

SIDDHARTHA FESTIVAL, 11TH – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2016

Teaching by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche on the Buddha

According to the sutra of fortunate eons – Within these premises there will be one thousand Tathagathas. It is believed that many, many eons ago, a very vicious and non-virtuous king beheaded a million Bodhisattvas, within these premises. At that time, instead of the Bodhisattvas having a grudge, fear and aggression – each of them did an aspiration. A 1000 of them had the aspiration to be enlightened under this very spot. 100s and 1000s had the aspiration to be the followers of these Tathagathas. Many other Bodhisattvas had the aspiration to be the patron of the teachings of these Tathagathas.

Till date, this place has been blessed by Four Tathagathas, starting from the Dipamkara. When the Dipamkara was the Buddha (enlightened one), somewhere here, it was believed that there was a poor, destitute boy, who wanted to take the Bodhisattva vow. To take a Bodhisattva vow, since it is such a precious, and sublime enlightened thought – one has to have merit, to actually aspire for the Bodhisattva path. Since he was so destitute and poor, he **didn't have anything** to offer in order to accumulate this merit. Upon searching everywhere, he found a beautiful girl selling flowers. He approached this girl, and asked her to give him a flower. **The girl said that the flower was not free, of course. So the boy offered the girl a day's service.** Household chores, etc. Towards the end of the day, when he asked the girl for the flower, the girl was very puzzled. Why? Why did he want flowers so desperately that he actually wanted to sacrifice his time?

She asked him, “What is this flower for?” The boy replied. “I have to go see Dipamkara, and I want to offer him the flower, and want to take the vow of the Bodhichitta.”

Then the girl cheated. She said, “I will only sell you the flower, if you aspire to be my husband for the next 500 lifetimes.”

The boy was puzzled. He said, “No. I am going to Dipamkara to renounce this samsaric life! And here, you're telling me to be your husband – not just once, but for 500 lifetimes!”

Finally, the boy had to give in. They went to Lord Dipamkara, and it is believed that they took the Bodhisattva vow. Many, many eons later he reincarnated as Yashodara, also known as the Shakyamuni Buddha. When Siddhartha finally managed to vanquish all the entanglement of samsara, emotion, defilement and karma – he was known as the fourth Buddha. Historically speaking, generally speaking, outwardly speaking, he appeared as the son of Siddhodana and mother Maya.

But, I've been given a task to talk to you about the Buddha.

This is not an easy task. The great **Chandrakirti** said, “**The birds**, can fly into the deep sky. They will fly and fly, and then, they have to finally give in, eventually landing on the ground.

Likewise, ordinary beings like us can use our means to measure, judge and analyse the quality of the Buddha, talk about the Buddha, discuss about the Buddha.”

After a while, you have to give in to the fact that there is no adequate logic, no adequate language to describe the Buddha. There is no adequate mind to hear, actually here the calling of the Buddha. **Anyway, here I've been given a task to talk about the Buddha** and I have to consider this as an opportunity to accumulate merit, under the very Bodhi tree where four **Buddha's** have vanquished samsara and achieved enlightenment. Many more Bodhisattvas will achieve the Tathagatha state here. Given this opportunity to talk about the Buddha alone must be a small merit that I must have accumulated in my past lives.

I have to say that the Buddha can be understood in two aspects. There is the inner Buddha, **the Buddha within, which is with us. Actually, the word 'with' is very deceiving. We 'are'** Buddha. Every one of us has this cognizance. Every one of us has this awareness. Our very mind, our consciousness – if you like – the ingredient of consciousness, the ingredient of emotion (even emotions – the defilements!) the big part of this ingredient of emotion, is **'Awareness', which is this** cognizance. That pure, pristine consciousness is the Buddha.

You don't even have to be a Buddhist to be that kind of a Buddha. 'Buddhist' is just a term, a limited way of labelling ourselves for the sake of easy communication. Easy to identify, easy to label ourselves. There is, there has to be and there is a constant cognizance. There is an awareness. You may be dull, you may be sleepy, you may be distracted, you may be agitated, or you could be very inspired, you could be very devotional – no matter what – but you are aware.

If you don't have cognizance, you are as inanimate as a piece of stone, or wood. This very cognizance which you have is the most precious. It is the Buddha within.

