

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

### Talk by Venerable Sumati: 'Self-Forgetful, Imitative, Artificial'

So let's remember what Professor Deokar said this morning. A sense of gratitude, and rejoicing that we are in this holy place. When Buddha was asked to prove himself, he didn't point to the sky, didn't point to gods in the sky, and so forth. He touched the ground, didn't he? So, that's going to be part of the theme of our talk. It is connected with that. So I thank the Professor for reminding us for that. The sacred Earth and the gratitude. Let's find a moment also remembering what Suresh-ji said. All of us here you know. Many different colours, well several colours anyway, and different shapes of faces. But all of us united here. Because we have some kind of aspiration to understand what Lord Buddha said and live our lives in accord with that, however imperfectly we are doing so right now, but to attempt that. Please spend a moment to be grateful to Lord Buddha, the Bodhi Tree and our kind spiritual masters. Please rejoice, please be really happy, please rejoice, and spend a moment. **\*Silence\***

Somehow when one sits silently here, part of one doesn't want to say anything, you know. But that would embarrass the organizers, so I've got to say something. I'm surrounded by paper and notes, so I guess that means there is something to say. But there is that sense that whatever I say will not be sufficient, so please recognize that. Also please excuse me quoting a lot. I quote because other people say much better what I want to say. So why not save time by quoting from them. Many of them considered enlightened people, so why should I waste my time with my drivel. Because I'm only an Oxford thinker. Oxford thinkers are very limited according to Rinpoche. Probably, rightly so. So I, having come from a *parampara*, which isn't actually a parampara, I'm going to talk about tradition and parampara soon, what a real parampara means. So I'm not from a proper parampara. It is an imitative parampara, what we have at Oxford, even though it is considered so fantastic.

Anyway, want to start, it's hard to know what to start with, since I have so many things in front of me. Since I have this piece of paper in front of me, I'll start with this one. 30 pieces of advice from the great Longtemba, great master, 14<sup>th</sup> century, says you take what you need. Images, offerings, books, cooking gear, whatever and stay in solitude. Right now, you have it all together. But later difficulties and disputes arise. Don't need anything. That's my sincere advice. Okay. I was asked to talk. I don't know why this happened. Someone said, we want a quirky title from you for a talk in Bodhgaya. Now who would ask the organizers to give me a quirky title? Are people getting a Chinese translation of this? Yes or no? No, okay. Sorry Chinese people, quirky means kind of a strange, odd, out of the ordinary, title. So I can't imagine who asked Vinita to ask me for a quirky title. Anyway, I sent some titles and somebody, I don't know who, chose this title, which I like and I'm going to read the paragraph from Sri Aurobindo, where this title comes from.

Sri Aurobindo, one of the great, what should we say, beings of India, who was tuned into the Indian tradition, had not been spoiled or destroyed by the Industrial revolution and the

coming of the British. He understood very well what was happening in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is what he said and for me when I first read it, it kind of...it is hard to blow an oxford mind, but it some kind of impact. Very hard to blow an oxford mind. Cambridge mind too. Nalanda mind, maybe they are already blown so it's okay.

*19<sup>th</sup> century in India was imitative, self-forgetful, artificial. It aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India. Forgetting the deep saying of the gita: "better the law of one's own being, though it may be badly done, than an alien dharma well followed. Death in one's own dharma is better. It is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another's nature. For death in one's own dharma brings a new birth. Success in an alien path, means only a successful suicide".*

I really feel I should repeat this, like to singers do twice or thrice. And we should sing it you know. 19<sup>th</sup>-cen-tury-In-dia (\*sings jocularly\*). Anyway,

*"19th century in India was imitative, self-forgetful, artificial. It aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India. Forgetting the deep saying of the gita: "better the law of one's own being, though it may be badly done, than an alien dharma well followed. Death in one's own dharma is better. It is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another's nature. For death in one's own dharma brings a new birth. Success in an alien path, means only a successful suicide".*

