening one's intellect through active engagement in philosophical inquiries. Truth was sought through metaphysical debates and discussions.(3) This approach placed strong emphasis on the power of rational knowledge. The second way was to enter into seclusion and solitude and to search for the Truth in personal silence.(4) Here the emphasis was placed on renunciation, detachment, and an ascetical way of life. Eschewing the first approach, Buddha deliberately and decisively chose the

city. The park was called Rishipattana or Issipattana after the rishis of sages who come to meditate under its shady trees. Its other name was Mrigadaya or deer sanctuary, because a king of Varanasi had gifted the land as a safe haven for deer. The modern name of Sarnath is derived from the name of the Bodhisattva, Saranganatha.

The blessed one met his old companions who were the first to hear him unfold his path to Enlightenment and the Middle Way. This first sermon is called Dharmachakrapravartana, or Turning of the Wheel of Law.

The Sangha At Sarnath the Buddha founded the Sangha with his five old companions as his first disciples. It was also here that Yasa, the son of a



rich merchant of Kashi, renounced his life of worldly pleasures to become Sakyamuni's disciple. Kondanna, leader of the first convents, described the moment of his realization: Lo! he hath passed with vigour out and on; Sloughed off hath he the dryings and the births, Wholly accomplishing the life sublime.

Thereafter for 45 years the Lord walked the dusty plains of northern India, touching the lives of millions with his teachings. However he did not forget Sarnath. He came back to the deer park to meditate during the months of the next monsoon and for many other such retreats.

Invasion brings its downfall. However in the 12th century both Varanasi and Sarnath faced the first onslaught or Muslim invasion. After Qutbuddin Aibak's attack in 1194, the thriving monastery in the Sarnath lay in ruins, and the few monks who survived, fled. Sarnath never rose again. The faith survived in other countries but Sarnath no longer echoed to the chants of the monks. Seven hundred years later, in 1834, a British archaeological team led by Alexander Cunningham rediscovered Sarnath, opening a window to a forgotten period of India's ancient history. Today the ruined stupas, broken walls of monastery cells and statues within the niches of the

second. Mauna, rendered in English as "silence," was the chief characteristic trait of this path.

The word mauna is one of the few terms used commonly by all language and religious groups in India. In religious treatises and traditions, this word has a history of its own. Mauna, from which the noun muni, meaning "sage" or "hermit" is derived, has a meaning exorbitantly wealthier than its English counterpart "silence." Mauna means blissful calmness, joyous recollection, tranquil quietude, and peaceful stillness.

In many of the legends and stories ascribed to Gautama Buddha,(5) he is referred to as Sakyamuni. Literally this means, "the silent one of the Sakya clan." But the popular use of this name for the Buddha also contains a dual significance. For besides referring to Buddha's clan, in certain Indian languages the word sakya also refers to something "graceful" or "pleasing." Thus Sakyamuni can also mean "one who is gracefully silent."

Buddha began his search for the Truth as a muni walking on this graceful path of mauna, ...

TRUTH AND SILENCE

In the stories and discourses attributed to Buddha, one can clearly see a close link between Truth and Silence. Wherever Truth is mentioned in reference to Buddha it is always said in relation to Silence. In fact, popular Buddhist religious tradition attests that whenever someone asked Buddha to explain the Truth, he invariably answered by Silence. Thus he gave a new and deep

walls, lie within stretches of emerald lawns. Dharmarajika Stupa Dharmarajika Stupa marks the site where the Buddha gave his first sermon. It was broken down in the 18th century by an officer of the Maharaja of Benaras who was looking for building material for constructing a bazaar. Alexander Cunningham found a marble casket beneath the stupa during excavations in the late 19th century.



Just behind the Dharmarajika Stupa are the remains of the massive Ashoka Pillar, one of the many that Emperor Ashoka set up at Buddhist sites. It is placed at the spot where the Buddha gave his first sermon and established the Sangha. The monolithic Ashoka Pillar was once crowned with the magnificent Lion Capital, which is now kept in the Sarnath Museum. The four roaring lions face the four cardinal directions.

Mulgandhakuti Vihara marks the site where the Buddha meditated during his monsoon retreats at Sarnath. Excavations have unearthed a statue of a Bodhisattva from the 1st century AD, and a tablet on which the name of the shrine was carved.

In 1922, Anagarika Dharmapala laid the foundation of a temple named Mulgandhakuti Vihara at the site. It enshrines relics of the Buddha which were discovered at Taxila. The interior has frescoes painted by a Japanese artist in 1932-35. Outside is the Bodhi tree and its spreading branches symbolize the return of Buddhism to India.



Chaukhandi. The first landmark that visitors see on their way to Sarnath from Varanasi is a high mound with the remains of a brick stupa built in the Gupta period. Today the site is called Chaukhandi. It marks the spot where the Buddha first met his five companions on arriving in Sarnath. A Mughal style octagonal tower was added by Govardhan, son of Raja Todar Mal, in 1588, to celebrate a visit by the Mughal Emperor Akbar to the city. (Source: [www. IncredibleIndia.org](http://www.IncredibleIndia.org))

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significance to both Truth and Silence. His silence was not a mere absence of speech or words. Buddha's silence was eloquent! It was so blissful and ecstatic that it always provided the perfect answer to those akin to the philosopher in the above anecdote who sincerely sought for the Truth.

For Buddha, Silence as the inevitable path that leads to the Truth is not distinct from the Truth itself. That is, as the way to the Truth, Silence already contains the reality of the Truth. They are two aspects of the same reality.⁽⁶⁾ It is no wonder that even in Christian tradition silence is spoken of as the language of God.⁷ In Christian terms, we may say that for Buddha, Silence is the sacrament of the Truth.

