

SIDDHARTHA FESTIVAL, 11TH – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2016

Chai and Conversation with Sudip Mazumdar

I came to listen to some music, and they just asked me to go and make sure that people have tea – so please have tea! Some of my friends, namely Venerable Sumati and Venerable Dhammadipa are here, so they're the people who you should be asking questions to or sharing concerns with.

You have been listening to the words of dharma and how to make your life better – but I can give you some illustrations as to what a confused and deluded mind can be like, if you would sit here and listen to me for 2 minutes. After that I'll let you go and have tea. Feel no obligation whatsoever to sit or be civil at all. Throw things, do anything you like.

As I said, I can only give you a glimpse of my own totally confused and deluded mind. If there is any resonance of that in your own experience, you're going to ask Venerable Sumati or Venerable Dhammadipa who are sitting here – we're very fortunate that they're sitting here, because of which my throat feels dry. All the wonderful experiences that you've had here, contrast that with two minutes of my blabbering.

I will just touch upon three topics which are the highlight of our life – my life, not our life. I've really thought about what dharma practice is. So I started hanging around masters, and all these talks and teachings and I found that there is an element of sobriety and gravity, and seriousness. Nobody seemed to be cracking a joke! Nobody was actually pulling anybody's leg, or everybody was taking themselves so seriously; or if not themselves, they were taking everything else seriously. It is only when I got to befriend and be a little *chamcha* (spoon, follower) of Guruji, – he gets angry when I call him Guruji, Kabir-la – then I realized that dharma is not supposed to be grim. Dharma is supposed to liberate us, make us feel good.

Even as we are confused, we can crack jokes of any kind, of course, by considering the people or the population that we are talking to. We should be light. I'm just throwing these ideas, if you feel like they're nonsense, then ask me to shut up and I'll keep quiet. Then we can ask these great masters here – don't run away! – He's coming back, he'll really throw me into the deep end of a swimming pool. Of course, Venerable Dhammadipa is here, you can ask him too.

So we don't need to be grim. We can crack jokes, we can pull each other's leg, of course, with generosity and kindness and compassion in our heart.

The second thing, which I am totally deluded about is that I think I'm not going to die. Until a friend of mine insisted that I go and see a doctor. I was shaving every morning and used to find a lump here, and I thought it's nothing but a swelling, it'll go away. I can't have cancer, I can't have anything serious. I'm sort of invincible and immortal. Upon his insistence, I went to the hospital and went through a couple of checks and had a little biopsy – when the results came, they said that it was a malignant tumor, which meant I had cancer.

My first response was, *Why me?* Look at all of these guys, ALL of them around me, nobody has cancer but me! What a terrible state I am in now! Before I was diagnosed, in my deluded state, I thought I would continue! I would not age, I would not have sickness, and I would not die. So even if I intellectually understood that mortality is ripe anytime – I never experientially or emotionally felt that, till that time.

Even now, I don't think I'll have cancer again. Or even now I think I cannot die of cancer. I mean, look at the level of my delusion that I refuse to believe I have cancer, or if nothing else, that I can walk down the stairs, fall, get a head concussion and be a cabbage, or a cauliflower for that matter. I do not really believe it – emotionally I don't believe it. Experientially, I don't believe it. Intellectually, yeah, I do, maybe – because I've heard of impermanence, I've heard that we have sickness, birth, aging – all of it is suffering.

So the second point is that, I really don't think that I'm going to die. Intellectually, I know that I'm going to die, but I experientially don't die. That's the reason I keep on doing things, planning things for 5, 10, 15 years. Sometimes, when I see someone else like that, I say sorry, you're making a 5-10-15 year plan but it doesn't really exist. In fact, nothing exists even beyond this moment. So this is the second delusion that I suffer from. I'm sure none of you suffer from that delusion, but if you do, then you may ask how to deal with it – if you don't, then ask me to shut up.

The third delusion that I suffer from. Your life may be full of suffering, but romantic relationships, really, are uplifting. Really make me full. I really think that they are going to make me complete. All that vacuity that I have in my heart, and all the suffering that I've had thus far, will be gone if I only have the person of my life, my soul mate.

