

Tales From Joy #8, 2024

Thank you, dear readers, for your heartfelt response to these Tales....

It's a bit weird for me to write an intimate story and then send it out there into cyber-space. For most of our human history, one watches the other's eyes, face, and body language to know whether a message is being received well and whether to continue.



Lacking all other clues, I appreciate and savor your written email responses, and

I do “feed” on them, as inspiration to continue, friends.

I've been down here for several days now, at the south campus of SDS, a three-hour drive from Bangkok. This was Khun Mae's final dream-project, towards the end of her life. It's known as BV, for Bodhissatva Valley.

About fifteen years ago, a devotee offered her a large chunk of this river valley, in the midst of a popular tourist destination near Petchaburi. I never understood how upscale the area was, until Nawng-Joy took me on an afternoon boat ride last year, and I saw so many dozens of finely manicured resorts drift past.



Two days ago, we headed down the road before dawn: ten nuns, four Thai retreatants, and me.

It was my first alms-walk in this area, and we were off to the nearest marketplace. MC Annie tells me that the locals are quite thrilled to see this ancient tradition revived. And that's how it felt.

The nuns and I walk barefoot and somberly..., I was one of the "bag people"

who carry the extra food donations, which quickly become hundreds of pounds! Our guys were hovering nearby to transfer this surplus to a truck. After receiving the offerings, the maechees/nuns chant a short blessing. It's an exquisite link to the past, for me, to feel the devotion of the market vendors and locals, and to see them kneeling in reverence to receive this 2500-year-old benediction.



Dear Maichee Annie (who lived in Florida for thirteen years and therefore speaks very good English) told me that the closest village to BV has chosen to take “the five precepts”, a tradition reinstated by the Queen Mother decades ago, in response to large-scale drug

addiction and poverty.

The precepts:

- Telling the truth
- Right livelihood
- No stealing
- No drugs or alcohol
- No sexual indiscrepancies

In return for this Five Precepts Commitment those villages received assistance with education, cottage industries, housing, beautification and supportive counseling.

And it is indeed a beautiful traditional village...