But not everyone has this merit, or the ability – the courage to accept this Buddha within. We are so used to abusing ourselves. We do not cherish ourselves. We forget this innate nature, we forget this basic goodness of ours.

Instead, we chase after thoughts. Chase after hope and fear. We chase after all sorts of entanglements. After all the thoughts, the emotions and the defilement, we create more action – and this action leads to more emotion which then comes back and there are consequences of those actions. We experience (sometimes, maybe) bliss or happiness, but most of the time we are anxiety ridden, fear ridden. We are tormented by all kinds of pain and suffering.

But again, I repeat here, not all of us have the courage and the know-how to look into ourselves and to contemplate towards ourselves, about ourselves and think about our own bodies. As Kabir so beautifully put in the morning – to contemplate about your body! Even seemingly mundane things like – do you have all your toes intact? Do you have all your fingers? How many fingers do you have? We are not mindful of, aware of and we do not contemplate these things.

The world generally does not contemplate enough. If we do, if we actually do contemplate about ourselves – it is usually in reference to some sort of material, or (in Buddhist terms we

call it) worldly dharma. We think about whether we are beautiful or not. Whether we are rich or not. Whether we are well-dressed or not. This is how we lose contact. We lose contact, or you basically forget this Buddha within.

I cannot emphasize enough. This Buddha within is the ultimate object of refuge. This Buddha within is the ultimate object to whom we make offerings, like we did today. This Buddha is who we venerate, pay homage to, confess – even confess our misdeeds to. It is also the inborn witness that we can dedicate our merit to and generate love and compassion for – *Bodhichitta*. As I keep repeating, this Buddha within is not the easiest to get a hold of because we are just so used to looking out there.

We are always looking for a saviour, we are looking for God, someone who fixes these problems, and the anxiety that we go through.

We think he or she is out there, and if we pray, supplicate, he or she will answer. So for that, we do have what I term today – the historical Buddha. The representative Buddha. In the Buddhist terms we call it the '*nirmanakaya*' Buddha, the manifestation Buddha.

Buddha, who was bound by time. Buddha who came 2500 ago, was bound by a geographical location. We can see that in the Shakyamuni Buddha who was born in *Lumbini*, who went through all kinds of hardships somewhere near here – and finally, this person, the son of *Suddhodana* and *Mahamaya*, the prince of the *Shakya*, who upon seeing death, old age, sickness and rebirth, totally lost interest in worldly life. Even the princely life. Renouncing even his most beloved son and wife, for the sake of searching for the truth.

Finally, after all this penance, it is believed (again, somewhere here) that the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, found enlightenment. This historical, symbolic, representation Buddha to whom we can relate to as a figurehead, as a model, as someone who we can venerate – is someone to make offerings to. Someone we actually can prostrate ourselves in front of

As time goes by, the representation needs to be updated. During Ashoka's time, there was no statue of the Buddha. To represent the Buddha – even the representation of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was an empty throne, an empty bed. A throne with a deer and a *dharmachakra* next to it representing the enlightenment of the Buddha, the *parinirvana* of the Buddha and the coming of the Buddha.

Much later, statues, stupas, Bodhi trees – all these symbolic representations become important. And why not? Whatever helps us in remembering this innate Buddha, whatever it takes to understand the basic goodness of a human being – we can apply, we must apply. Whatever method that brings our enlightened qualities such as love, compassion, *Bodhichitta* – and if not all that, then the statue of the Buddha at least soothes you. Makes you happy. Even if it gives you momentary solace, it is what the Buddhists would call a blessing of the Buddha. The manifestation of your merit.

This is what I have read. If I can find it...

I think this is what Jawaharlal Nehru said. "The features of the Buddha's statue soothed me, and gave me strength and helped me overcome many a period of depression."

A symbolic Buddha is very important for deluded beings like us. It is believed that one of the famous Chinese monks, who had travelled from very far – upon arriving somewhere here (probably where we are sitting right now) and upon seeing the Bodhi tree in the Mahabodhi temple, was very moved. **He sat in front of the tree, and for 7 days and nights, he couldn't** stop the tears flowing out of his eyes. The Maulik Buddha, the representation or symbolic Buddha gives this kind of inspiration.

