

SIDDHARTHA FESTIVAL, 11<sup>TH</sup> – 13<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2016

## Chai and Conversation with Aspi Mistry

So I am **Aspi Mistry**. I'm from **Bombay** – not Mumbai, I was born in Bombay and that cannot change. I am what my right-wing friends called a lib-tard. I'm a **liberal**, and I **make no bones** about it. There has been no party line given to me as to how I should conduct this session. **They just said, talk about yourself, let the audience ask questions...** I thought if they don't ask any questions then I will ask them some questions and test them – how much have they learnt in these one and a half days? What will all the teachings, and the singing and whatnot.

I should start with a little bit about myself. Perhaps you know where I am coming from, even if you have questions later about Buddhism, or the universe, or life, or anything. I had my education in Bombay, at one of the best schools and colleges. The MC said a lot of things about me. Many of them may not be true, but one of them definitely is – I like to be a thorn in the side of those who need a thorn. That part is true. So I had this very good education, and then I went to one of the best technical schools in India, IIT – I was doing Aeronautics. Then I crash-landed, dropped out after 3 years. The reasons for me dropping out were many – I fell in love, I used my milk money to buy tickets to go to Bombay, to meet my girlfriend. That was **the end of my engineering career**. So I came back to **St. Xavier's college in Bombay**, finished my Maths and Economics and then **decided with a group of friends that I didn't want to join the rat race**, so we formed our own society and trust – we called it Vistas (for visions and tasks) and we went and worked in the villages of Maharashtra in a drought prone area for three years.

After that, those of you who're old enough will remember that **Indira Gandhi** had declared Emergency, and we had by then moved from being distributors of milk powder to organizers of landless labour. We committed the mistake, the political mistake of organizing a strike in the sugar factory that was being constructed. If anybody knows anything about **Maharashtrian politics**, then you know that you don't **TOUCH** a sugar factory. So we were told to get out of the village or get back into jail. **Since we hadn't come with a political program**, we decided to go back and do something in the city of Bombay. By that time, we were Marxists, leftists (whatever you want to call us) and maybe I was a little bit like the Dalai Lama. I had some values of my own, but I thought Marxism was good because it was equitable.

When I came back, I did a course in Mass Communications. After that, we set up an information centre in Bombay. In the emergency, papers were censored – badly censored. A lot of literature was going underground and most of **the international press wasn't very** accessible to journalists, lawyers and so on. So we started this information centre which is still going on in Bombay – **it's now been 37 years**.

Then I got into filmmaking. Made documentary films – not totally on my own; we had a producer. Then I became a barefoot lawyer and then I was a student activist. I made a great contribution to the education of India, for Indians. I was registered to Bombay University for one day – so that was good, you know – a hundred of us took over the university campus for a whole day, physically. It was a protest against a very massive fee rise – from 300 rupees a term we were expected to pay 3000. It was a question of who could even afford such fees!

So, the parents, students, and teachers – everyone was with us. We did the usual stuff – organized morchas, got lathi-charged, all sorts of things. Nothing worked. The government **wouldn't move. So we said it's now time to run the University ourselves.** One morning, the romantic in us declared, **"We must synchronize our watches to the Vividh Bharati Radio signal for 9'o clock in the morning!"** and we formed a 100 of us into three squads, and executed a surgical strike on the **university (good to use the idiom of the day).** We'd already done a recce – in a governmental institution no one comes to work on time. So we went on time.