Satya, the word translated "truth" in English, is one of the oldest words in the Indian religious heritage. It too has a wealth of meanings. Derived from the root sat, meaning "being," "existence," "pure," "holy," "perfect;"⁽⁸⁾ etc., satya signifies the Truth in all its unlimited perfection and plenitude. As the ground of all existence, satya can only be experienced through the medium of Silence. It cannot be expressed. The moment one tries to express it, one runs the danger of falsifying it, of rendering it asatya, "un-

A short bus ride from Varanasi brought us to the following sites in Sarnath, which we toured with Lama Gursam's teacher: Chaukhandi Stupa, the Sarnath Deer Park, which included the ruined Dharmarajika stupa, and the Mulagandhakuti Vihara and temple. After lunch at the Vaishali Restaurant, we toured the Central University of Tibetan Studies and were impressed by the vast library of Buddhist scriptures.

The group returned to the hotel at 3:30 pm and 14 of us gathered a half hour later to go to the Kasim Silk Emporium. Seven of us crowded into each of 2 small white vans which drove us into the Muslim silk area. Upon arrival, we walked through winding alleys, children greeted us on the way to the emporium. We removed our shoes outside the lobby area and were ushered into the showroom which was covered wall to wall with white futon type mattresses. We arranged ourselves around the perimeter of the room and workers brought out bolts of silk, unfurling yard after yard of silk, followed by scarves and pillow cases, until a mountain of silk filled the center of the room. Amid the display, chai and Ritz type crackers were served and individuals made their choices and we retraced our steps back to the 2 vans. Some of the group went to Ganges by Tuk-Tuk (a motorized tricycle rickshaw), while others just had dinner at the hotel and prepared for the 4:30 am wake up call.

March 9 – Day 9 – Varanasi – sunrise Ganges boat ride and bus ride to Bodh Gaya

The day began strangely with shouts for assistance, as the body of an Indian man was discovered on the 2nd floor landing of the hotel. Since we could offer no information, we continued on, boarding the bus to the Ganges.



Vendors were setting up their shops, as we made our way through the narrow alleys to the Ghats (the wide stone steps that line the banks of the Ganges). Vendors near the river were selling flowers and small leaf-candle-boats for 10 rupee and most of us boarded the simple wooden boat with leaf/candle in hand. After pushing off, we lit our candles and then gently placed them in the water, so that there was a trail of candles in the wake of our boat.

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truth." The fountain of Silence is the sole medium that is capable of delivering the Truth.

Buddha did not communicate any knowledge with his Silence, but he nevertheless communed with seekers of the Truth. He did not offer them a part of his knowledge, but imparted to them an aspect of his being. He used neither words nor the wordless (signs and gestures). Rather, the language he used was Silence in the sense of an effulgent mauna.

Buddha's Silence was not wordlessness or noiselessness. It had a transforming power, permeating and filling the atmosphere around him with such intensity that people seated at his presence experienced "the ineffable and the inexplicable." His Silence had no movement, yet people around him moved closer to the Truth just by being in his presence, permeated and filled by the effulgence of his joyous stillness. His Silence was contagious. It was like the unseen powers of a magnetic field or the invisible sound waves that travel in the atmosphere.

The close affinity that is said to enjoin Truth with Silence is not uncommon in the mystical traditions of other religions including Christianity. Whether it be in the Sufism of Islam or in the Hasidim of Judaism, silence is always referred to as the prerequisite for an interior experience of the divine. Silence is often eulogized as the language of the heart. Buddha's Silence reveals to us the nature and significance of an ideal form of silence. This becomes more evident when we contrast the mauna with our ordinary experience of silence.

The Ganges was alive with activity, numerous boats like ours and smaller boats of vendors selling trinkets, even showing DVDs of a sunrise trip on the Ganges. The most puzzling was a fisherman with buckets of small (smeltlike) fish. Lama Jamdor had to explain to us that he was asking us for 'ransom' to release the fish back into the Ganges. (In Bodhgaya, we



saw similar enterprises, with peddlers seeking ransom to release birds from cages.) We saw: bathers, people washing clothes, worshipers, as well as the cremation Ghats. These were ashy, with sooty buildings and piles of burned and unburned wood with a few gold wrapped corpses on the steps. We had been counseled not to photograph these ghats.

There was a collective 'Ahh' as the sun rose and we headed back to our starting point. On a concrete platform midway up the ghat, Lama Gursam gave us the Mahamuhdra transmission and we read the Mahamuhdra together in English.

We returned to the bus amid beggars and peddlers of bindi and trinkets. Before lunch a smaller group did some exploring on foot and found another silk shop (with the help of the NY Tibetan woman, who was able to speak to the locals). Along the way, we saw Christian as well as Hindu temples.

Varanasi stands on the west bank of the river Ganga as it flows through the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It is at a distance of 764 kms from Delhi. Varanasi, Benares, Kashi, they have called this city by many names. Placed between the Varuna and the Assi rivers it is Varanasi. It is the spiritual pilgrimage that is like a luminous beacon to Hindus and for them it has always been Kashi, the city of light. They believe bathing in the river Ganga here washes away their sins. It is also Avimukta, the city that is never forsaken by Lord Shiva, its ruling deity. It is Shiva's favorite city, his Anandavana of Garden of Bliss. And finally, it is also the Mahashmashana, the great cremation ground.

One of the oldest cities in the world. Living with the great questions of birth and death, Varanasi has never bothered to record its history. Its beginnings are lost in the mists of time, no one cares to remember when this city began. It was there when Jerusalem, Beijing and Athens rose and it has watched great cities like Nineveh and Babylon get swallowed by the sand. It is one of the oldest living cities in the world.

