

SIDDHARTHA FESTIVAL, 11TH – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2016

Chai and Conversation with Venerable Sumati

Thank you very much. Thank you all for being here. I don't intend to say much because I have more to say later, under the tree. So it's not worth listening to the same voice again and again. Deokar-ji also, I don't think he quite had the time to finish what he was saying under the tree – due to the time factor. So, we'll invite the professor also, if he accepts. We are also waiting for Aspi Mistry, founder of the Dharma Centre – one of the founders of the Dharma Center in Mumbai – to be here. As a founder, he has an encyclopedic knowledge and insight into the teachings, so it'll be useful to have him also here.

I think, given the nature of the festival, there is not much point in me speaking from personal experience, because there are these 'much-larger' issues. I think each of us can work out our own connection with the 'dharma', with Bodh Gaya, with going against the stream, as Professor Deokar brought out so beautifully in his talk just now. We have to come to terms with that, to understand that – and my place is no different from anybody else's, possibly. So I'd rather look at the larger picture, partly due to my Aquarian inclination. So, what – it is hard to say what somebody like Rinpoche would be thinking, or, conceiving in an event like this – but I think he wants us to look very deeply at Indian people remembering Siddhartha, and what that means for Indian people. Now, because Indian people are connected with everybody else in the world (We always have been – with trade, technology, travel and so forth – tourism) what does that also mean for you, from China, from Europe, from the United States and Canada and so forth? So that would be a productive exercise to engage in. So as many of you as possible can talk on this topic.

I was moved by Professor Deokar's emphasis of going against the stream, because I – we're practicing contentment, non-grasping, non-clinging, non-violence, non-attachment etc. we are going against the stream of modern society, it seems to me. The structural violence, the abominable acts of personal violence, given the latest news of child suicide bombers being encouraged in the Middle East and so forth. So these kinds of things, these travesties against human nature, one could say, against compassion and love force us to reflect deeply on the dharma. Going against this modern grain, which is so awful really.

First I'll ask – since Aspi's not here yet – I'll ask the Professor if he'd like to say a few more words, just five minutes or so – it's possible, on his personal experience of going against the grain. That aspect which he feels is most relevant for Indian people, first of all. Then anybody else can say what they feel is most relevant for... German people, American people, Chinese people – yeah? I think that would be productive. You agree?

So Professor, just stay where you are and maybe – do you agree to say a few words? Okay.

Professor Mahesh Deokar

Thank you very much. What I'd like to share is a personal struggle, a journey in Pune now, where we are trying to work with the Dharma. I work in an academic university and see different people coming to study the dharma. I think one challenge – one big challenge which I see is in spreading the dharma to different people, coming from different backgrounds. They say that everyone has his own baggage with which a person comes, even when he approaches the dharma. His own ideas about the dharma – **if the dharma thought doesn't fit** into that framework, then the person has a tendency of either ignoring or just walking away from it.

We as those who want to take the dharma to these people must offer more wisdom and compassion and employ more skillful means to take the dharma to them. Actually, what I feel (in my own experience) is that teaching through traditional literature is one good way for me – because this is where everyone comes together, all their different identities and accepts it as the world of the Buddha. They might not accept it as the word of Mahesh, or some other person – **they see that it's the word of the Buddha, it becomes easier for them to accept it.**

Similarly, to accept the different forms of Buddhism, different aspects of Buddhism is also one big challenge. No one wants to do that. In this idea of the pure dharma and other polluted forms – these kinds of ideas are coming in the way of bringing all these different schemes together, which is actually an ideal situation. We can see that each tradition emphasizes on **something more, something they've found useful in terms of practice, personal practice or community-based practice.** There is a need to bring that kind of understanding among people who are Buddhists. All the people who are coming to take shelter, to take refuge in it. I think if we bring more openness among the traditions, making them more sensitive to other traditions of Buddhism, which would be one big challenge. All of us should be taking help because it is something likened to fighting – we have this tendency of living in fractions, in these small groups rather than forming a sangha. When the Buddha first established the sangha, the idea was the idea of like-minded people coming together, practicing together. In isolation, but still connected. So that should be the key, I suppose. So they are all working as islands, but not totally cut off because, within the water all grounds are connected. If we can take this ahead, it will be good for the spread of Buddhism, and for the entire movement of **taking the Buddha's word to heart.**

Thank you so much. I'd like some Chinese person to speak – would any Chinese person like to speak? What the Siddhartha Festival means to them? Is there anyone of Chinese origin that would like to say something? Are you naturally very shy people? If you are, that's okay! Yes, thank you.

Thank you very much for giving me the chance. This is just a start, so maybe my opinion is not **very mature.** I'm really enjoying this festival because, especially, from yesterday and today, I can feel the real culture of the real India – which is that of Buddha, born in this land. Also,

according to my limited knowledge, Buddha actually started meditation from an Indian master. Later, he found the real way – for the real truth. So, to me, it is the first time that I really experienced how the very original knowledge that Buddha at first experienced. I feel something – **I don't quite know how to say it, it is very touching.** Yesterday, I realized chanting and some of these very holy sentences being expressed by these amazing songs. In my previous knowledge, we do it in a very serious way, in a very holy way, a little nervous. When I experienced these songs yesterday, I felt the people sitting around me (the Indian people), they just moved their body and were really enjoying it. It was very natural, it was **something from the heart. That's really amazing.**

Yesterday I sneaked through the Indian areas to make it closer to the master! **I'm sorry for that.**

But it is really touching, and as things go, very different from the things I experienced in China. Thank you very much.

I have been told by one of the organizer's that we have to stop at 10.55. So we have a few minutes. Somebody from Europe!