There were about 8 employees. We told them to hand everything over to us, and go home – have a holiday, a casual leave today. They were puzzled, so they went away. There were three gates to the university – we put our chains around them, put locks on them, put Araldite in the locks and locked ourselves in. We started receiving phone calls. We had a girl who was a very good telephone operator. It was the old days, where you had to shove those wires into the telephone board to connect phones from the outside line. The first calls came from the **principals of various colleges. "I'm principal so-and-so from Jhunjhunwalla College, may I speak to the Vice-Chancellor please?"**

**"Yes Sir, I'll just connect you. But do you know that there is a new vice-chancellor for today?"**

**"What?!" They would then get connected. My friend, acting as the new vice-chancellor would then tell him – "Yes principal. I was about to call you, to inform you that you're fired. We don't like you authoritarian behaviour with the students, so you're fired."**

This guy disconnects the phone. We get phone calls all day long. Then the press says, we want to meet you, for a press conference. We said okay, but you will have to come through the window. They came, one by one, some six of them and we had a press conference in the university. They informed us that Sharad Pawar (who was then chief minister at that time – just after the emergency, it was a coalition government – BJP and other parties against the Congress) had held an emergency cabinet meeting to talk about the takeover of the university! Within an hour we came to know that the cabinet decided to withdraw the fee rise completely and unilaterally. So that was a big victory for us.

After this, I had to climb on to the senate table, like Trotsky in the revolution, and explain to my colleagues who wanted to continue the takeover for the next few days, that we had won the protest! **We couldn't run the university, it was a symbolic act!**

So that episode ended, I was involved in several other human rights organizations and we formed the committee for the protection of democratic rights in Bombay.

This sort of activity was what I was involved in for most of my life in NGO's. Then the question arises, what brought me to Buddhism?

To explain to you what brought me to Buddhism, I will have to tell you about my arrest as a **dacoit. Don't be alarmed, you don't** have to clutch your bags so tightly – **I'm not really a dacoit.** I was charged for dacoity, house-breaking, theft of property; all to get us out of a house where we were living, which was on rent – which someone else wanted. You need to know the background of this, which is the Rent Act in Bombay to know how this operates. If you are a tenant, nobody can throw you out – the house is yours. So if someone else takes the tenancy from you, they then own the place.

One evening, I was arrested on these charges. I got into the police lockup – my wife was **absconding, they couldn't arrest her because she was a woman and after sunset, you cannot arrest a woman if there's no lady officer.** So I spent the evening in the lockup while my wife made the rounds of the lawyers. She used to work in the Civil and Sessions Court. She went to one of the topmost lawyers who told her not to worry because this was a fake case. In any case, by the time we woke up, the magistrate would take charge and he will be produced before the court. **I'll send my junior lawyer to argue, you just get these papers ready.**

**Next morning, I'm** produced before the magistrate and the lawyer comes. Argues very well, shows all the documents – showing them that we had been staying there for three years. The judge says, **"Not satisfied." (It was a Friday) "Remanded to Monday."**

I was put back in the police van, and I was being taken back to the police station. Then I used language that I had never used in my life. I told the inspector, **"Why don't we go to the police station? Why don't you keep me there instead of the lockup, you know? I'm sure we can come to some understanding."**

So they said alright, the senior inspector is a very good man, and you talk to him – **you're also** a very respectable person. They look out for respectable persons. They love it when there is a fight between two respectable people. So they said, fine, come with us to the police station. Sometimes in the night, when the senior inspectors come for an inspection, that time we will put you in the lockup for **15 minutes, and after they go we'll take you out.**

I was quite a popular guy back in school, and my friends came to know about this – **Aspi is in jail! They call came to the police station and said, "Can we help you? We have contacts!"** Now I knew that some of these contacts were from the underworld as some of them had gotten into that sort of **business. Small time crooks! So they said, "We know the magistrate. Can we go ask him as to what does not satisfy him?"**

I said okay, go and meet him. They next day was a Sunday, and they met him and came back to the police station to tell me of the meeting.

**The judge told them, "On Monday, you can get Mr Ram Jethmalani if you want (one of the topmost advocates), but unless the accused pays me 15000 rupees, I will remand him to jail for 14 days regardless.**

So they came back to me and asked, **“Shall we pay him?”** Obviously, I still had to shell out the money and somebody had come and given me some money because they knew we were totally broke. I agreed to pay him off. They told me that on Monday, when I was being brought to the court, we had to go meet him in his chambers before the court sits.