A view of the ghats. The panorama of the ghats is one of the most ar-
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UNQUIET SILENCE

The silence which most of us have experienced or know of is an exterior absence of words or a stillness from noise. During such an experience we may not use words audibly and externally but the mind is unquiet, filled with words and noise, ideas, questions, desires, doubts, and conflicts. All this clouds and confuses the mind; silence is only on the surface. Quietude is only on the periphery. It is only a mirage or a deceptive appearance of Silence, because there is calamity inside and a pretense of calm outside. Such silence can easily be tilted by the least external noise. Instead of resulting in peace this forced stillness will explode into annoyance and irritation.

SPEECHLESS SILENCE

Persons under sudden shock or deeply excited by fear also experience a brief spell of silence. This silence may be wordless or it may render someone momentarily speechless. But there is no lasting peace or quietude. It only causes confusion and chaos, besides accelerating anxiety and tension. It is a silence thrust onto a person from outside and therefore has no natural flow or spontaneity.

TRANQUIL SILENCE

Buddha's Silence is of a third category. His Silence is not forced by any internal or external factors. It is natural and spontaneous, active and sublime. It wells up from the depths of his personality and overflows with a certain rhythm. It is mauna in the fullest sense of the term. It radiates energy and emanates vitality. Peace and joy

resting images of Varanasi. As you float down the river some will be crowded with bathers, at others a solitary, ash-smearing sadhu with matted hair will be communing with the sun. Another ghat will be full of washer men slapping clothes on flat stones in a synchronized swinging of arms.

Blue grey drifting smoke covers the most fascinating ghat of all, Manikarnika. Only those fortunate to have died in Varanasi have the privilege to be cremated here. To die here is to be freed from the cycle of life and death. And with the city's usual penchant for myth making they named this ghat Manikarnika, after the Goddess Parvati's earring which fell down while bathing. On top of the steps is a large tank, the manikarnika kund that Lord Vishnu is supposed to have dug with his perspiration. Vishnu's feet are set in a marble pedestal beside it, called the Charanapaduka.

In food shops and narrow alleys. The old localities of Varanasi are a labyrinth of narrow lanes, crowded with people, cycles, and ambling cows. Some of them are so narrow even a cycle rickshaw cannot pass through. The street corner food shops make trays of sweets, the famous creamy rabri or thickened milk and glasses of cool thandai and lassi. The paan shops offer a variety of paans (betel) with a subtle mix of masala.

The weavers of Varanasi. The weavers of Varanasi have been creating exquisite silks and brocades for centuries. Once they were the prized goods being carried on the silk Route to Europe and to China. Even today Indian brides get married in the silk saris woven in Varanasi. It is said that the muslin shroud that covered the Buddha after his Mahaparinirvana was from Varanasi, and it was woven so fine it would not absorb oil. (Source—www.IncredibleIndia.org)

Left the hotel heading for Bodhgaya at about 2 pm and arrived at the Kirti Hotel at about 6:30 pm. After a tasty Tibetan dinner, a small group of us walked to the Maha Bodhi Temple. The shoe check area was quite a distance before the steps to the Temple area, and we walked on the stone pavement in our socks. Tired pilgrims found a crowded temple, unrelenting peddlers and mosquitoes, at dusk. Returned to the hotel to set up a mosquito net around the bed and prepare for an early wake up call.

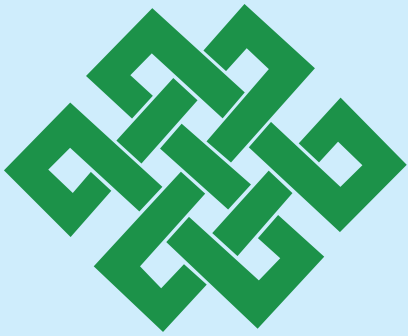


March 10 – Day 10 Bodh Gaya, Vulture Peak and Nalanda

Walked to the Temple with Lama Gursam at 5 am with a sickle moon overhead. The stillness was broken by the sound of a low, deep voice chanting

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are inseparably interwoven in its very essence. This Silence is not negative; there is no “absence” of something. It is wholly positive, pervading the entire atmosphere around him, so that he can just sit without uttering anything and the people around him can receive wisdom. It is this pattern of Silence that the early Buddhist sculptors and artists endeavored to convey in their images and replicas of the Buddha.



Buddha’s Silence was the result of a profound harmony within himself and with the world outside. It pointed to a deep concord between the center and periphery of his self and his states of awareness or consciousness. Buddhism refers to seven layers of such consciousness. A joyous quietude is attained when these seven layers throb harmoniously, pulsating in sublime awareness. Buddha is silent because he knows the narrow boundaries of rational knowledge and the blind alleys of metaphysical queries. He knows the frailty and feebleness of words and concepts. His discovery of the language of Silence helped him dispel the inner darkness and void created by a rational thirst for knowledge.(9)

SILENCE AND CONTEMPLATION

As we mentioned earlier, in the

over the PA system. Long sleeves, pants and a scarf provided some protection against mosquitoes and the cool morning air. We did walking and sitting meditation and saw the huge Bodhi tree behind the temple and myriad shrines and pallets for overnight meditators.

Bodh Gaya (once Uruvela village) is the place where, 2500 years ago, in the 6th century BC, a young ascetic, Siddhartha, attained enlightenment to become the Buddha, and founded Buddhism, one of the world’s oldest religions. Born into the ruling family of the Sakyas, Siddhartha had renounced his royal heritage, and since then had faced many hardships in his search for Truth. He came to Bodh Gaya looking for a quiet retreat where he could meditate upon the causes for human suffering.