I've had two marriages. Two, wonderful human beings. Two beautiful, kind and compassionate women. They couldn't live with me! Impossible! I was so deluded, I couldn't see the pain in their eyes, or in their heart! I thought I was bringing them happiness, by doing all the things I thought I was doing right. So they weren't happy. I wasn't happy either, but I continued to believe – maybe, the third or the fourth partner would be just the right partner. In search, I spent more time, a few more years, too. I made a few more people miserable, and I became even more miserable! It really, really didn't click. So these are the three things that I suffer from, terribly.

I do not know how to get out of it. Only venerable Sumati, or venerable Dhammadipa would be able to tell us (if anyone is interested in knowing) how to deal with the actual, only inviolable truth of our deaths – and, that partner number 18 is going to be your ideal partner. How to deal with that delusion?

Let's pray and request Venerable Dhammadipa and Venerable Sumati – Venerable Sumati, please pay attention to me, otherwise I'll die! Now, please!

Here are the two learned masters and they're going to tell us some things. I just wanted to share this much, and I wanted to open the conversation – if you ask me to shut up, please go – I'll go and have some tea, my mouth is dry – where is my bottle?

But if you think that it resonates – he is really the person you should be talking to, you should imprison him. Because he is going to tell you something really, really specific and good. That'll help in dealing with the neuroses that I suffered from. He's a wonderful, dear friend who tolerates my stupidity, my confusions and delusions. He's not even my friend. I'm his vassal, I feel my life would be meaningful if I can carry his bag and polish his shoes. So please ask Venerable Sumati how to deal with these two neuroses of light and laughter in our lives! **Venerable Dhammadipa, please save me! You have taken the Bodhisattva vow, I'm a fallen sinner, please help!**

By the way, all that I said – I'm sure I'm unique in that regard. No one shares that kind of delusion or that kind of confusion in life or hopes that their 18th partner will be their ideal partner.

What was the question? I still don't understand...? → Venerable Dhammadipa

Here, I rest my case. I realize that master did not even understand my confusion, just imagine the level of it! I can't even make him understand what I want to say, I'm hopeless in my situation! But my hopelessness, I want to come out of that. Please go ahead and ask him questions!

I'm so deluded that I think I won't have cancer again. I'm going to live maybe, 5-10-15-20-40 or even a 100 years, with all my youth intact, I still do not experientially believe this.

According to Buddha's teachings, we are all in a state of paranoia, the Samsaric mind. So you should not worry too much. So you should ask some concrete questions. I think everybody here who's studied Buddhism knows that they have paranoia – if you don't know that, it seems you haven't studied Buddhism yet!

Anybody who has no paranoia, please ask him questions! Anybody who has a little paranoia can also ask him questions!

No question, so...

Okay, the second concern was – You say that all emotions are pain, but there is nothing like romantic relationships. Falling in love! One partner doesn't work, but the second would work, maybe the third would work, or the fourth or fifth – maybe the tenth, or the fifteenth will work! So I'm still suffering from that belief.

This is the same question. Because we don't know, therefore we search. Because we search, we do not know. So don't worry too much!

I think Venerable Sumati has a question!

I just wanted to ask Venerable Dhammadipaji, what was your response to the morning session? → Venerable Sumati → Because you come from a different dharma environment, I doubt you've had this kind of input before.

I have been trained in the Theravada tradition, the forest monk tradition so I appreciate this open approach. I had some inkling of it in China where I spent many years, but more as a teacher. So I'm very impressed, and this is exactly what modern society needs.

I have heard, once, when I lived in Sri Lanka – I used to have very inspiring conversations with one well-known German monk, Nyanaponika. (You may have heard about him) We were discussing about the modern approach to Buddhism and how to bring Buddhism to the West. He thought exactly what Khyentse Rinpoche is doing. If we are to bring Buddhism to the West, we have to use the arts, we have to use music and all kinds of skilful means to inspire people.

Take medicine – Indian and Chinese medicine have a very Buddhist, holistic approach to all kinds of problems. So, this holistic approach to Buddhism is the song of spreading Buddhism all over the world. We became Buddhists in the West because we believe Buddhism is the most open religion, most liberal. **That's why** it is so attractive.

This forest tradition which I have experience of, is naturally very useful and wonderful. It should be preserved. But to suit the needs of the modern man. Buddhism focuses on the teaching of dependent origination. Everything is based on conditions, and we, being modern Buddhists, have to create conditions for making Buddhism acceptable to those who have a different culture, a different way of thinking and **a different background. So...I'm really** grateful for seeing different, very inspiring and effective ways. I see how effective it is and how many people are influenced by it. I think that even those people who were like myself – raised in the conservative training in Buddhism, we are very inspired and grateful to have a chance to experience such an appropriate approach for modern society. No matter whether it is India, Europe or China – we have similar problems and we have to deal with them together. Buddhism is a very good answer to these problems.