Now this is the interesting part about how the judicial system works. We all know the standard practices of bribery and so on.

**I’m waiting in the corridor with the cops and they went into the judge’s chamber; they also came back grinning. “He’s taken the money!” they said.**

By this time I was getting paranoid. These guys are all with the underworld, how do I know that the judge has taken my money? Maybe they all just pocketed it and are saying that he took the bribe! But you know, the judge gave me a receipt. A receipt much better than a paper receipt. A paper receipt can be forged – someone can forge your stamp and signature also. **But, he gave me THIS receipt. My friends told me that he’d taken the money, and this was the order that he was going to pass.** On cash bail for 4000 rupees, to report to Tardeo police station from this date to this date, between 4.30 pm and 5.30 pm every evening.

**So we go to court. The senior advocate comes this time. His junior tells us, “Don’t tell him you paid a bribe, he’ll drop this case like a hot potato, he’s an honest man.”** So we don’t tell him anything, the poor man argues his heart out for half-an-hour and then the judge says, **“I’m satisfied, you may sit down.”** Then he dictates the order that I could have dictated, word for word! Cash bail, 4000, this date, this time and so on. That, my friends, could not have been conjured up.

I was out on bail. We got anticipatory bail for my wife. We had no place to go because the man who’d done all this had occupied our place and we only had the clothes we were wearing. **So we went and stayed at a friend’s place, and then at my brother’s house** – his in-laws had a place which would begin leaking in the rainy season. We had two months to stay there. While we were staying there, I had nothing to do but read because somewhere, I felt that all these problems were not just pertaining to **this world. There’s something more to this.** When I did a simple count, I realised that we were in the eleventh year of our marriage, and we had moved house 14 times. The 14th time was this incident with the cops. So I was reading a lot.

I read the Bible, the Gita, Zoroastrian books, books on theology – all sorts of things. Re-read **rather, I’d already read most of it to find the answer, as to what was happening to us.**

Then my younger brother, **who’d been practising Buddhism for 10 years,** came to me and said – **“If you’re reading all this, why don’t you read this also?”** He gave me a book, **An introduction to Buddhism.** That night, I finished the book like one would if they’d read a murder mystery or something like that – just finished it – **all the jigsaw puzzles that I’d been struggling with** – this is not this, this struggle is not worth it, past lives and so on – all that fell into place, and that night I became a Buddhist. I think so.

This practise was the practice which the Sokka Gakai (as some of you may know) have been doing in India. This is the Nichiren practise, the practise of the lotus sutra. For about 7-8 years,

I was with this organization and they told me not to read anything else but their publications. So I promptly went out and bought every book on Buddhism that I could find in Bombay. For the next 2-3 years I was only reading, and was asking them so many questions that my wife and I were slowly eased out. Even the others were told, “Don’t talk to Aspi and his wife, they’ll spoil your karma!”

That was my beginning with Buddhism. Then I met his Holiness the Dalai Lama, and became involved with the Friends of Tibet. I wanted to remedy a problem: for a young person who is interested (I was young then) in Buddhism, there is no place to go to! Yes, if you want to do a PhD there are 1-2 places for you to go and do that, but if you simply want to go and learn a bit more – be with other young people with similar interest, there is no such outlet.

Therefore, I thought of starting this centre, or group in Bombay – the Dharma Rain centre. I think it’s been about 12-14 years. We still don’t have a centre because the real estate karma is still bugging us, it’s too expensive to get anything in Bombay! We do have a good group, many of them are here – the group still continues – We do invite teachers and so on.

So, that is how I got into Buddhism. Prashant was, in fact and is still the president of Dharma Rain and I am the secretary. Supriya, whom you heard yesterday was the treasurer. We are all here and we still continue with our activities in Bombay.

I don’t know, maybe I should halt here and you could ask questions – and these questions need not be about me, you can ask me anything. If I can answer, I will answer. Of course, the whole Sokka Gakai thing is another big, long session one can have – how they arose, what they have got to do with the politics of Japan and so on. I’ve discovered a lot of things.