Siddhartha spread Kusha grass beneath the Bodhi or Bo tree (Pipal tree, botanical name *Ficus religiosa*) and sat cross-legged facing the east with a vow to get up only if he attained supreme knowledge. For 7 weeks, Mara, the tempter, assaulted him with his weapons of flood, fire, thunder and lightning. Then Mara’s three beautiful daughters tried to allure him, but in vain. Siddhartha entered deeper states of contemplation. His quest finally



ended at dawn on Vaisakha Poornima, the full moon day in April-May, when the kind daughter of the village chief of Senani, Sujata, brought him a bowl of kheer (sweet thickened milk). It is said that the gods had infused the kheer with ambrosia. Siddhartha attained Samma Sambodhi, the Enlightenment that he had been seeking for so long. He was no more a seeker he had become the Buddha.

As the place of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, Bodh Gaya is the spiritual home of Buddhists. Located in Bihar, 115 kms from Patna, the land is rich and fertile, dotted with green fields and watered by the river Phalgu - the same ancient Nairanjana River where the Buddha bathed after attaining enlightenment. A range of low forested hills silhouette the small hamlets flanking the glistening, sandy banks of the river. Monks and nuns rub shoulders with tourists and believers from all over the world. An all-pervading calm envelops the town, giving visitors a sense of peace. (Source: [www. IncredibleIndia.org](http://www.IncredibleIndia.org))

After breakfast, boarded the bus at 7:20 am, destination Vulture Peak and Nalanda. The landscape is more hilly here. We saw empty roadside shrine enclosures, which we dubbed ‘BYOS—bring your own shrine’.

There are walking sticks for sale at the bottom of Vulture Peak, but the

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Indian languages a contemplative is a muni. Literally, this means “the silent one.” Muni refers to one who is so totally and intensely silent, calm, serene, and recollected that his very presence becomes a pool of energy, radiating an ineffable spirit of stillness. Buddha was a muni par excellence. The strength of his contemplation was rooted in his power of Silence, which led him to enlightenment.

In the Eastern contemplative tradi-



tion, the act of doing something is already the thing done. The goal of life for Buddha was the act of living it. Thus Silence as the way to the Truth is itself the Truth. In fact, in Buddha’s teaching the four-fold salvific truth(10) incorporates “the path” as one of its constituents, while “the eightfold path”(11) leads to the realization of the Truth.

Buddha persistently refused to define or describe the Truth. It can only be experienced and assimilated. It was part of his very being. It cannot be communicated by words, but can only be shared with someone who possesses the right prerequisites for receiving it into his or her being.

People who came to Buddha with adequate inner preparation re-

path is paved with platform landings arranged in steps leading to the peak. Beggars sit along the edge of each landing. Near the top, Lama Jamdor bought a large box of individual packages of biscuits and tossed a package into the cupped scarf of each person on the way down. We prayed at the shrine and made offering at Vulture Peak, the site of King Bimbisara’s conversion to become a disciple of the Buddha.



Toured Nalan(Lotus)da(give), where the Buddha preached and the site of a great Mahayana university. Collected a bodhi leaf at Sariputra’s temple and admired the red flowered Samer tree.

Lunch at a roadside restaurant in Rajgir was delicious and plentiful. Fed our leftovers to the cow who was eating from a trash can. Returned to Bodh-gaya in the afternoon and searched for the Post Office to mail postcards (12 rupee each) and to find a cloth dust mask (45 rupee in the drugstore). Evening prayers with Lama Gursam from 6 to 7:45pm next to the Bodhi tree.

March 11 – Day 11 Bodh Gaya

5am meditation at the Temple; 7:40 am breakfast; 9am Tsok feast departure. Tsok is a feast of offering, a symbol of generosity, about gathering and purification. We, pilgrims, helped with the arrangement of water and marigolds in cups on a long altar along the side of the temple. On the platform further down from the temple along the side of the Bodhi tree, we gathered and arrayed fruit, candy, juice, biscuits, water, etc. As we went through the prayers in the Bodhisattva Foundation prayer book ending with the joyful 100 syllable prayer, Bodhi leaves fell on us. Then the riches were distributed to us and to nearby monks and poor people. We ate and kept some of our riches for ourselves (as we must) and were happy to have goodies to hand out to children along the path back to the hotel.

11am – Lama Jamdor took us on a ‘temple crawl’, giving us the opportunity to admire and compare Buddhist temples representing Thailand, Japan, Bhutan, China, and Tibet. It was a hot day, but we enjoyed taking photos and admiring the culture. Pilgrims bonded during an afternoon shopping trip in some local shops where Lama Gursam had negotiated very reasonable prices mostly on clothing. 5pm meditation, 7:15pm dinner at the hotel.

March 12 – Day 12 Bodh Gaya, bus ride to Gaya train station, train to Delhi

5am meditation, followed by refuge service along the Bodhi tree and then time on our own until 12:30pm when we departed by bus for the train sta-

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ceived at least some experience of the Truth through their trustful silence. Otherwise it is hard to give any proper interpretation to the “cult of meditation” that is integral to Buddhism and eventually blossomed into Zen. Paintings and sculpture over two thousand years old portray Buddha as a serene and silent sage, a phenomenon found in almost all countries where Buddhism claims adherents.¹² It further confirms that this elegant and eloquent trait of Buddha’s personality had a universal attraction and appeal for over the millennia.

In the Christian mystical and contemplative tradition, silence is strongly recommended as an ingredient of the religio-spiritual quest. The Desert Fathers and the later monastic tradition stress the role of silence for interior spiritual growth. St. Benedict advises his followers, “Monks ought to be zealous for silence at all times ...”⁽¹³⁾ Silence creates an atmosphere and an attitude for listening and receptivity, for response and recollection. Only thus can the Truth, that is, the Divine Reality, be able to permeate our entire being.