I mean if the holy Bodhi tree tries to be a mango tree, it will not succeed. If the mango tree wants to be a Bodhi tree it will not succeed. We in India, for many reasons, which I cannot elucidate in the 20 minutes that are left, forgot. We are self-forgetful. Forgot its own nature. **That nature's been spoken of beautifully by several people**, Rinpoche yesterday, Professor Deokar today. And also by Venerable Dhammadipa at the chai session yesterday, when he spoke of the Bhakti that is so important in the Indian tradition. The devotion element. The bhakti, which as one Chinese lady said today in the chai session, she sneaked away from her Chinese compatriots to join the Indian compatriots because they were swaying with the music and her own compatriots weren't swaying enough so she joined the swayers. The movers and the shakers. **So we Indians haven't left everything behind it seems. We still know how to move and shake, with the bhakti, when we hear the right notes and the right tunes. So this is something very good. This is something very good.**

Thanks to Rinpoche, we met in khan market some years ago, thanks to Prashant again. And you know, Rinpoche, one of the first things he said to me was you should go to Bhutan. Theek hai you know, stuck in Delhi and this lama is saying go to Bhutan. Okay, theek hai. Lamas say all sorts of things, what to do? So this lama is saying go to Bhutan. Theek hai. So, I had no idea **why this lama is saying this you know. I mean I'd heard of Rinpoche for many years and had lot of respect from Rinpoche. You know lamas say outrageous things sometimes. This sounded kind of reasonable but I didn't understand what it was about.**

Anyway this year I had the chance to go to Bhutan. A blissful journey from Kathmandu by air and then a terrible journey by road 16 hours from thimpu along roads that were being carved out of the pristine mountainsides. I had some kind of attempt to be more modern. I don't

know what kind of highway they went there but the mountains were coming apart and it took 16 hours to travel, I don't know 150 kms or something. Not good.

But I have to say that the Bhutanese people in the coach were very happy. They were all so happy, joking you know. I've lived too long in England, so I wasn't happy and joking. But they were happy. This archer with his big case where his bow and arrow, this govt. servant and there was someone, you know, doing some social work it seems. They were all joking, cracking jokes and kind of okay about it all. And we were in the back seat which bumps a lot.

So anyway, we got this magical place called *Bumthang*, where a *drubchen*, a prayer festival was going on. By a series of coincidences after that *drubchen*, and a wonderful story, which I don't have time to tell you now. But, through a wonderful set of circumstances after paying homage at the Maitreya temple, Champalakhram in Bhumtang, I came out of course, seeking tea. I'm always seeking tea. But I went on to this verandah. I didn't get tea, but this guy just stands up and says here you have to have this book, he just hands me a book, which was Longchenpa's translation, it has a Tibetan too, but I don't read Tibetan.

Longchenpa's forests of poetry and rivers of composition in Bhutan. Longchenpa, the great guru, whom I just quoted from. He had been to Bhutan, he came to Bhutan in the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. Because things weren't so happy in Tibet. Just listen to what he says. Just listen to what he says about bhumthang, this province in central Bhutan. I mean really, it's, anyway just listen to this. He is speaking first of the Tharpaling hermitage on the majestic and Jewel Mountains at the bosom of what seems like a sitting maitreya, the beautiful hermitage of tharpaling. *"The glorious mountain like the mansion of Pelri Pemaye. The criss king of mountains is exceptionally high. Forest, medicine trees, flowers, water are pure. Alpine meadows and herbal landscapes embellish it. The place of hermitage is extraordinarily beautiful. The sunlight stays long on earth and sky. Summers are cool and winters are long. Moderate four seasons. Fondness for the place grows, as wood and water are wholesome. Away from the village, the forest is secluded. Over here, one is free from fear. Easy to find the living, concentration naturally improves. There are numerous substances from which essence can be consumed. The trees have many relishing edible fruits that are attractive to behold, satisfying to eat. Virtue grows. The mind attains clarity and awareness. As in pure land heaven, it is always a happy place. The marvellous Tharpaling, where this is great tranquillity, in an ancient period, the self-emergent Pema, bedecked with the wealth of his blessings, transmission of teachings and the profound dharma. The place is swarming with oceans of darkinese and oath-bound deities. Being free from obstacles, one is one the verge of accomplishment. Reasons for Longchenpa's stay, by being in this exalted holy place practicing concentration has gone well, because the contemporary people are uncultured, teachings of Buddhism in Yu and Sung are close to decline. As the frontier invasion and evil spirits have disturbed the land of yeh".*