I have to express my joy, and my gratitude to all my Indian friends, who out of their love and dedication, conducted this festival to remember the Buddha. To remember one of their own! An Indian. I know India has – this land has hosted so many great beings. But from my very limited, narrow minded point of view, I think it is almost safe to say that none can match the Siddhartha. His legacy, his teachings. His path.

I have always told many of my Indian friends that Siddhartha, or the Buddha is probably **India's greatest export, India's gift to the world.** Jesus Christ – etc. they are foreigners. Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu – they are Gods. But the Buddha was an Indian! If he still here, walking around today, he would be holding an Indian passport. It is so important that we all remember the Buddha, but especially, the Indians remembering the Indian is what is truly meaningful.

How many Chinese emperors, or Japanese emperors have you heard of, who have adopted Yoga? How many Chinese or Burmese kings and queens sing Bollywood songs? I know Bollywood is very famous – but how many? Not many.

But the Buddha-dharma, Buddhism really travelled far and wide. So many great, ancient Chinese-Japanese emperors have bowed down. **They don't easily bow down** to others. But they have bowed down to one man. So many of them, centuries after centuries, dynasty after dynasty – they bow down to the Siddhartha.

Tibetans (whom I know very well) – they are really blood-thirsty, barbaric, war-mongering. But why, now, do they think twice before they squish a mosquito? All because of this guy, this Indian who said something about non-violence. For centuries, Tibetans knew nothing about non-violence until the message of the Buddha came to Tibet.

Anyone who has been to Japan would know about these amazing, grand glories – Zen temples, Zen monasteries, Zen gardens. Even though Japan is almost 6000 miles away from India – the Japanese, for centuries have bowed down to and really applied the value of the Siddhartha in their hearts and minds. Many other nations too – Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos – and this is not only the distant past. Now, the words of the Buddha are officiated in many countries, nations and cultures that have never heard about the Buddha until decades ago!

Croatians. Why would they give up their lucrative job or business and be a student, a disciple, a follower and some even dedicate their life into becoming monks and nuns. What is it about Buddha that was so revered even in these distant lands?

Among scientists, thinkers – people among many distant walks of life. Here, after many years of penance and practise, Buddha finally achieved enlightenment. In other words, he finally understood the truth, the absolute truth.

But, he didn't have a conversation with some external god. The truth, he realised, had nothing to do with some extraordinary revelation. The truth, he found was exceedingly simple. It is so simple, it is so close, like our eyelashes – **we don't see it. It is always within us, and this is what** he had realised.

Things such as: All compounded things are impermanent. All emotions that are connected to self-clinging are pain. All phenomena have no inherently existing nature. Enlightenment, or nirvana is beyond extremes.

It's important to know as to what led Siddhartha to seeking out this kind of truth. We are all talking about the representation Buddha, the symbolic Buddha. **It's not as if he had a hard life.** He was a prince! Everything was going very well. He had a family, taking care of him. There was no war. There was no religious dispute. It is not out of desperation, that he needed to find an answer. He contemplated about impermanence upon seeing death, old age and sickness as he walked out of the palace, as unavoidable. That we are all subject to impermanence. He began to ask amazing questions.

Do we all die? And if we die, who dies? Is the death the end? Do we continue? And anyway, what is Death? What do we mean by death? So on and so forth, he dared asking these questions.

He had the courage and the wisdom to ask these questions. For him, finding the truth was so important that he forsook and renounced all worldly goods. He went looking in every direction for an answer to these questions, and finally, under this very Bodhi tree – in these premises, he finally understood or realised or in other words, he was awakened to the truth. The truth that no matter what, all compounded things – our aggregates, our body, our feelings, our consciousness, our dwellings, friends and families, our mood, values, our very life – is subject to impermanence. This is something that you have to actualise, and this is the first truth he realized.

Then, what is the cause of all this anxiety that we have? The suffering that we have? Sufferings are all caused by emotions. Hope and fear. Any kind of emotions, even those emotions that may be blissful, loving, caring, and inspirational. As long as these emotions are connected to self-clinging, one way or another, they lead us to pain. Because emotions are always stained by a dualistic, judgmental mind. A mind that clings to hope and fear. As long as you are subjected to the dualistic mind, you are always bound to compare. As long as there is a comparison, you are always going to have the pain of hope and the pain of fear. This is what he actualized.