EMPTINESS

A major question arises: how is this ideal form of Silence to be embraced? Can anyone experience it? Buddha himself provides the answer. It lies in the Buddhist understanding of the richness of emptiness.⁽¹⁴⁾ As long as a person is willing to become empty⁽¹⁵⁾ of all forms of desires and attachments, both within and without, and learns to avoid using any self-suppressive force,

tion. The poverty and begging at the train station were terrible. The vermin (mice, roaches, mosquitoes) on the train made it difficult to relax and sleep.

March 13 – Day 13 Train to Delhi, bus ride to Agra and Taj Mahal

16 of the original 25 opted to go to Agra. Left yesterday at 2:30pm and expected to arrive in Delhi at about 5 am, but were delayed at least 2 hours and arrived at about 7:45 am—a 17 hour train ride. And then we boarded the bus again for what turned into a 5 to 6 hour ride. We arrived in Agra at about 3:30 pm, so all together it took us about 25 hours to get from Bodhgaya to Agra, although we had stopped for about 2 hours. Outside of Delhi we stopped at a fast food place called conEsum. There were armed guards out front and we were forbidden to take photos of the food display cases.

After much negotiation, we determined to go directly to the Taj Mahal upon arriving in Agra. Since it was a Saturday afternoon, the Taj was crowded with local family site seers in addition to foreign tourists. The admission fee for nationals is 500 rupee, but 750 rupee for non-nationals, which covered entrance and a bag with ½ liter of mineral water and surgi-type booties to cover our shoes when we went into the Taj. The hawkers of books and cards were particularly aggressive. Because of the Muslim influence, admission was segregated between men and women, and we were thoroughly screened and patted down before we could enter.

The Taj Mahal is a monument and not intended for residence and as such, most of the tour was outdoors. Indoor viewing of the Taj Mahal was limited to 2 of the 4 chambers. Our pilgrimage tour guide (Tenzin’s sister Lackey) had arranged for us to have a Taj Mahal guide, who took us to a local shop without Lackey’s knowledge, while she was in the washroom. She was frantically searching for us for over 30 minutes and had called the police.

So after our long trip, tour of the Taj Mahal on a warm day and the excitement of being ‘abducted’, we were all happy when we arrived at the Hotel Amar. This was the most cosmopolitan hotel of our stay. We were greeted with garlands of marigolds, glasses of cola and air conditioning! At dinner we even had King Fisher beer with our spicy Indian buffet.



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the path of silence is very accessible. It should be undertaken in an attitude of total self-surrender, humility, and trust. Otherwise it is very hard to quiet the mind, which is always clouded with thoughts and concerned with the deceptive power of the ego. This is possible only by incessant practice induced by the desire to reach into the very core of one's "inner-self."

A story of one of the Buddha's disciples can help us to discern how the process of achieving emptiness is an ideal means of attaining the Truth:

Subhuti was one of Buddha's disciples. He was able to understand the potency of emptiness: the viewpoint that nothing exists except in its relationship of subjectivity and objectivity.(16)

One day, when Subhuti was sitting under a tree in a mood of sublime emptiness, flowers began to fall around him.

"We are praising you for your discourse on emptiness;" the gods whispered to him.

'But I have not spoken of emptiness;' said Subhuti.

"You have not spoken of emptiness, we have not heard emptiness," responded the gods. "This is true emptiness."

And the blossoms showered upon Subhuti like rain.(17)

This is the only story that exists about Subhuti. There is nothing remarkable about him simply because he was one of Buddha's numerous disciples. Tradition affirms that already during his lifetime, Buddha had some outstand-

March 14 – Day 14 – bus trip from Agra to Old Delhi and then to the Airport

Up at 5:25 am for 6 am breakfast, including an omelet station and luggage pickup before 7am. The air was pleasant and cool and there were few people as we toured the Agra Fort, which was built about 1565 by Akbar the Great, the great grandfather of the emperor who built the Taj Mahal. Unlike the Taj, which is a monument, the Fort was built for residence and had a multitude of chambers and decorations (both Muslim and Hindi). The author enjoyed this tour more than the Taj.

On the road to Delhi by 9am, driving through various towns, encountering congestion and soaking in the last sites of India. Upon arrival in Old Delhi, met some of those who had stayed behind in Bodhgaya and wandered around the shops purchasing Tibetan refugee made goods. Had our last good-byes, thank yous and dinner at the Sakya House and then headed to the Airport for our evening flight back to Newark airport. Although we arrived about 3 hours before the flight, departure time came quickly. We were not seated together, but we saw our trip mates intermittently during the flight. A group of about 20 Cambodian Buddhist pilgrims from the Boston area were also on the flight, and the kindred spirit of pilgrimage continued across the Atlantic.

The Four Healing Powers Of Mind

Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, Shambhala Sun, May 2000.

The key to health and happiness, says Tulku Thondup, is a mind that is peaceful and positive. This respected Buddhist teacher and author offers insights and meditations to help us access the natural healing power of mind.

To find true well-being, the best place to look is close to home.Money does not necessarily grant well-being either, nor does a youthful or healthy body. Health and money can help us, of course. But the real source of peace and joy is our mind.

The mind wants to be peaceful; this is really its natural state. But there are so many distractions and cravings that can obscure our peaceful nature... Meditation can slow us down so that we touch our true nature. Any meditation can help us. The object of our contemplation could be a flower, a religious image, or a positive feeling. Or it could be our own body.

