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## What I did on Summer Vacation

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I'm home from my most meaningful vacation at [Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Center](#) in Ulverston, England. This year I got to attend the first week of summer festival instead of two, but that's ok — I still got to see my “summer camp friends”, hear some awesome teachings from my root Guru, and relax for eleven sublime days. Now that I'm back, I thought I'd offer you a few glimpses of what's happening, what's being talked about, and so forth in the NKT & Summer Festival World. Ready? Ok, here we go!

## THE TEACHINGS

During the week that I attended, Geshe-la offered the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara Empowerment and commentary to Universal Compassion. He spent most of the time teaching on Equalizing Self and Others, the Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing, the Advantages of Cherishing Others, and Exchanging Self with Others. The presentation he offered was so simple, easy to practice, and it was a different approach than I had heard before. In particular, he broke down Equalizing Self and Others into four stages — first equalizing ourselves with everyone we associate with, then all human beings, then all animals, and finally all living beings without exception. I found this gradual way of practicing Equalizing to be very helpful. He also said that if we can Equalize Self and Others, then Great Compassion and Bodhichitta come easily. I found that very encouraging! After his teachings, we had a three-day meditation retreat on the above-listed meditations using the new Thousand Armed Avalokiteshvara self-generation sadhana. It was fantastic, and I think I really managed to make a dent in my self-cherishing (that slimy, evil monster living in my heart!).

## GEN-LA KHYENRAB

I admired Gen-la Khyenrab before he was ever a Gen-la — his humble, unpretentious demeanor and his straight-forward manner seemed to me to be the example I wanted to follow. When he was named Gen-la, I was delighted, and I have been totally enamored with his teachings ever since. The underlying theme whenever he teaches is moral discipline. In a good-hearted way, he constantly pokes fun at our laziness and unwillingness to apply effort to our spiritual training. In New York (April 08), I remember that he said: “We think that our problems and suffering come from being hard on our delusions — that, if I give up my attachment, it will cause me pain. But really, the opposite is true: all our suffering comes from being lenient with our delusions.” I have been reflecting on this statement since April, and trying to stretch my capacity to eradicate my delusions — especially attachment.

This summer, Gen-la Khyenrab gave the introductory talk to the festival, and encouraged us to improve our inner qualities and ability to benefit others. Within this context, he gave us five things in particular to improve:

**Faith** – the most interesting thing he said, and what will stick with me, is that “It is not our Spiritual Guide who is the root of our path, but our FAITH IN our Spiritual Guide which is the root of the path.” In other words, it’s not the person who is our focal point, it is developing our own mind and our relationship towards the person and the teachings which is the actual focal point. I LOVE this statement and will contemplate it more to understand it better.

**Motivation** – our normal motivation is selfishness, continuously thinking of ourselves. Every problem we have comes from an excessive self-concern. So we need to gradually shift our motivation from selfishness to cherishing others. Our external activities don’t need to change, but our motivation does.

**Correct view** – mostly, basic Buddhist view and action. Also, he pointed out that we often think our problems have nothing to do with our own mind. He said this is an “interesting view” but that “Buddha disagrees”.

**Discipline** – it’s interesting to me that at first he said only “discipline,” and only later added the word “moral”. In other words, (my interpretation) I don’t think he means simply abandoning the ten non-virtues, but he means the self-discipline that it takes to practice at all. His advice was to pick one negative behavior we have and day-by-day begin to remove it. This way, he said, we gain self-respect, dignity, and integrity.

**Wisdom** – what he said in this section that stood out for me was that eventually wisdom will become our Spiritual Guide. But the reason we need a Spiritual Guide for the time being is that our wisdom is quite lacking.

## FESTIVAL LIVING — What's happening and what folks are talking about

In between sessions, the best part of Festival (to me) is getting to make deeper connections with Sangha, both your own Sangha and Sangha from around the world. As Sylvia put it, "Isn't Festival great? All you have to do is go to the temple to listen to teachings, eat, and talk."