Thanks Venerable, that's wonderful. Would you slightly adjust it for Indian people? How would you give dharma to Indian people?

Of course. From my experience of having grown in a central European country – in a very traditional European country, the difference is very obvious. In India, despite this fast modernization there is this atmosphere of Bhakti. **It's very inspiring for all of us. That's why** so many Europeans, Americans or Chinese come to India because they are inspired by this atmosphere of Bhakti, and this is wonderful. Rinpoche understands this very well. This site must be emphasized in India through the wonderful Bhakti tradition which has influenced all Indian traditions. We could also impress people with the good things Buddhism has to say, and they can be transmitted through Bhakti, no doubt. We have seen that it can be done. There are very inspiring Buddhist poets – we have had the experience of listening to the verses of some of them.

Any questions?

“Venerable, both the traditions – the present Theravada and Mahayana – they both talk of *shamata* and *vipassana*. But at the same time, when you listen to either the Theravada or the Mahayana, they all give the indication that there are differences between the two. So if you could elaborate on the kind of differences there are, if at all?”

It is very simple. The whole difference is based on the *Bodhichita*, which is at the base of the whole Mahayana practice, no matter what tradition. There are so many of them in Mahayana, like in China – Mahayana makes sense however you interpret the practice, *shamata*, *vipassana* – it’s all based on *Bodhichita*.

In the Theravada tradition, even though (I can tell you this, I have a long experience in the Theravada tradition) most of the monks in Theravada, they practice *paramis*. **There aren’t** so many nowadays in Sri Lanka, Thailand. Even in Burma there are only a few more, since the meditative tradition has been preserved best there. However, they would never call it Mahayana because of *Namabhaya* (*fear of the name*)!

Sangha-bheda (vivisection, compartmentalization of sanghas) is the worst thing one can do to Buddhist traditions.

So now, we are practicing more or less that same thing. Many monks in the Theravada tradition also do *punya-parinama*. The sutra says when you do the *punya-parinama*, **you’re** a Bodhisattva. What is the difference? Most of the monks do it. There is undeniable fact that **when you don’t practice with the perspective of Bodhichita, you have a different approach to practice**. You can see this with the forest monks – now unfortunately, they are becoming a very small minority. I was told by my teacher in Sri Lanka that only 10% of the Bhikku sangha **really meditate**. **Most of them don’t meditate nowadays**. **The study Pali, and scriptures, they learn the ceremonies – they are of service to the people**. Their aim is not to attain liberation in this life.

If they practice *shamata* and *vipassana* based on the Theravada *Abhidharma*, then their attitude is very different. You can see **that it is different**. **They aren’t interested in what the others do – they are only interested in purifying their mind**. **They don’t have an idea that purifying one’s own mind and purifying the mind of others is the same process**. So the attitude is different, we cannot deny it. Yet, when you practice the *punya-parinama*, you are a **Mahayana monk, in fact! No different**. **Only, you’d never call it that – because we are all dependent on causes and conditions, and the causes and conditions in Theravada countries are different**.

We have to see it from this perspective, not just from the philosophical one. Philosophy really **doesn’t matter here so much**. The social setup is what is important.

In Burma and Sri Lanka they have different ideas of what a good monk is, and what is not a bad monk. We, the monks, behave in accordance with what the lay people think. Even the Buddha has done that – he taught according to what the lay people thought. In Mahayana countries, **you have to behave in a different way**. In Theravada countries, **if you’re a forest**

monk, you have to behave differently. Otherwise, you cannot function properly. So, we are all bound by conditions.

“What are the ways in which one can overcome attachment? Attachments with people, situations, attachment with things or attachment to my opinions – this is what I think is right, so I’m like the center for myself. If I hear somebody saying something different, I say *that’s not true.*”

Buddha’s teachings are all concerned with that. Because we have attachment, we have a self. According to Buddhism, we have a self because we have attachment. If we have no attachment, we have no self.

So, because we have attachment, we cling to all that is pleasant. Because we cling to that what is pleasant, we suffer. We dislike what is unpleasant. Therefore we also suffer. Because we cling to all that is pleasant and we suppress what is unpleasant, therefore we are deluded. So, the Buddha has given medicines for all.