One especially rich way to develop a peaceful mind is to meditate upon the body. By doing this we promote the welfare of our whole being. Through meditation, we can learn how to encourage our mind to create a feeling of peace in the body. This can be as simple as relaxing and saying to ourselves, "Let my body be calm and peaceful now," and really feeling that this is happening. It is the beginning of meditation—and of wisdom, too.

This approach is reintroducing ourselves to our bodies and establishing

continued on next page

ing persons, kings and scholars, as his disciples. But the gods did not choose them. They chose the unknown Subhuti. Herein lies the key to the Buddhist notion of emptiness, which can be understood and cherished only by being empty.

Like tranquil silence, emptiness cannot be expressed. The moment an effort is made to express it, it loses its value. It is no longer emptiness. Because in "true emptiness" even the experience disappears. This is the significance of the Buddhist notion of sunyata, the attitude that Buddha had when he left the palace and chose to become a sage. It is not a negative emptiness, but a sublime emptiness that becomes the firm foundation on which the edifice of silence can stand.

For a few elusive moments, all of us have had glimpses of emptiness and experiences of silence. But as long as the mind is there, or the ego is there, such moments pass like a dream. The closer we move towards silent emptiness, the more elusive it becomes. To grasp this moment one has to be securely rooted in openness and humility. ...

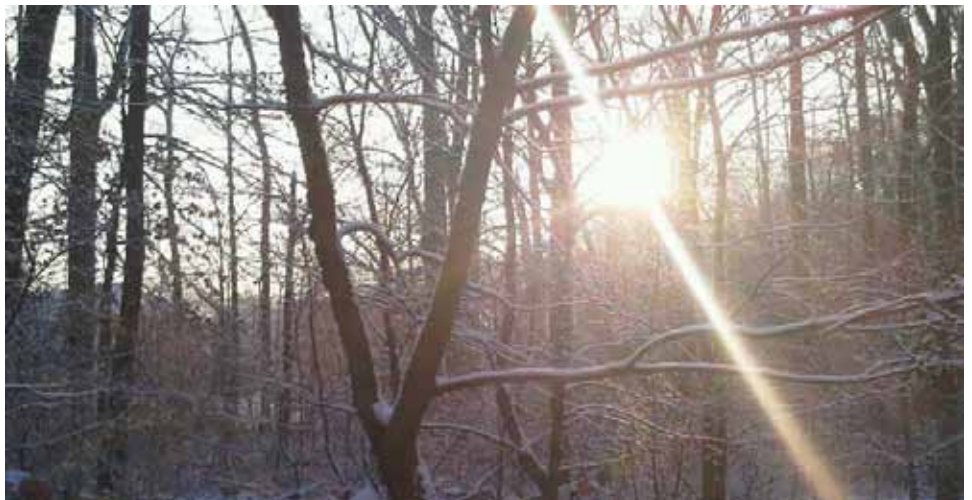
SILENCE TODAY

More than ever before, people today feel the need for silence, meditation, and contemplation.

Mahatma Gandhi entitled his autobiography *Satya Sodhana*, "an experiment with Truth." Regularly observing one day of the week as a day of *mauna viradha*, "fasting by silence," Gandhi described it as one which filled him with the vitality and strength necessary for

a positive connection between mind and body. Quite often, people have a rather strained and distant relationship to their own body. We think of the body as unattractive or ugly, or maybe our health is not good. Or else we like the body, cherish it, and foster cravings around it. ...The body is an object of anxiety.

Mind and body are intimately connected, and the relationship of mind to body in meditation is very interesting. When we see the body as peaceful and beautiful, who or what is creating these feelings? The mind is. By creating peaceful feelings in the body, the mind is absorbed in those feelings. So, the body is the object to be healed, but it also becomes the means of healing the mind. The healing of the mind is the ultimate goal of meditation.



The Peaceful Mind

True healing and well-being come down to enjoying an awareness of peace, the ultimate peace, the ultimate peace of existence. The mind is not passive in the sense of being half-asleep. Instead, the mind is open to the thought and feeling of total peace. An unrestricted and uncontaminated awareness of peace is the ultimate joy and strength. ...For the enlightened mind, peace does not depend on any object or concept. Awareness of the absolute nature of things, the universal truth, is not limited or conditioned by concepts, feelings, or labels such as good and bad. A mind that is free can transcend dualistic categories such as peace versus conflict and joy versus suffering. ... But for most of us, the goal should be to work with our ordinary minds and just try to be a little more peaceful and relaxed in our approach to life. If you are a little more peaceful, it will help you to better handle problems, even if big problems are still difficult.

It can be helpful to remember that the enlightened mind and the ordinary mind are two sides of the same coin. The mind is like the sea, which can be rough on the surface, with mountainous waves stirred up by ferocious wind. But at the bottom it is calm and peaceful. Sometimes we can catch sight of this peaceful mind even in times of trouble.

These glimpses of peace show us that we may have more inner resources to

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him to generate Truth to others. For him, satyagraha, "insistence on truth," was an inseparable part of life. Gandhi is also reported to have said that on this day of silent fast, he was more in contact with his inner self and feelings than with the reality of God. It was thus not so much a day of prayer as one of personal reconciliation with his inner conflicts. When these conflicts are resolved, prayer blossoms as its joyous result. Such prayer gives peace and solace, comfort and consolation. Prayer and meditation are not just ways of learning to relax with God.

Today's world is a world of the outer. It has sought and bought the outer at the cost and expense of the inner. Hence the need to return to the source and the center of ourselves in Silence and solitude to discover the treasure of the Truth buried within. As a priceless statement attributed to Buddha has it, "As long as I had no knowledge of the treasures within me, all outside things seemed valuable. Now since I have found the diamond within, all earthly diamonds have paled into insignificance."



draw upon than we realize. With skill and patience, we can learn how to be in touch with our peaceful selves.