We actualise everything that we project, everything that we see, smell and everything we perceive things not as they are – basically, how things appear are different from what they are. So things may appear to exist solidly, permanently, things may appear to exist logically, things may appear to exist cohesively – things may appear to be functioning, things may

appear to be lasting – but they are all appearances. Ultimately, how they appear is not how they are.

Upon seeing this truth – Many times, the thinkers of the past (and also the present) come to a realisation to a similar truth. But how do we get out of these trappings? How do we free ourselves from this kind of defilement? How do we liberate ourselves from this kind of entanglement? So there, Buddha had a systematic method that is explained in myriad forms, **which are now in the form of “4000 Buddha’s teachings.”**

As venerable Kabir was saying this morning – After seeing the truth, the first thing the Buddha said was that he has found a brilliant, uncompounded, profound, peaceful truth. But it is inexpressible too. Therefore, ordinary beings will not have the capacity to understand or chew on such kind of truth. Therefore, he declared to remain in the forest silently, and it is believed that Lord Indra and Brahma paid homage to the Buddha and supplicated themselves to the Buddha so that he would use methods and all kinds of means to lead the sentient beings in the right direction. To the truth.

There, he began teaching us a systematic path. For instance, the four noble truths. In the four noble truths, he taught – the first teaching right after enlightenment – he went to Varanasi, this place called Sarnath – he taught that no matter how certain beings appear to be ignorant, appear to be imperfect, appear to be deluded – these illusions, these defilements are removable. The cessation of these emotions is possible because the emotions, defilements and the dualistic mind are NOT the ultimate nature of the human being. These are temporary, dirt. These are temporal wrappings, so to speak.

The cessation of the cause of suffering is possible because suffering, or the cause of the suffering is not the first nature of the human being. Then he said, one must know what suffering is because often, we do not know the causes of suffering. We look at very painful, gross examples of suffering, and can identify it as such. But the subtle sufferings, which we misunderstand as happiness are nothing more than pain, anxiety, hope and fear. So the first thing he taught us is how to understand suffering. Birth as suffering. Death, of course, is suffering. Old age as suffering. Comparison is a suffering. Judgement is a suffering. Basically, the moment we think of something as a deluded being, we are planting either the seed of suffering, or we are already suffering. So knowing the face of suffering is the first and most important path that a person can learn.

Then, what is the cause of the suffering? Many times again, we may know our causes of **suffering at the ‘gross’ level**. But, the subtle level of the cause of the suffering which is basically none other than clinging to the self, the idea of the self, cherishing the self, only thinking about the self - thinking and doing everything that is connected to believing in the existence of the self.

Not only believing in the existence of the self, but cherishing the self is what we call emotion. He has vast and profound and infinite teachings on what the cause of suffering is. Then, he taught that there is a remedy, a path, a solution to deal with the causes of this suffering. More than 84000 teachings exist, describing these remedies in many different forms and ways. To different capacities of students, to different kinds of people – to those who have a different

kind of cultural background – an infinite amount of teachings on how to apply, remedy, or the path to destroy the cause of suffering so that we can be free from it. This is just one example **of the Buddha's teachings popularly known as the four noble truths.**

There are many, many other teachings. Many a times, you can find – if you are not vast, courageous, and open-minded enough – **then you may find some of the Buddha's teachings** to be contradictory. At times, he taught to people – that there is a person who accumulates bad karma, good karma, who goes through the consequences of this karma. Other times, he taught that there is no such thing as the self. Meaning there is no agent. Therefore there is nothing like bad karma, good karma – there is no rebirth, there is no – nothing! He said, in the *Prajnaparamita sutra* – Even the notion of enlightenment is like an illusion. Nothing more than an illusion. Even if there is a phenomenon that is grander than enlightenment, that too, is like a mirage, just like a dream. It is an illusion.