If you are attached to all that is beautiful, observe the non-beautiful. If your mind is too agitated, then you will meditate on your breath. If you are too easily angry, you should meditate on laughter. If you are too proud, you should meditate on the beings – made of 6 elements, that’s all. Nothing to be proud about. For everything, there is a method. You can work on the general and particular methods. Both come together when we get a little more knowledge of meditation.

“I have a follow-up question. Is meditation the only way? I’m not too comfortable with meditation, so is it the only way or are there some other ways in which I can practice?”

In the teachings of Buddhism, nothing is separated. Meditation cannot be separated from ethics. It is the same in Hindu teachings – without this ethical base, you cannot practice meditation. This ethical base comprises of so many things. Control of your food intake, of sleep – all this we have to take care of and meditation becomes easy.

When we meditate, we get some insight. If we don’t meditate, then the insight will remain on the intellectual level. But intellectual insight is also very good – you should study, definitely. So first, we have to learn. When we learn, we have faith and we take refuge. When we take refuge, we practice. When we practice, we will realize – this is the step-by-step way.

“So, on similar lines. You mentioned that fear and anxiety are the emotions which are primarily driving most of us. I would admit that these are the dominant emotions which I feel most of the time. A lot of it also comes from the kind of experiences one has had in one’s life, and it’s almost like a template that the first response to have to a situation is: Fear of loss. So that keeps you from taking an action in that direction or from getting fully involved due to fear of pain, or whatever. You mentioned that meditation is probably the only answer to dealing with these emotions. Does it get more intense if you’ve had certain kinds of experiences which feed into these emotions?”

Actually, all fears, depressions – they are this complex of liking and disliking. Fear is also dislike – we have fear because we dislike something. We dislike because we like. Because we like, we are attached. According to Buddhism, the *feeling* is controlling our minds and when we have some deeper understanding, we mistrust our feelings – that can be done when we meditate, if we don’t meditate, it is difficult.

“True, because intellectually understanding things does not really solve the problem.”

Intellectual understanding can give us direction, but then we have to go – if we don’t go, we won’t get there.

“Um, I have heard it expressed – as Buddhism is spreading, there is a concern that it is spreading only amongst certain classes? Namely, the educated, wealthier class. In terms of your experiences, do you have any advice, as to how to make sure that as Buddhism spreads (and for those of us attempting to help it spread), it can be made accessible to everyone? All classes, and all social classes and experiences?”

Being a student of the Chinese tradition, it is very inspiring for me personally. China was a country where Buddhism never really became an official religion. In China, Buddhism was always kind of an outsider. Because it inspired the intellectual class, they became very interested in Buddhism and it became part of the Chinese culture. I think we are going through a similar process. Now in America or in Europe – those who are interested are also intellectuals. They also have some knowledge of the spiritual sciences – they know a bit about Christianity – they know about Christian mysticism or Jewish mysticism, so they compare and they see the advantages of Buddhism which are very obvious in the contemplative tradition. The greatness of Buddhism lies in how well it preserves this contemplative tradition.

As far as the ceremonies are concerned, Christianity is doing very well – specially the Catholic Church and so on. People inspired by the contemplative tradition, by philosophy. We have to add to it, some dimension of art and bhakti, and Buddhism will surely be doing very well, but it is a long development. In China, it took hundreds of years before Buddhism kind of became influential. We are in a similar situation because Buddhism will never become an official religion in the West, but through intellectuals, it can influence a society. This is the process we are now experiencing.

“Hello, okay. Venerable, considering the lifestyles that we all live, lost in the material world – working 9 to 5 and then all these desires. What would be your, practical advice to include Buddhism in our lifestyles? How can we benefit from Buddhism while we are living our regular lifestyles?”

Very good questions, and we have to think about it. In our society where most of us just live in order to keep alive the family, in order to enjoy – those who are inspired by spiritual training, we should keep together those people who have similar interests. We should group together, make a collective. If we are alone, we are nothing. If there are more of us, we become strong. So the need of the modern time is that those who are inspired by Buddhism and spiritual sciences should band together, discuss together. Then we can inspire others by all kinds of means. But one person, even if he is exceptionally talented, he cannot do anything.

Especially in my country where we have grown under the communist regime, we are all without the ability to organize. We were forced to be organized, so now, nobody wants to be organized. So we have to use some skilful means like art, medicine, and music – to inspire ourselves and to inspire people. Especially philosophy, meditation and retreats inspire people. So the hope is in collaboration.