Anyway, he left Tibet because of many disturbances, but he came to Bhumthang, because it is that kind of idyllic place, you know. What are the causes, for this kind of idyllic place? What are the causes? Well, we often speak of places being blessed. We speak of Bodhgaya being blessed. We speak of people needing to seek out holy places where there gurus have meditated and so on and so forth. We speak like that. There is a reason behind all these

things. Let me first though, speak about, where we have gone wrong. I'm going to juxtapose various things my friends, because my mind is at the best of times not very clear so ill be skipping from here to there. But If you keep your concentration for another 12 minutes, it should be okay.

I'm going to quote from Seeto Rinpoche. Seeto Rinpoche, great lama, has his seat in Sherabling, in Himachal Pradesh. He says in his book, relative world, ultimate mind, which is very worthwhile reading. He says,

*"If we are honest with ourselves, we should be happy that we are not all in a state of nervous breakdown or insanity. Of course, some of us are, not all of us. We should be happy that we are kind of okay. We are going fast, but we have somehow been able to catch up. It is this situation though, that has brought the development of psychology and psychotherapy. People who grow up in a changed and more artificial environment have difficulty understanding that life is simple. Everything becomes very complicated for them, especially such things as love, caring for themselves and other people, having balanced relationships, discipline and so forth. Such basic states as happiness, sadness, death and birth have all become very complicated. So even though, people nowadays may have a lot of materials to learn from like books, video cassettes that discuss every critical aspect of life, it is indirect learning. They may read a 100 books and still be confused. People who have grown up with nature, might not have seen any books and they might not have the ability to explain what love, respect and kindness is but they know and feel these principles in a way that gives them stability. So the professional therapist has originated from the needs of modern people to find answers for all those major questions that didn't need to be asked in the past. Nowadays, the simple things that people once knew naturally, have now become areas of uncertainty. That's our situation".*

Everything has become an area of uncertainty, especially those ones. Caring for each other, love, relationships, looking after this earth. What do we do with this earth? We trashed it. Every time as an Indian I travel on a Rajdhani train, which has cut the time of travelling from Delhi to Gaya by 5 or 6 hours. It took me 17 hours in 1983 when I used to come here, now I get here in 11 hours. But what happens is, each Rajdhani journey, if you were to look at the amount of rubbish, the garbage, the wrapping, the paper, the plastic, that is accumulated from one Rajdhani journey, you'll be amazed. Where does it go? Can't burn plastic, of course Indian people, we try to burn plastic. But, if you burn it, it is very noxious. Where do you put all this stuff? Where do you put all this stuff? Life isn't simple anymore. Can't get a packet of my favourite biscuits or oat cookies made by the Britannia company, I'm talking of local biscuits, I have other foreign delicacies, but if you open a packet oat Britannia biscuits, it is an unbelievable amount of wrapping. It is heavier than the biscuits themselves. And what's happening to that? Just throwing it, you know? We don't care. Somehow it is a necessary evil, but we should think about these things.

Going back to the idea of why certain places are blessed, which I said I would talk about. I haven't forgotten, I'm kind of proud of myself. Buddhist concept of nature, what has His Holiness the Dalai Lama said? He said, when we talk of the elements, there are internal elements, which exist within sentient beings. There are different levels, some are subtle and

some are gross. Ultimately, according to Buddhist teaching, the innermost subtle consciousness is the sole creator itself, consisting of five elements, very subtle forms of elements. So these subtle elements serve as conditions for producing the internal elements, which form sentient beings and that in turn, causes the existence or evolution of the external elements. So there is a very close interdependence or inter-relationship between environment and the inhabitants.