So, there are so many methods that he has taught, but this is something that we also need to **appreciate. He said, "You are your own master." He also said, "No one can be your master.** I have given you suggestions. I have given you the path that I have applied. You have to analyse this, you have to test it. You have to see whether it works for you and then apply this method. He also said that the path should not be taken at face value. You have to analyse, you have to scrutinise, you have to be critical – he is the one who said, never depend on a person or a figure. He in fact, even taught his monks never to depend on him, the master! Depend on the teachings, the logic, the reasoning.

You have to realise this was said 2500 years ago. Even today we still suffer with the tyranny of totalitarianism – we still bow down to the irrational belief. Even today we get attached to a system that is completely faith and devotion oriented. Here, 2500 years ago, Buddha was already promoting reason and logic. He was already saying, emphasizing on - not depending on a figure, a person, but depending on the truth.

I wanted to – **I don't know whether I have the time** – I wanted to (I have translated this very roughly) grab this occasion to go through some of the stanzas of the aspiration that the Shakyamuni Buddha himself composed – **I don't know whether composed is the right word.**

I think this is kind of important.

"Dharma has to live long. The longevity of the dharma is so important in this day and age, where all we think about is material gain. Where all we think about is gain, happiness, attention. In this day and age, where we think of those things so instantly, and in such a big volume! **Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha has to live healthy, and has to live long."**

Shakyamuni Buddha himself said that he had this aspiration; he wanted the teachings to prevail and live long. Just a few days ago when I was given this task to speak about the Buddha, I wanted to share this aspiration that he wrote – or uttered.

He said, "In my past lives, I endured hardships and even gave up my own happiness for the sake of others. Through this, by the power of this dharma, may the teachings blaze unceasingly. In my past lives, I gave up my own nourishment to those who were ailing and my own belongings to help those who were destitute. I gave up my children, my husbands, my

wives, my belongings, my elephants, my chariots, so that I could develop priceless *Bodhichitta*. I venerated and made offerings to the Buddhas. To the *Pratyekabuddhas*, and to the *shravakas*, and to the fathers. I venerated my fathers, mothers and the truth-tellers. Eon after eon, I endured untold sufferings in my quest to the Bodhichittas unceasingly. In the past, with unwavering diligence, and one-pointed determination, I endeavoured to liberate beings. I sought for non-distraction, and accomplished infinite mindfulness. For the sake of acquiring wisdom, I renounced a futile life, secluded and isolated myself in the forest. I gave up even my most beloved possessions – my flesh, my blood and my limbs for the sake of others. I repent non-virtuous beings by steering them towards the countless stages of the teachings. With skilful means and wisdom, I liberated those bound by wrong views. By the power of this activity, **may the dharma, the teachings blaze unceasingly.**”

“**In the past, I was generous, spoke soothingly** and acted in accordance with the dharma and the capacities of beings. By doing so, I rescued others from the fires of emotion and vanquished non-virtue. **By the power of this activity, may my followers remain in this world.**”

“**In the past, I freed many beings from the river of wrong views and guided them towards the right views. By this activity, may my followers be always revered and respected.**”

This is the aspiration that Shakyamuni Buddha himself offered. To conclude, I want to say that there must be so many means and methods to make this world peaceful, harmonious. There must be so many means and methods to make ourselves individually harmonious, prosperous, **peaceful and happy. But we have to know Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings** among these many, many methods – **it’s one of the most illuminating ones. It is one of the most blissful methods.** It is also one of the most harmless – not only in ‘not harming others’, but it also the most harmless to oneself. So, the longevity of the dharma and the longevity of the dharma within the place which is the source for all the Buddhas – because this is where all the 1000 Buddhas will have come, and will come – to have the seed of dharma sprouting, blossoming, bearing fruit in this land of the Buddha, is most important. Not only for India, but also for the world in general.

So, the next few days as we celebrate remembering the Buddha, I’d like to request everyone to think of having an aspiration as to the propagation of the increase, or the longevity of the Buddha and his teachings and his followers.

Thank You.

I have been asked to answer questions, so...

“Thank you sir. That was very insightful. Just a fundamental kind of question. Please pardon my revisiting of this – You talked about dharma, so I just wanted to understand what you mean by Dharma here.”