You have a question?

“So, could you explain to us what he meant by – Rinpoche said that Nagarjuna could destroy the thesis of socialism, and the leftist view with one stroke?”

Last night? He said, with one stroke, Nagarjuna could demolish the western – that means Western philosophers. He was using Marxism as one of the examples of Western philosophy and whoever else he named and was trying to say that the philosophies of Nagarjuna, and Chandrakirti and all these scholars – the Buddhist scholars (and perhaps even some Vedantic scholars) the philosophies they expounded in India are far more complex, far more subtle, and are perhaps closer to ultimate reality than the others.

He meant that the philosophers who are so popular in the West, and are considered with such high regard would probably be very easily demolished if there was a sort of hypothetical debate between them and the Buddhists. I mean, in India we used to have debates between the Hindus and the Buddhists and so on – they used to call them ‘heretics’. So if one could imagine a Buddhist scholar of the calibre of Nagarjuna actually debating with a philosopher of your choice then I think what he meant was that Nagarjuna would win.

Yes, Sir?

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“I have many friends who’re very upset about what happened in the United States (Trump etc), and I was wondering what, in Buddhism, helped you with going through your journey? Through all of this?”

I think it was mainly two things. At that stage, when we were in all that trouble and we were new to Buddhism, it was faith. Now I’d like to think of it this way. There are three aspects. There is faith, practise and then study. The metaphor I like very much is “Practise and study are like two wheels of a cart.

Faith is the axle. If one of the wheels stops – if you stop study, and only practise, the cart may go round in a circle. You’ll be in the same place all the time! Similarly, if you stop practise and only study, you’d probably go round in the other direction. If the axle breaks, your two wheels may be in order but the cart’s not going anywhere.

Faith, of course, is not really just blind faith – this is important to clarify, it is more of this sort of faith:

If one of my friends says, “I’ve got terrible asthma.” I say, “Look, I had terrible asthma, and I went to this physician. He’s cured me completely.” He says okay, and I’ll give him a try.

He goes not so much because of his faith in the physician (though he can develop that), but because he had faith in me! Aspi has never misled me – he’s my friend, and if he says something I should try it out at least once – So he goes, and the great physician, the Buddha, cures him. Now it’s not a question of faith, it’s a question of knowledge. Now he knows that it works.

So this is what sustained us – as we went along our journey, we got – just as the sutras say, (I don’t know about the next life) but we got a lot of merits in this life itself. We came out of our problem, from the point where we had changed house 14 times in 11 years.

After 8-9 years, we stayed in one place for the first time in our lives – within another 8-9 years from this incident, we had two properties which our son bought. Money problems just seemed to disappear, to the extent that my family decided that I should work full-time in Dharma even though it may not bring in any money, and they would work because they were now getting threefold, or even tenfold of what they’d been getting earlier. Everybody within the family (including my son) felt that it was a benefit that we were getting. We didn’t want to look at it much too closely, we didn’t want to analyse it – as long as it was happening, it was good enough.

You don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. So it was faith, and practise and study – all three – that sustained me, at least. My wife is more into practise, less into study, my kids got totally disillusioned with the Sokka Gakai approach. After three months, they said, “We’re not coming in again to hear the same old crap!” You have to be very careful with children. You can’t brainwash them these days. I hope that answers the question.

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“You studied mass communication, right?”

That’s right.

“So I keep asking myself, if all this mass media, commercial, entertainment, information overflow is like one reason or even the main reason for the lack of insight, or self-control that people have or might have nowadays? And if that stands contrary to the Buddha’s teachings and mentality nowadays?”