So basically, if our minds are out of control, the environment becomes out of control. The very environment. The elements, the air, the water. Of course, you can look at gross things. We do throw things in the water, **there's continents of plastic and so forth**, and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans – but just the subtle level, how we are polluting the atmosphere. With our garbage thoughts, emotions, our jealousy, our greed and our hatred, aversion – how are we doing that?

As his Holiness Karmapa says, without developing healthy emotions, we **won't** have the resources we need to heal this planet. The whole of – one hesitates to say western culture – it may not be fair, especially after what Suresh-ji said about some intelligent, interested, karmically suitable westerners finding pilgrimage places for us Indians and digging them out of the mud – we owe a debt of gratitude to our Western friends.

But in terms of Western habituation and fascination with progress, with money and some other factors too – we have gone on a path where we have disturbed our inner elements, and we have disturbed our environment almost beyond repair.

So, his Holiness Karmapa says healthy emotions are those we can all feel. Compassion is one such resource which we should develop. Compassion, as he says, should be king and behind that should come wisdom, intelligence, Oxford thinking and all those other things. However, the first should be compassion. Actually, Oxford thinking should come a long way towards the end, like a tail. Similarly, our compassions should set the course of our actions while our wisdom serves to determine how to plot that course forward.

**I shouldn't speak this way actually about Oxford, that's why I discovered Buddhism. I'm very grateful to Oxford. 'x' and other great personalities have blessed Oxford, so, you know, no need to feel bad about where I studied.**

In front of me, what I have is very interesting. Tibetan master, Mipham Rinpoche. He, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century apparently, he was a kind of Leonardo Da Vinci. Leonardo made many drawings of helicopters and other amazing things – which were never made, I guess – they were made later. **Apparently Lama Mipham Rinpoche burnt (he'd made a lot of sketches of flying machines and other amazing inventions) all his drawings, explaining that it was better to dedicate oneself to inner transformation than to spend one's life inventing machines and getting lost in the multitude of everyday occupations. He burnt all his drawings of machines.**

(Lobsang Sangay?) Rinpoche, who was one of my heroes and as Aspi, the others here and Prashant will all know why he is our hero in many ways. Not only because he speaks such pure Hindi and is such a wonderful lama, but he is someone who often says things like: **Basically, I'm a savage. I belong to the Tibet of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This is the ex-prime minister of**

the Tibetan government in exile. He says, "In Tibet, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. That is where I feel I should be. That is what I feel about who I am, and what kind of life I want to lead – which is non-violent to the environment." And so forth. That is something amazing! Of course, when he says these things in public, people think he is joking. For him, the great Buddhist classic, the Dhamma Patta is not greater than Gandhi's work, Hind Swaraj – Indian Home Rule. This was a text Gandhi wrote in 1908-09 on a ship, in which he totally lashes into what was happening in India in terms of taking on the British ideas. The whole idea of machinery, the money economy, people being exploited in the name of progress – he totally lashes into that. Gandhi, in that text, makes it very clear what he feels true civilization should be, which we Indians have largely forgotten. Really, we have. I'm speaking as an Indian here, not as a white person from Oxford with an Indian mother and a Scottish grandfather. I'm speaking as an Indian here, with an Indian passport who sometimes pees behind bushes in the wrong time.

What is true civilization? Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to people the path of duty, performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality, is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. In so doing, we know ourselves. He was from Gujarat, so he says, the Gujarati equivalent for civilization means, 'good conduct'. Which is why he said in an answer to somebody – Western 'civilization'? Yeah, that would be a good idea. He also says, "I must confess I don't draw a sharp distinction between economics and ethics." In our world, economics has become divorced from ethics.

A friend recently sent me something, which I saw on her Facebook page – what looked like a Japanese professor giving a short talk in which he said, "The modern way of understanding economics is brain damage." Of course it is! IT's obvious! Look what it's done to our planet! Look at what it's doing to people! How could we say it's not a form of brain damage, where you regard water, the air, the earth as externalities and not part of your necessary inputs? It's like collateral damage in war – you're trying to get one terrorist and you kill a hundred people at a marriage party – *that's just sorry, you know. Sorry about that, collateral damage. We couldn't see everyone properly.* In screens, thousands of miles away, that's what happens.