Noticing the Peaceful Mind

Peace of mind is not something we save for meditation or for the contemplation of past experiences, as if it was some special feeling separate from everyday life. We can encourage the mind to be more peaceful all the time.... In the ups and downs of life, the opportunity is always there to cultivate an awareness of positive feeling.

When I talk about peace, people sometimes mistakenly think that this means detaching yourself from the stream of life. This couldn't be further from the truth. The way to truly heal your life is to be awake to its simple joys, and to develop an open, welcoming attitude toward all your activities and encounters with other people. We should enjoy ourselves and be fully engaged in what we do.

Notice when you feel open and peaceful. Be aware of any feeling of freedom. Awareness is the key. If you are aware of peace, it has a chance to become part of your life. When you feel peaceful, enjoy it. Don't force your feelings, or chase after them, or stir up false excitement. There's no need to grasp. Simply be aware, and let the feeling blossom and open.You may find your body feeling peaceful too....enjoy it.

It is possible to feel calm and joyful for no reason at all, or under challenging circumstances.Be Aware of the Positive: At the beginning, we should focus on positive situations and images, and rejoice in their healing power. It could be the sight of a toddler proudly taking a few awkward steps ... Maybe an open-hearted person has said hello with a cheerful smile, or you might have freely done someone a small act of kindness. The simple acts can grant us contentment, and even joy, if our attitude is open and receptive. Develop an attitude of appreciation.

See the Positive Side of the Negative: we should focus not only on the positive objects but also on the positive qualities of negative objects. Look for the positive side of negative situations....Many people have overly sensitive minds and therefore feel the negative more strongly. This allows anxieties to take root and grow. We can actually decide "not to mind so much" when negative situations come up,See All as Positive: See the positive in everything, and everything as positive. Then it is possible to realize true peace beyond positive and negative. Ultimately, everything can be a source of healing, without discrimination between so-called positive and negative.

Positive Perceptions

Pessimism can be so deadly. The habit of worrying about problems or seeing only the negative aspect of a situation hardly leaves any room for healing. When the mind becomes encrusted and rigid with this attitude, then everything that happens appears tainted by pain and negativity. The mind can choose between positive and negative; it's all in the perception. A central

NOTES

- 1) Paul Repts, (ed.), *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (London: Penguin Books, reprinted 1982), pp. 119-120.
- 2) The major schools of Buddhism are known as Mahayana (practiced in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam), Theravada or Hinayana (practiced in Burma, Ceylon, India, Laos, and Campuchea), Ch'an or Zen (China and Japan) and Tibetan Buddhism.
- 3) R.E. Hume, (ed.) *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (London: Oxford University Press, revised and reprinted, 1934), p. 30. See also *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, 5.1 to 6.5 and *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.1 to 3.2.11.
- 4) For some pertinent religious texts see R.M. Panikkar, (ed.), *Ma-tranmanjari: The Vedic Experience*, (University of California Press, 1977), pp. 250, 264, 412, 629-630.
- 5) Gautama was the family name of Buddha. Siddhartha was the name given to him by his parents. "Buddha," in fact, is a title rather than a name, meaning "the blessed" or "enlightened one." The name Sakyamuni is used in later legends and literature.
- 6) See Joel Giallanza, "Silence as a Second Language" in *Review for Religious*, 46 (1986: 453-457).
- 7) *Ibid.*
- 8) R. M. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-66, 110-111, 123-124, 716-720, and 740-742.
- 9) Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 109-117.
- 10) Buddhist traditions maintain

practice in Tibetan Buddhism is positive perception. It's an approach that's been proven over the centuries to yield an amazing harvest of spiritual realization, as well as happiness and health in everyday life.

Problems can become stepping stones on the path to freeing our minds. we can start by seeing small problems as acceptable. Try to see a difficulty as an interesting challenge. Then if you can solve it, or learn how to tolerate it, be sure to congratulate yourself on doing so. Feeling the satisfaction can bring a surge of joy...



A spark of peace and joy can be found in every situation, if we care to find and apply it.According to Buddhism, the nature of the mind is enlightened. So our nature is good. The big problem is the negative habits of the mind, how we look at everything. Everyone has the capacity to be happy, but you have to change the habits of your mind and way of perceiving things.

Change what you can to improve your situation, and don't worry about what you can't change. Be more accepting of things at this very moment. Find humor...wherever you can. Don't make happiness an obsession, like some object you simply must get hold of and keep.

A Meditative View of the Body

Our physical body is a precious treasure. Buddhism talks about the body as a guest house for the mind, and takes a quite realistic view of the body's aging and decay. When we bring awareness to the body, doing so can call forth powerful positive energies. There are three reasons to meditate upon the body. First, our own body is a very effective support in regaining the healing energies of the mind, since the body is so intimately connected to the mind.

Second, much of the time, the goal is to heal the ills of body. So, choosing the body as the object to be healed is practical. Meditation can be an effective remedy for these problems, depending on the skill of the meditator and the particular illness. ... even if our physical ills don't go away, they can often be eased. At the very least, our minds can learn to better tolerate the woes of the body and carry them more lightly.

Third, by bringing healing energy to the body, we can also improve our

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that “The Four Noble Truths” were pronounced by Buddha when he delivered his first sermon. Briefly the Four Noble or Great Truths are: 1) Sorrow is associated with all stages of life (i.e. birth, aging, death etc.). 2) Selfish desire is the cause of all sorrow. 3) Emancipation from sorrow is possible only by abandoning all selfish desires. 4) The Eightfold Path is the means by which human beings can overcome all selfish cravings or desires. I have translated the word *duhkka* as “sorrow” but it also means “misery,” “pain,” and “anguish.” For more on this see P.L. Narasu, *The Essence of Buddhism* (Delhi: Bharatya Publishing House, 1979), pp. 128-133.