You’re absolutely right. First of all, when I did my mass communications course, it was in 1977. It was a course designed by a Jesuit priest, who was in fact trying to teach people communications and mass media to counter exactly what you’re talking about. He was a Catholic, Jesuit priest whose values were very similar – honesty, compassion, all that – so, we knew then – at the time, Marshall McLuhan, it was all in the air. We knew subliminal advertising and so on. So, we knew that we are moving in this direction and today, we’ve arrived there. So, totally – the mass media are in the industry of delusion – seven-eight corporations around the world control the world. I think it is a little naïve now to say Trump will do this and Teresa May will do this and the French will do this – they will do what the corporations want. That is my gut feeling. Yes, the media is totally complicit. In fact, in India, I blame the media for Modi’s success and I blame them for a lot other things. I blame them for the intolerance and the atrocities that are going on in the country today.

“Yeah, so...”

But that doesn’t mean we can do away with the media. There are good reporters, we have to find ways to hear their voices.

“Which are those ways?”

I don’t know. We are still a work in progress. Something’s got to give. This cannot just go on like this – we may have a third world war, but something’s got to give.

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[CHATTER]

“So I have spent eight years working with ex-untouchable Buddhists in central India and Nagpur. It’s been very interesting and inspiring for me to see the Buddhist renaissance going on here – but I’m just aware as a social worker, and as an activist, of the huge gap between the very poor disempowered Buddhists in Nagpur and the very educated, westernized Indians here. It’s almost a Dickensian gap in society and the realities of that still exist, with the very real need of socially engaged Buddhism. What do you think could be done to bridge the gap between these two communities? To bring them together, to make Buddhism flourish in India? What is the role of socially engaged Buddhism there? My feeling is that if we don’t help these people, if we don’t address their social needs, there is no way they can think about spiritual things.”

I mostly agree with you. But the amazement of it all is that, in spite of their situation, they are thinking of spiritual things. They are. There is a really a thirst. I have been to Nagpur very often, I was associated with the Trailokya bauddha mahasangha – **I don't know if you've** heard of them – Lokamitra in Pune, the Nagarjuna Institute in Nagpur, and I was very involved with INEB also – the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. So I know what you are talking about, and I think that the fault lies on both sides.

They have an issue (as Supriya mentioned yesterday) with certain aspects of Buddhism. They are more inclined toward the Theravada approach of austerity and minimalist practise and so on. At the same time, the so-called middle class has to shed their prejudices also. Discussion about a book – **Lee Harper's** second book – you know her, she wrote To Kill a Mockingbird and she wrote a second book – not a second book, but a book titled To Set a Watchman. Of course, during the discussion, considering that in the second book the protagonist is very racist – Somehow, and of course, the discussion came to India and the dalits.

Then, somebody brought up the usual cliché – you know, if you give these people power, will they be able to handle it? I told him that the character in the book would say the same thing! He would say that, If the blacks were given power, how would they be able to handle it?

I said well, you now have a black American president – **you think he's handled it alright?**

**What about Doctor Ambedkar? He didn't get any reservations! But he was one of the best** scholars, and one of the most well educated people in the entirety of the Indian Freedom struggle movement – **outclassing Nehru, and Radhakrishnan and everybody else, if you're** looking at politics and economics. So, it takes effort. These prejudices are there even in the elite Buddhists – here too, I suspect. This problem comes from both sides. If we are truly Buddhists, we have to give up these prejudices. We should ensure that we do nothing to alienate them. As Supriya said yesterday – this is not the time to go hammer and tongs at them and try to prove **rebirth and karma because they don't accept rebirth and karma.**

**You're right in saying that they are very poor** – Gandhi said that if God were to appear to a poor man he would appear as a loaf of bread – and if you say that they are in a situation where they **can't handle that spirituality, then we have to tackle that situation! Also, we have to speak up against the caste system, we have to help them organize and there's nothing wrong** in politically organizing to fight for your rights! These are basically human rights.