The first thing the Buddha did was to establish a *sangha* – we have a need of this now. Buddhism is becoming influential, we have to establish an international *sangha* based on the needs of the people today. It is very important.

“Hello, Venerable, in addition to sitting on the cushion and meditating, are there any other practices, ways of doing meditation that we can follow?”

Actually, meditation does not mean only sitting on a cushion. It means mindfulness and awareness in daily life. To be aware of what is the body, the feeling, the perception, the will, the consciousness and how they work together. We get some insight into the selflessness of all that we experience, and that is Buddhism. That needn't necessarily be on a cushion. Being a Buddhist, we must practice continually. Then, sitting on a cushion becomes easier too.

Otherwise, when you sit on the cushion, you'll think of everything else as compared to what you are supposed to be doing.

“About awareness, what are some ways of cultivating it? Because it is very easy to lose it. When I’m taking tea, or I have to go to the next meeting, I have to achieve my targets...”

So we’ve already discussed this. We have to be together, people who are with the same interest. Not to be too involved with worldly people who have no interest at all in what we are doing, and they can’t understand and they don’t have any interest in understanding. We have to be receptive to them, we have to smile at them, we have to inspire them – but not to be too close, because if we are too close, we lose our mindfulness. When we lose our mindfulness, we lose everything.

“Venerable, you have also used the expression, ‘spiritual’. Now, when we say physical, I can very easily correlate to what is physical. When you say emotional, I can also correlate to what emotional is. When you say mental, I can correlate to what mental is. But when the word ‘spiritual’ is used, I don’t really see the referent of it. So if you could shed some light on that.”

It’s very easy. It’s just the same as in Sanskrit, ‘*Adhyatmika*’. Because you turn your attention inside, you are spiritual. When you turn your attention outside, you are not *Adhyatmika*.

“When you say you turn inside, what would this inside be? To what would you say, yeah, now this is spiritual?”

The spirit literally means the mind. So when you turn your attention to the mind, you become spiritual. Because you turn your attention to the outside things, and you think they are the measure for everything you experience then you lose your spirituality. Because you turn your mind inside, and the mind is the measure of things – you become spiritual. *Adhyatmika* – the inner, that which makes us ‘beings’ is the mind. If we don’t have a mind, even so, we are beings – not like real beings. Isn’t that true?

“What is the situation in China now?”

Well, I am not a great expert on China. Even so, I’ve lived mostly in Taiwan, which is a different China – for many years. But I have visited China, many times so I know the situation to some extent.

In China, (As you know, the same in Tibet) – China has been marked by many turmoils. It started a long time ago, and it reached its summit under the Cultural Revolution. Terrible turmoil – Chinese history, for the last century was just turmoil, one after another. It is really incredible what China has achieved. When I was in China, I was with my friends, monks – they told me that even in the 90s, the population did not have enough to eat. Now, they are

becoming a wealthy country slowly – of course, many problems – but they are becoming a wealthy country. Within one generation, they have accumulated so much wealth. The attention of the whole government, and of the whole setup is accumulating wealth. People are dissatisfied with that. There is, obviously in China, a very clear aspiration for people. Even if they are getting wealthy, they are also getting its bad effects. The pollution in China is one of the worst in the world.

So people are asking questions – is it all the worse because of this? The Chinese culture is one of the great cultures – one which emphasizes harmony of man and nature. Man and nature is everything in Chinese philosophy. So, definitely, there will be changes again because this trend cannot last forever. Now even the government is realizing that if they don't support the local culture and religion, China will become an Islamic, or a Christian country. There are so many people converting to Islam, or to Christianity because they don't know their own culture! It has been swept away, through time.

“Is there any intellectual awareness amongst the citizenry?”

Of course there is! Unfortunately those who were really competent, they have either left the country or ended up in labor camps during the Cultural Revolution. The old masters have died and the new, inspiring generation is now missing. There is a generational gap. The old, inspiring masters have gone.

Now, in China, you have freedom to become a monk. Before, it was very difficult to become a monk, to study in Buddhist institutes and so on, but the educational level is still very low because there are no competent teachers in China. So it is very important – Khyentse Rinpoche is going to teach in China, and many people are inspired to teach there because interest is growing, no doubt. You will see many young Chinese people being interested in Buddhism, and that's great.