I guess the Sanskrit word dharma is so rich, it is so many different meanings. Here, when I was using the word dharma, I was mainly using it as something to do with the ‘path’. Many times, the dharma means the truth, but I’m using it more along the lines of a path, a technique. Such as meditation, such as contemplation. Such as hearing, such as discussion or debate.

Anyway, something that has to do with technique. In this sense – also, the dharma refers to the method of protection.

“Thank you very much for this remarkable exposition. The notion of mindfulness, you spoke about is so similar to other traditions, other currents within Hinduism like Kashmir Shaivism and many other – so how do you see them converging?”

I don’t know so much about the other traditions. Mindfulness is such a broad term. In Buddhism, when we talk about mindfulness, we have to really speak about two aspects – one, the element of non-distraction. Being in the present. I have a feeling that this is something most people talk about these days, including **‘xyz’**. But, in Buddhism we also talk about vipassana, which is simply not non-distraction, but also understanding the truth. If you do not understand the truth, simply not being distracted is not enough, because even a sniper-shooter is also non-distracted but he/she may not have understood the truth. So these two elements of non-distraction, and of understanding the truth are necessary for the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness.

“Thank you very much, Rinpoche. Rinpoche, my question is – you talked about the inner Buddha, and you talked about the representation Buddha. What is the relationship between the two? They’re not the same, but are they completely different?”

“They are not actually completely different. The one that is looking at the reflection of the Buddha has the inner Buddha. It’s a bit like the reflection of your face in the mirror. First of all, you have to have the will to even look at it – to look at your own reflection. The mirror has to be clean. You have to have the time to look at it, you have to have the sort of longing to look at it.

As long as you have a face, and there is a mirror, and if you look in the mirror, you will see your face. So since you have the Buddha within, you use the proper way to look at the mirror. Proper meaning: the devotional, with longing, with an analytical, contemplative mind – then your Buddha within gets reflected – and you see somebody else, someone like the Siddhartha. This sublime, serene human being to whom we get attracted as to a teacher, as to a guide – someone we can take refuge in. This is how the inner and the outer Buddha relate.

“Thank you very much Rinpoche. My question is regarding the teaching that we were given on the Maitreya’s questions. In that – Rinpoche mentioned that Maitreya had been practising 25 eons before Buddha, but when he encountered Buddha, he was very ordinary (of course, much better than what an ordinary human is) So I was wondering, what is this difference and why does it have to be so much? Otherwise, in 25 eons, to me, he should have been enlightened even before Buddha, and at the time, he was looking very ordinary and the Buddha instructed him – I just wanted to know how.”

I think it’s a feature of the Mahayana Sutra – there’s always teaching that requires interpretation. First of all, the Maitreya Sutra is a Mahayana Sutra. According to the Mahayana tradition, every manifestation of the Buddha is actually, to put it very crudely, a pretence. The fact that he was born as the prince, the fact that he saw old age and sickness

and the fact that he had such remorse upon seeing these things and death – all this is a manifestation, in other words, a pretence in order to teach other beings like us – he needs to almost demonstrate this. So within this context, yes, even though Maitreya actually took the Bodhisattva path some many, many eons before the Shakyamuni Buddha, he, Maitreya in this case is manifesting as the disciple of the Buddha. This is just another way to teach the **disciples. The teaching in the Maitreya Sutra is that, Shakyamuni Buddha said, “I have practised things that are very hard, things that require a lot of endurance, things that require a lot of courage such as giving up my own eyes, my own limbs, my own children, and my own kingdom and so on. Whereas Maitreya, when he was the Bodhisattva, did not do those things.**

Shakyamuni Buddha was not downgrading the Maitreya when he was a Bodhisattva. He was **telling us something else. He was saying, “Practitioners who are not endowed with courage, with infinite – strength, endurance – there is still a path that can take you to enlightenment. Through aspirations, without going through all the hardship. There is of course an indication that if you do this, then the sort of speed of enlightenment is...probably slower. This is all another form of teaching, another interpretation.**