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[CHATTER]

**“Aspi, you mentioned that when you became a Buddhist** – and when there was nowhere you could go to and support your practise – what is the situation now? Is it better after this? The second question I have is – of course, a lot can be done to promote the revival, or interest of Buddhism, in India and all that – engaged Buddhism is wonderful – but there are **SO MANY** things that can be done! Is there **ONE** particular area that you would suggest – someone like yourself, or Khyentse Rinpoche who is interested in promoting this that they should **concentrate on?”**

Okay, let me answer the first question. It wasn't so much that I didn't get support, because for the first 7-8 years, I was totally into the Sokka Gakai framework. They said, we have to fight for world peace. **I started fighting for world peace and they didn't like that! They said we must be friends with everyone.** So I started making friends within the Sokka Gakai and they said no no no, no social friendships within the Sokka Gakai. Now if I cannot be friends with my own Sangha, how am I going to be friends with the world outside? This is not a good term, **but I sometimes call them 'ambulance chasers'** – you know, those lawyers who go after ambulances? Who want to sue the other party? So if you are in suffering (**they're looking for people who are suffering**) you do this and your problems will be solved. The practise is good but the organizational doctrine is all wrong.

**So it was not so much that I didn't get support. But I realised that if there's a young person, who's not suffering,** but is just interested in spirituality, religion and wants to know (or is just dealing with his own religion) something more about Buddhism – there is no outlet for him.

As to the second question. Events generate a lot of interest. We have had the Dalai Lama come and give teachings to our small group, at least 3 times, maybe 4 – **we've had him over in Bombay,** specifically giving these teachings to at least a hundred people who are part of our group. Khyentse Rinpoche came too, and we had a public talk where there were 300 people present. They all **gave us their email ID's and** said that they were interested in Buddhism. But, how do we follow up? How do we follow up with the interest?

Today, because of all of this, people people may come up to you or they may come up to me and say – Keep us in touch, and all I can do is put them on my email list. So I would say let a 100 deer parks bloom all over the country! This is because we need it – I talked about that political centre that I started – the information centre. Something like that becomes a centre of gravity. I may be sitting in a public bus next to a person who is interested in Buddhism – **I can't turn to him and ask him, "Are you interested in Buddhism? Can I give you this book? Can I give you this brochure?!"** I can't do that.

Over the years, I have bought and collected over 2000 books on Buddhism which I want to **donate to a public library where people can come and use it freely. I can't do it. There's no place to do it.** Now if there were such a place, I could freely advertise – **Here is a free Buddhist library, come here and read, and borrow books if you're interested. Then, we'd know the people who are interested – once they come there, you say oh, you're interested, let's talk.**

The weakness is that we have no follow-up mechanism. When there is Deer Park, yes – now those who are here from areas around Delhi, Himachal – for them, Deer Park is practical. You can say, here is a website, come to Deer Park for a weekend – they may even come. However, for someone in Bombay, somebody from Bhopal, someone from Madras – to tell them to come to Deer Park to follow up on their interests is a bit tedious – their interests just got kindled! **It's not like** we kindled some passion about Buddhism! They just got interested in something, and they want to follow up on it in an easier manner. Let there be a hundred Deer Parks all over India.

**Films and Art, that's the next step. Films and art.**

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[CHATTER]

“Aspi, has being a Buddhist affected your political views and actions, and if so, how?”

Not really. I think I left Marxism because I had certain values already before I came to Buddhism. I couldn't wrap my head around violence, I couldn't wrap my head around 'the ends justify the means' and I couldn't wrap my head around 'values are only class values'. Three main things, and I had those values from earlier. In fact, I encountered something strange when we were working with the dalits. I had also joined the Sokka Gakai, and one of their rules was: You cannot induct a dalit or scheduled caste person into the organization. I was saying to myself that even when I wasn't a Buddhist and when I was working for the dalits, I was behaving more like a Bodhisattva – now, I came into this Buddhist organization and I'm told NOT to work with these people!

So, I think Buddhism only gave me a framework and it resonated with the views and values with which I was brought up. Maybe there's a little change in that – I'm a little kinder to people who have the opposite views, I don't just cut off their heads!

One question here?