Thank you very much. So, thank you for this festival. Here is so much inspiration – it seems, that when you have obstacles, it seems very easy, in this holy place of Bodh Gaya. Or in places such as Varanasi. Or as dharma practitioners (or so called dharma practitioners anyway) so many things inspire us, non? Even the panwalla sitting for ten hours, in shanti, doing his job is such a great source of inspiration. The dhobiwalla can be a great source of inspiration. You can here the puja then and there. When we go back to our country, sometimes it is so difficult, because we feel very lonely. Here, our dharma friends (and even without our dharma friends), referring to Rinpoche here – have this very natural understanding of Shunyata, non?

What advice would you give to us? Especially for a beginner practitioner like me, to continue and have this – courage to face these obstacles which are very strong sometimes. You face people in the West that are not only indifferent to dharma, but speak harshly and are against every type of religion in general because of some historical or cultural reasons. It is difficult. **All this is part of this lila, this illusion, so it's hard to remember it all there. It's more easy here, in a way.** So what advice would you give?

So Aspi, this is where you can help. Don't think you're going to be let off the hook, you have six minutes to tell this gentleman or give some thoughts on: How people who are isolated and alone, or they feel that way in Europe or wherever – which country are you referring to? – France, Nice – in France which is renowned for film festivals, beaches, that sort of thing. So how to keep on with the dharma and going against the stream, which was a theme that Professor Deokar had just brought out?

He's just shoved me into the deep end of the pool, I don't know why I am qualified to do all this. I've never been to Nice, or any other resort of France, or Spain, or anywhere else. I think it's not necessary to be in any particular place to feel alone or lonely. Many people in the midst of crowds and company, and society in their own country are terribly lonely, and I think dharma is one way – this loneliness is suffering, I guess? Suffering which we all encounter. Dissatisfaction with the state of things as they are; which is probably the more accurate translation of 'dukkha'. From that point of view, you feel you are isolated from other dharma practitioners. But we who are always dharma practitioners also feel isolated because you don't always agree with everything that everybody says. I don't know, whether in this sort of electronically connected world, whether it is actually a technical problem or a problem in the mind. If it is a problem in the mind, then it means more practice, more meditation etc. and if it a technical problem, then I think there are plenty of good YouTube recordings, and videos which teach you meditation. I've seen so many of them in every tradition. Even Khyentse Rinpoche's teachings are all available on DVD, some 300-400 of them, we churned them out really fast. Yesterday's DVD is out today.

So I don't know whether this sort of answers your question. IF you're lonely, I assure you even I feel lonely, you know. I feel pretty alienated sometimes from all my dharma companions.

Sorry, I was not expressing this feeling of loneliness actually. I was asking for advice to keep this courage, for the purpose practice, for the purpose of spreading dharma. Not in the sense of loneliness.

Courage to be in the dharma and share the dharma. Yeah, this is a more friendly environment. The first time I met his holiness the Dalai Lama, I was in computer software. Which means you have to read, and you have to be up-to-date, and you have to read certain magazines and you have to be on certain websites and find out what's happening, what's the latest – if you're doing software development I was very interested in the dharma and from morning to night, I was reading only dharma books, so I asked his Holiness this question. How do I balance? I am interested in the dharma. I am no longer interested in computer software and coding, but I find it difficult to earn and income, and ultimately that is what will happen.

He said, the mistake you're trying to make is to balance things on a day to day basis. Plan a few months ahead. So plan that right now, you got this computer contract, and you have to finish it and you have to do some research on that. So keep 3 months aside. Don't worry if your dharma activity is less, or your dharma practice is less. But then, make a plan that after 3 months, you'll go on a one-month retreat. Then forget about computers, only study dharma, only retreat, only meditate. I have found that useful so some extent – for that time. Now, I'm totally into dharma in different ways. At that time, though, it did make a lot of sense and it did work. After that audience with him, I actually fixed myself up for a vipassana retreat, and it went off very well, and somehow things sort of fell into place one-by-one. So that sort of a gimmick. You don't plan at all – today you feel, I don't have the courage and I have to do the other things – Well, that's fine. Do the other things and you plan that way. You know this is going to happen every day. So you know for the next 2-3 months, plan your life and keep chunks of your life for the dharma.

Thanks Aspi Mistry (one of the co-founders of the Dharma Rain center in Mumbai – they also run a very good program there.) I also want to add that – his Holiness the Dalai Lama says, to people – “Don’t run after a guru like a dog runs after meat.” That’s for new people, especially. It’s a Tibetan proverb. Then he says, “Read good literature – authentic literature and use your own intelligence.” Because we all have that. That builds our confidence, because we know we can get some understanding and feeling for the dharma with our own intelligence, with the help of good literature. So there are books like ‘The Heart is Noble’ by his Holiness, then there is ‘Relative World, Ultimate Mind’, by Tai Situpa Rinpoche, another great lama. Then there are plenty of books by his Holiness – “The power of Compassion” – by the Dalai Lama. These give courage when you read it, and it all fits together, and then you begin to practice. The teaching on the Buddha nature, we realize we all have the Buddha nature – we all have what Rinpoche called ‘basic goodness’, he mentioned yesterday, we all have that. When we stop and we take some time, maybe we have some glimpses of that. When we are rushing around, as we do in the modern world, then it’s harder to access our Buddha nature. I mean, it’s completely covered by all of our stuff. It helps to be in a place like Bodh Gaya, but you don’t have to be in Bodh Gaya because if you create a sacred space in your own home, even a small corner, and you’re a very good flutist and you play the flute, and you sit and meditate – I imagine you would be in a sacred space. You are a lucky person to have such a skill, playing the flute so beautifully, so that would help you create this sacred space. Because sound is mantra. Especially beautiful sound. So you create a beautiful mandala around you in your place.