“Venerable sir, thank you for your wonderful teaching. The purpose of me asking this question is: How can we bring more and more people to the path of the Buddha, to bring joy and happiness in their lives? Now, the question is this: If I am not mistaken, from 500BCE to 9-10AD, Buddhism had become the most popular religion in India. In Tamil, 2-3CE, there were Tamil epics were based on Buddhism. **Also I’ve heard that there were many temples in Kerala which were then changed to Buddhist sites of worship. So what were the reasons as to the decline of Buddhism in India? How can we regenerate it? A few steps, methods – so that more of them can come to the path of liberation, happiness? Thank you.”**

I think there should be people like you that ask these kinds of questions. There will be people like the ones organizing this event. Many more of these probably need to contribute a little. **I’m really, I’m trying to behave under these circumstances. That’s why I don’t want to say any jokes – but, this one I have to. I have no choice but to tell you.**

Once I was in Kerala. I was in a taxi, I was wearing my robes, like these ones. This guy, he **couldn’t resist, he had to ask me – “So what religion do you belong to?” he said. Before answering, I asked him, “What religion do you practise?” He said, “I’m a Christian.” Then he said, “My God comes from Jerusalem. Where does your God come from?”**

And I said, “My God comes from your country!”

It is quite mind-boggling that Indians actually don’t know about the Buddha. A friend of mine once told me, Indians know more about Marxism and Shakespeare than Nagarjuna! That is mind-boggling to me! Because Nagarjuna can wipe out many great thinkers like Nietzsche and Kant, or – **within a single stroke he could do it. Here, I learn that Indians don’t know about Nagarjuna? That is kind of mind-boggling to me.**

But, as I’ve been here – as we’ve been witnessing today, more and more Indians – especially those who’ve done this, done that, been here and there – I think they are now turning to the

teachings of the Buddha, and I have to say, I go around to teach. I go around the world for that, I teach Americans, Europeans, the Chinese – and when I teach these other people, I have to say, I'm less nervous than when teaching the Indian audience. Every time I teach the Indian audience, every time I talk about non-duality, every time I talk about something to do with Sunyata, the Indians, they seem to be very at home! You understand? They can chew this. They can take it! Me? When I talk about Sunyata, emptiness, non-duality to an American, or to the Chinese – someone who does not have that kind of background, it is really difficult to go through the argument.

This is the land where people believe Ganesha rides a small mouse which is kind of a strange thing, right? A big animal riding a small animal. In reality, if an elephant sits on a small mouse, the mouse would be dead instantly. But Indians don't ask such questions! Indians don't think it's funny! So the Indian mind has this capacity to observe and understand concepts like Duality or any Buddhist principle – anyway, the Buddhist teachings come from India! So I think, that when it revives, it will revive very fast. All we need is more curiosity, I think just curiosity would do a lot. Sometimes we could do this kind of a celebration.

“So my question is related to the inherent Buddha nature which you are talking about. When we say that the basic human nature is wholesome, or good. Can you please explain this from an epistemological point of view? If we say that we have a basic wholesome nature, some people can say that it's just your impression, so how do we know whether it's the real thing?”

This is kind of a big question. I will try to answer it as concisely as possible. When you are wearing a shirt now, and I believe you do laundry from time to time – do you, or you never wash? When you wash your clothes, what do you wash? You don't wash clothes, you wash away the dirt. You don't wash the clothes themselves; you'd have to throw them! So what does this tell you? This dirt, the stain, is not the cloth. The cloth, the shirt that you are wearing – they are all spare entities. That is the Buddhist way of saying, this anger, the pride, the jealousy – all these emotions, all these negative emotions are dirt.

But that is the Buddhist view, right, that it is all dirt. So when we wash it all away, what is left is the wholesome nature of mind. But some people, or some philosophies also believe that basic human nature is probably violent, related to the instinct of survival.

Oh I see, we can probably go on a lengthy argument about this. Isn't there another time where we can have some kind of a conversation? Then again, for now – I will tell you this. This is a typical Mahayana argument.

Violence. Why do we have violence? There is a reason for that. You understand? We are trying to achieve something. You don't want someone else to be violent towards you, do you? Do you like other people being violent towards you? Now if you don't like someone else being violent towards you, this proves that you are someone who knows what suffering is. You understand?

If you know what suffering is, then you can slowly stir yourself towards understanding that just as how you don't want to suffer, maybe others also don't want suffering. This then leads

to the conclusion that human nature is good, but I think this needs more time for me to give you this answer.