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“Thank you for the opportunity, and sir, I am exactly the kind of person that you are referring to. I have no idea about Buddhism. We were in Bodh Gaya and we knew about the festival, so we came here. So to get started with the Buddhist journey, what would be your first three steps? Currently, on the internet, there is so much information that you get inundated and you feel lost. Even here, except for Dalai Lama's course, I don't have anything proper-“

Where are you from?

“I'm from Pune.”

Pune! Oh, in Pune, we have a very, very vibrant and active sangha! So you saw all the people sitting there – all of them are from Pune, you contact any one of them and you get in touch with Zubin or Asha and your problem is solved!

On February 8th, 9th and 10th, Khyentse Rinpoche will be giving teachings in Pune – they will be organized by the Pune group (Zubin and Asha and the others), so put yourself on their email list and you'll get to know the details about that teaching.

Before that, on January 31st and February 1st, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo – have you heard of her? She is a British-Tibetan Buddhist nun, who (to cut a long story short) spent 13 years in a solitary retreat, in a cave, when she was a young lady. She's written a book called Cave in the Snow. If you can get your hands on that book, you can read it before you meet her, and it's very interesting. So your problem is simple – Pune is good.

“But sir, beyond that, are there any specific books that you would recommend for first timers?”

From what you have seen here, does Tibetan Buddhism attract you?

“Yeah, it does.”

Have you read the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying?

“No.”

You can read the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying. Not the Tibetan Book of the Dead, which is a scripture to be prayed over a dead body – but the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying – it’s available everywhere. The tenth edition I think, is the latest.

“Thank you.”

Then you can read Rinpoche’s book – What makes you not a Buddhist.

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[CHATTER]

“Hi. My first Chinese teacher, she was Christian. Her husband was a preacher, and once I went to mass just to view them – and every passage of the Bible they chose, felt like I was listening to Taoist, Buddhist ideas – because he chose passages that all somehow referred to emptiness, since **that’s their culture**. I started to think that, even if they became Christians, the way they thought would always be the same. So I was wondering, even if Buddhism was sort of wiped out from India, does Buddhist thought still **remain in Indian culture, or...?**”

So that was what Rinpoche was trying to say yesterday, when he was sort of joking. He said I can teach the Chinese, I can teach the Americans – but when I am with Indians I get scared **because they just get it, and it’s sort of in their blood. So that’s what I think you are referring to also.** The answer is yes. It resonates more in countries where there has already been a background of some sort of spirituality, or some ideas of non-duality and so on.

“But if the culture is already here, why is it so difficult to access young people and-”

I don’t think it’s difficult to do that – it’s all about **strategy and resources**. The thing here is that, we do not have the sort of luxury that Westerners have. You know, you have a job in the West, you can go for a sabbatical for three months, and then you go back and still have a job. Here, if I want to go somewhere then my **boss will say, “Yes you can go but don’t expect a job when you come back.”** So that’s a big problem, you can’t go for long periods.

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So, before we go - yesterday, there was some reference to humour. When we go through all these troubles, I lost everything except my sense of humour. I tried to bring a lot of humour into our Buddhist meetings, and since this is a Buddhist meeting, I’m going to tell you a few Buddhist jokes.

-So first question, since there are so many Nagarjuna masters here – How many Madhyamika monks does it take, to change a light bulb? Raise your hands, anybody who knows the answer!

Yes? Wrong answer!

Yes? Four! Can you give the answer, I think you know it – huh? Okay, I think you got it, let me phrase it better.

Four! One to change the bulb. One to NOT change the bulb. One to both change the bulb AND not change the bulb. And you can get the fourth...

-My Zen master said, “Do exactly the opposite of what I say.” So I didn’t.

-There is this monk driving down the highway, and he runs over a dog. Kills it. He says, “Now to whom can this dog belong?” He sees another temple. He goes there and this guy says Namaste or whatever and he says, “I think – my kar-ma just ran over your dog-ma.”

Thank You.