So a little bit like that – economics, is NOT economics as if people mattered, which was the subtitle of E.F. Schumacher's wonderful book in the 70s which people should read, specially the chapter on Buddhist economics in that wonderful book, 'Small is beautiful' subtitled "economics as if people mattered." People don't matter very much, other things have taken over. Their own flow has reduced people's ability to see that it's the human being next to you who's the most important person. We don't see that when we just think of money, profits – the fact that we may get rid of labour in order to cut costs – tough luck, if the labourer cannot find other jobs and may take to crime, alcohol – that's just tough.

Do you know – I'm sure our foreign friends don't know – 1000s of farmers in India have committed suicide in the last decade? 1000s of Indian farmers! The people who grow our food. Not much outcry at all. Of course, a paragraph here and there in the paper, no national headlines really. Can you imagine what would happen if 5-6 industrialists committed suicide? They may start doing it of course, with the 500 and 1000 rupee note fiasco although some of them would be tipped off at the right time, but what do people think? People don't care! We don't care about those who touch the ground. I was moved by what Professor Deokar said

here, we need to touch this ground, you know? We need to get our hands dirty. Especially us Indian middle-class, we need to get our hands dirty. Even if it just means growing some plants in a pot, which I'm sure most of us do. We need to be able to do that.

The caste system and many other things have gotten away, and our government is trying to tell people that if you speak English and you know how to use a computer, you are a capable human being. If you work in the villages, well, hmm – sorry about that, maybe you should try and get to a city. This problem, Dalai Lama-ji has also seen very clearly. He warned people against it when he came to Bangalore, 4-5 years ago maybe. He said, 'This is what you people need to worry about. The drain of the people from the countryside to your cities in search of the urban way of life. Gandhiji and his vision was to restore the pride of villages, the health of the villages to make that culture strong. What should Buddhist economics be looking at?

Let me quote Schumacher – then I won't get much time left, but I think we should have a seminar at Deer Park about this, it is very important. Or any other sankhesa, anywhere so that it's in Hindi as well.

**"The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work, good hard work, to be threefold." Because he's saying, human beings need to work, they need to have meaningful work, not just on an assembly line. Work should do this – "Give a person chance to utilise and develop his faculties, to enable him to overcome his eager-centeredness by joining with other people on a common task and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a good existence."** The consequences that flow from these three things are endless. So to organize work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying or nerve-wracking for the worker should be considered little short of criminal. **Meaningful work. There's a lot to be done! It's wonderful we're here in Bodh Gaya but I really wish you had time to go into the villages nearby! That would blow your mind. What you'd see in Indian villages some 10kms from here, or less! The drudgery, the poverty, people sitting there almost like baboons picking nits out of each other's hair. That's what they do most of the day. They won't give you any water, some of them because they're afraid they'll pollute you or you'll not accept the water because they are lower caste, which is banned in our constitution but it's still there.**

You should see how much potential there is on our villages to do things, positive things. To help develop village industries, crafts, a culture of working as Gandhiji said, with your head, **your heart and your hands. That's what education should be – head, heart, hands.** In India, we are very much emphasizing the head. People who do hand-work, **well, it doesn't matter if they commit suicide, it is almost like that! They're not so important. Hands are there for the fingers to work the technology.**

**So we've forgotten our roots, our wonderful roots which Gandhiji and others kept alive. Gandhi's disciple, Vinoba, kept it alive.** He was a wonderful man who ate very little and walked a lot. All over India, especially in Bihar after independence in 1947 requesting big landlords to share their land with poor people. The Bhu-daan movement. The Gandhi Ashram, just across the road here where Dwarko-bhai is, 95 years old – he was someone inspired by Vinoba ji who travelled great distances. Many people gave their land at that time to poor, landless people. Vinoba-ji said, we tend to forget that there are three powers in the

world – the power of the government, the power of the law. What do you think the third one is? *Keval-ji, teesra kya hai? Ek toh sarkaar hai, aap toh sarkaar mein hain, aap toh jaante hain yeh sab, sarkari baatein. Ek toh legal cheesein hai, teesra kya ho sakta hai? Vinoba Bhave jo bol rahe hain, woh kya hoga? Kya keh rahe hain?*