11) The Eightfold Path is said to contain the scheme of spiritual self-development leading to enlightenment. It consists of 1) right understanding, 2) right aspiration, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right pursuits (including means of livelihood), 6) right effort, 7) right attitudes, and 8) right concentration or contemplation.

12) The paintings and sculptures of Buddha found in Burma, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, Korea, and Vietnam are illustrations of this phenomena.

13) Rule of St. Benedict, Chap. 42.

14) The word *sunyata* is used in Buddhism to refer to the notion of emptiness. The religious significance of this term is very much similar to that of the Greek word *kenosis*, used by St. Paul, (esp. Phil. 2:6). *Sunyata* means emptiness as openness, freedom and fullness. See A.J.V. Chandrakanthan, “The Richness of Emptiness

lives. It becomes easier to develop a more open and relaxed attitude toward problems, including how to get along better with others. Our focus here is to simply become more accepting of our bodies as they are. ...you can go beyond attachment or resentment of the body.

Most of us are so attached to our bodies; we identify so closely with them. It can help in meditation to see our bodies as boundless, like the sky. We don't necessarily get attached to the sky.The healing meditations I teach focus on the technique of positive visualization. To that end, the mightiest weapons in our arsenal are the four powers of seeing, recognizing, feeling and believing.

The Four Healing Powers of Mind

The four healing powers are positive images, words, feeling and belief. When we bring these qualities of mind to our meditation, the power to heal our mental, emotional, and physical afflictions grows stronger. Positive Images: When we visualize positive objects, the exercise of our imagination engages and absorbs our mind. Practice staying with the image as long as you comfortably can, and eventually your concentration will improve.

Although visualization is a pillar of Tibetan meditation, many Westerners find it rather strange at first. With few exceptions, we all visualize constantly in daily life. Most of the time, our minds are occupied with neutral images



or negative ones. Instead, if we build a habit of seeing positive images, the peaceful nature of our mind begins to emerge and we give joy a chance to flourish.

One of the practices of Tibetan Buddhism is to visualize positive images at every opportunity throughout the day,Since many of us are predominantly visual, the focus is on positive images. Yet we could also use sound, smell, taste and touch as healing objects, if more appropriate. Some people are more auditory, so they could emphasize chanting, or incorporate music as part of their prayers and meditations.



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Positive Words: Words can have great power, for good or ill. As thinking creatures, words and inner dialogues are constantly going on in our heads. We put labels on things and name them. It is our way of recognizing and confirming the quality of something.

Meditating upon an image is made all the stronger when we recognize it as positive, and even comment to ourselves on its positive nature. Sometimes just the conscious recognition of positive qualities is enough, without a label. But a label can help open your mind to an image, such as just simply saying to yourself: "It's beautiful," or "It's red." The point is to confirm in your mind the power of the positive. In this way, we begin to transform the negative mindset we have built up. In addition to positive images, we can incorporate positive sounds and scents, or use gestures or touch. By recognizing the positive qualities of any of these means, we can expand their power.

Positive Feeling: The mind not only thinks and recognizes, it feels. If we involve our awareness of the positive qualities of an object through emotion, the healing of mind and body is much stronger.

Opening yourself to feelings in meditation can bring more zest and enjoyment to everything you do. Generally we need to feel our emotions; it's healthy to do so. But at times we may want or need to protect ourselves from harmful emotions generated by negative situations and images. To do this, try to deal with them at the level of thinking and intellect, rather than getting overwhelmed by the emotion of the moment. You don't necessarily need to allow negative perceptions to be driven deep into your heart at the level of feeling.

In meditation and all of life, we can bring the awareness of feeling to the positive qualities as perceived through any of our senses: seeing, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. We feel the vastness of the sky, the refreshing power of the wind, the comforting warmth of the sun, and so on.

Positive Belief: If you do not trust in the power of your meditation to heal, its strength and energy will be weak. Belief gives the meditation a firm foundation... This is not blind faith, but a faith and trust based upon knowledge that the healing power of mind can be fully called forth with the help of images, words, and feelings. We need to remember that the mind is a powerful source of healing, and that the purpose of healing meditation is to awaken our inner resources. The four healing powers are also applicable to daily life. We can see the positive in ourselves and around us, confirm this quality in our minds by recognizing it, rejoice in any positive or peaceful feelings, and believe in the healing power of this way of looking at the world. This approach to life can reap a great harvest of benefits.

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Tulku Thondup Rinpoche is a teacher of the Nyingma (Dzogchen) school of vajrayana Buddhism. He lives in Cambridge, Mass. Tulku Thondup is author of The Healing Power of Mind, Healing Meditations and Masters of Medita-

in Religious Life," a talk given on the occasion of the Silver jubilee celebrations of Sr. Anne Leonard, R.S.C.J., Canadian Provincial of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, (mimeographed), Ottawa, 1987, pp. 2-9.

15) For more on the Buddhist understanding of emptiness, see F.J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 43-81.

16) In Buddhism and Zen, the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity means that reality is to be understood in terms of its impermanent relationships, e.g. a middle-class rich man compared to a millionaire is a poor man.

17) Paul Reys, op. cit., p. 43.

18) Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 24.

tion and Miracles. This article is from his forthcoming book, Boundless Healing: Meditation Exercises to Enlighten the Mind and Heal the Body, to be published in October, 2000 by Shambhala Publications.



Deep snow surrounds the home
Its reality not the environment within
So to the words are piled up to express the inexpressible
Enlightenment is as inside the home
Words like snow enter the home and melt to nothing
— by: Jeff MacNair—

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