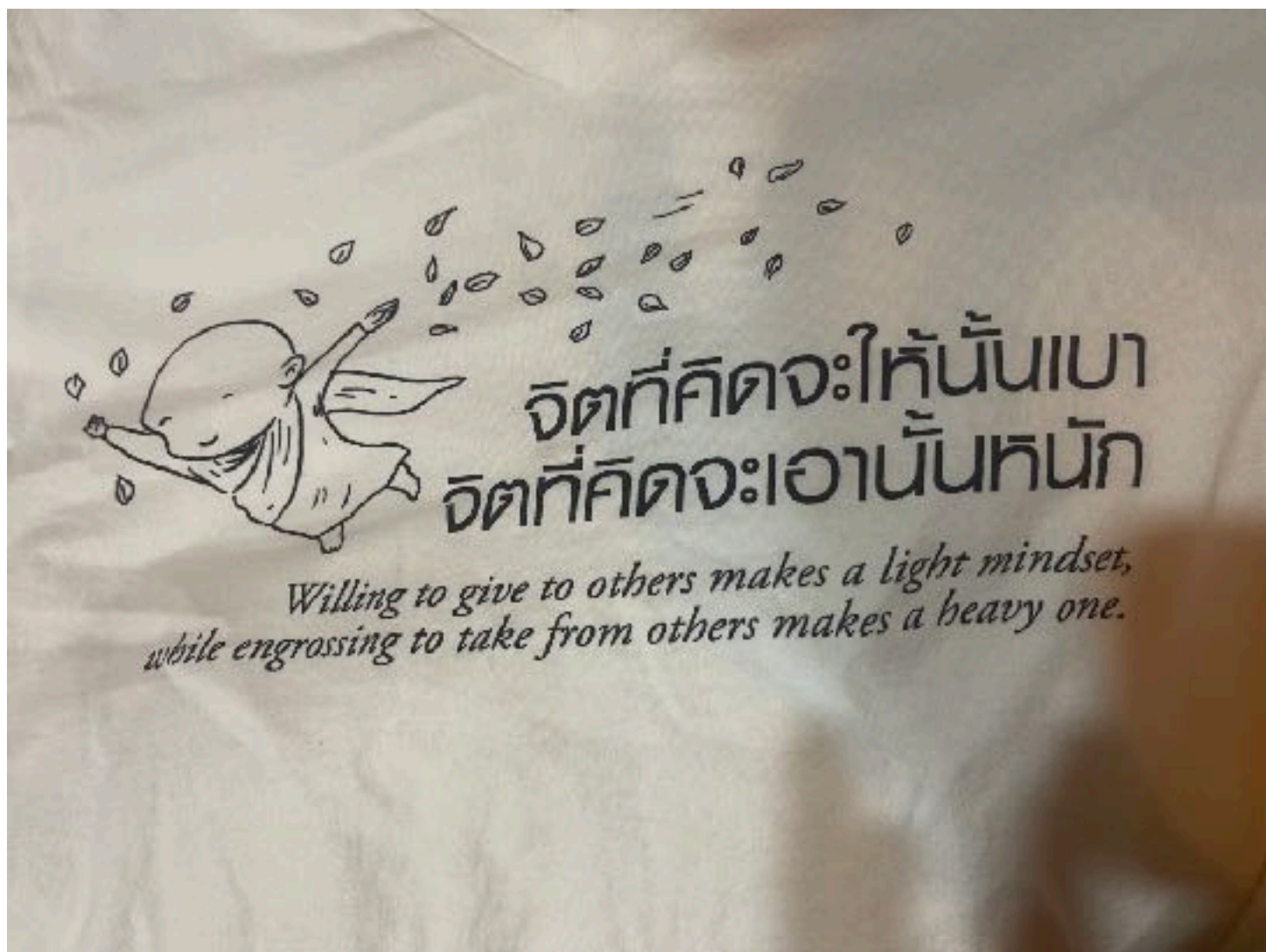


:

I went out on the village alms-walk yesterday, and soon realized that I wasn't well. I try to nurture the myth of being an OMNIPOTENT AMAZON, or O.A., here in Thailand, so that folks will not fuss about my age. But finally I had to mention feeling faint, for fear I would fall down on the cement.

Yes, a BIG FUSS ensued.

I loved just lying in bed for twenty-four hours, truth be known... but today, I'm back in the O.A. game! I probably got too enthusiastic about drinking the local filtered tap water, instead of bottled water. I just don't have the microbes to digest that, apparently.



By the way, here's an SDS t-shirt that I often wear... words from Khun Mae, of course.

It's a tremendous joy and privilege for me to hang out with my tribe of Karin teenagers, the fifteen local village kids who chose to come live here several years ago.

We work in the mornings, when they don't have school, and dance in the afternoons, after school.

As usual, the kids try hard to prevent me from doing much....



When I indicated that I wanted to help plant the cosmos, for example, they quickly:

- *dug the holes
- *piled up dirt all around the holes
- *placed the plants in each hole

Then invited me to push the dirt over the plants....



I have to be creative, assertive and watchful to find any actual labor opportunities. Meanwhile, we delivered hay to the water buffaloes and brought donated chickens to their coops..

These kids are the main reason that I train for six weeks in Mexico, before heading to SE Asia... so that I have a prayer of keeping up with them!





Our classes are festivals of happiness and creativity.

Some of you wrote and asked me what I am eating? This triggers one of my “Confessions”:

I tend to be quite a brat when eating in Thailand, cause I don’t do well with either hot peppers, or cilantro....two of the major ingredients in the cuisine here.

I discovered a new restaurant in Bangkok quite near our center, and proceeded to eat there every day thereafter! I’m sure this caused some suffering among the kitchen staff at SDS, who love to feed me. The restaurant salads were, literally, irresistible..

Down here at Bodhissatva Valley, the maichees and staff are no less



devoted to discovering what I WILL eat, and serving me that.

I've never seen the Tara Cafe serve anything besides coffee and cookies, except for my meals. So I was giving thanks that no one was around to witness my five-course banquet (!) when a tractor-trailer of Thai tourists arrived.

It's strictly taboo in Thailand to stare at another person's food, and no-one over the age of three has ever transgressed this social rule. (Oh, Pa Tum did catch me eating a few years ago, and expressed her amazement. It needed no translation).

I have to add this one photo from the Kiddee Cafe, before closing, dear readers:



The kindergarten waitress broke professional rank when she asked to touch my nose, cause it was so funny-looking..