(Keval-ji, what is the third? One is the government – **you're a government servant, you know all these governmental matters. One is legality – the law, what can the third be? Vinoba Bhave, what he's saying, what can it be?**)

Dharma. *Dharma ka nichod kya hai?* What is the essence of dharma? Ji?

Love and compassion. Thank you! He said the third power is Love! He said unless people **develop the third power, nothing will happen in this country. He's totally right!** I think in Bhutan, naturally you have a lot of love. They have 72% forest cover. *Aur apne Bharat key bhaiyon ko kehna chahta hoon (Hindi mein) ki Bhutan mein, ek bhi badsoorat makaan nahin dekha.* Itni khoobsoorat makaan banaate hain. (I want to tell my Indian brothers, in Hindi, that I did not see a single ugly house in Bhutan. They make such beautiful houses.) **I didn't see one ugly building in Bhutan. Not in 10 days. Of course, I didn't go everywhere. I didn't go to the border towns which would have been polluted by Indian architecture, modern architecture, unfortunately. They tried making everything beautiful with woodwork, painting – even from the hotel window in Thimphu – Nice! It looked nice.**

Then I came back to India, I was taking a train from Delhi to Gaya – *Ek bhi sundar makaan nahi dekha!* **Not one beautiful building, not one! You'd have to get off the train and go into the village. Of course, Indian people will go – Yeh toh mitti ka hai, this is a mud house. But the mud houses of India are much more beautiful than the palaces of India in many cases.**

So anyway, beauty. **Beauty as truth, connected to truth. I've gone over time, sorry, it's almost lunch time and everything. I want to quote one thing – just to show that I don't hate Western Culture. I was brought up with Western Culture. Some of the poetry is outstanding, and one particular poet – Walt Whitman, from America, I think he was an extraordinary fellow! What he's talking about is Bodhisattva activity. Some of you might be familiar with the verses of Shantideva, how we should try to be like the elements. We should be whatever beings need – earth, water, fire, whatever. Space. Especially space. For the western cowards who are afraid of space and the Indian cowards like me who're afraid of space, we need space!**

**Anyway, don't want to get into that. Listen to this, this is from a poem written in 1855 by Walt Whitman, who served in the American Civil war as a nurse, he was a great man. Sorry if the language is a little out of date, it was written in 1855, and excuses to our Chinese friends. I hope Walt Whitman is translated into Chinese. He should be.**

*"I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love*

*If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.*

*You will hardly know who I am or what I mean*

*But I shall be good health to you nonetheless*

*And filter and fibre your blood.*

*Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged,*

*Missing me one place, search another,*

*I stop somewhere waiting for you."*

If you miss me one place, search another. I stop somewhere waiting for you. That's the culture we have to cultivate in India. Waiting for people. Taking care of each other. Not being in a big rush all the time. You have to stop for people. We have to stop our crazy minds.

So, that's it folks. I've asked Raji-ji to recite two verses which I'll first recite in English from Shantideva's last chapter, and that will be the end.

From the great Shantideva: The verses she's going to recite, one of them is His Holiness' the Dalai Lama's favourite verse, and then the last verse of the dedication chapter, the last verse of the text.

*"As long as space endures,*

*As long as there are beings to be found,*

*May I continue likewise, to remain,*

*To drive away the sorrows of the world."*

And then the last verse

*"And now, to Manjughosh, I prostrate,*

*whose kindness is the wellspring of my good intent.*

*And to my virtuous friends, I also bow,*

*whose inspiration gave me strength."*

[MUSICAL RENDITION]