Almost every day at Festival, I got to have lunch with one of my dear friends from Mexico, after lunch I would take a long walk along the coast with my Sangha and RT, or hang out eating some dessert with Jack and Frances at the [Conservatory Cafe](#). For dinner I would sit with quite an assortment of Sangha from around the world, and after the last session of the evening, I would find Jack and Tim-2 and eat some Crepes at "Le Creperie" (I think on a few nights, we were the only English-speakers in the packed Creperie). And in between these, I got to meet and chat with practitioners from nearly every corner of the globe — from Japan, Germany, South Africa, and elsewhere.

Here's some of what people are talking about:

**Of the demonstrations against the Dalai Lama** – Not surprisingly, mixed feelings abound, but overall people are feeling very positive about what's happening. The vast majority of people I talked to had gotten to attend at least one demonstration, and most of them had very positive, meaningful experiences, echoing what my own Sangha buddies had said.

But naturally, not everyone is so happy about what's happening. What I did not hear was anyone who thought that the Dalai Lama's actions are ethical or in the right. But what I did hear are people who are unsure if this is the correct response, and, disturbingly, I also heard stories of people feeling "pushed" by their local Resident Teacher to participate in the demonstrations. My own Resident Teacher didn't like hearing that — his response was, "That's a frustration on the part of the Teacher, and they shouldn't do that. People have freedom to choose — that's the point of all of this in the first place. There's a lot of cleaning up of attitudes like that that's going to happen now, which in the long run will be good for us." He said later that even in his dorm room of monks he found himself reminding people that some of the criticisms against us have some validity, and that there are things that we can improve about our Tradition. It's funny: whether we're being criticized personally, or as part of a group of people, we are so reluctant to assess whether or not the criticism is true — we wish to remain closed just because they are unpleasant to hear. It is the evil slime of self-cherishing yet again. I for one feel very lucky to have my wise Resident Teacher, and happy that this has not been a point of much disharmony within our own Sangha.

My friend from Mexico remarked: "When I got the letter that Geshe-la asked us to post on our notice board, I read it, then read it again. Then I realized we did not have a notice board, so I created one, and then posted it."

**Of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso** – I always find it interesting to hear stories about what Geshe Kelsang is up to behind the scenes. Rumors always abound, especially at Festivals. So take these stories with a grain of salt!

Geshe-la had a monk read to him all the personal criticism against him that is around on the internet. Apparently it took two hours to read through everything. While the monk read, Geshe-la listened with closed eyes, occasionally saying the word, "Compassion."

During the annual meeting with the Resident Teachers, he told them what led up to his decision to begin organizing opposition to the Dalai Lama. First, he was invited by some monks to India to see the discrimination that was happening. Upon arriving, he found that the situation had really deteriorated. He talked to many forlorn monks, and ended up giving them a good deal of food and money (food because most vendors will not sell to them, and they cannot buy food within their monasteries). When he returned to England, he spent many sleepless nights and thought to himself, "Perhaps it is the Dalai Lama's karma to be able to destroy Je Tsongkhapa's tradition, and it is too late." But he felt that he was his Guru Trijang

Rinpoche's only remaining representative, and as a representative of his teacher, he had to speak out. He felt he could not sit by and do nothing. One morning he awoke feeling very clear about what to do, and we started down this road of demonstrations.

And watch out — it looks like he may also begin some legal proceedings against some different entities and individuals over all of this.

But my favorite Geshe-la story by far was the one that I will relate below...

**Of KMCs** – I was happy to talk to a friend from [KMC Texas](#) to hear about all the positive developments happening there. They are undertaking a big construction process to build residential housing, a new dining hall with a World Peace Cafe, and a complete renovation of their temple. It sounds like it will end up becoming quite the hub of the Southwestern US Kadampa Centers. My friend told me more about how the KMCs throughout the world are set to operate — acting as a central hub for activities in that region, supporting the development of smaller Centers around it. I got a glimpse as he was talking of what Geshe-la's vision is, and how he is going to propel Kadampa Buddhism into mainstream society everywhere around the world. I was so happy to hear how this is all coming together, and I can see a bright future, with so many people benefiting on so many levels! I notice from our own World Peace Cafe that you don't have to be "Buddhist" or go to classes at the Center to benefit from the Buddhist Center... I think these KMCs will become tourist attractions, places where school kids go for field trips, places that will care for their local communities and bring benefit to that community. I rejoice!

My Texan friend told me that (apparently), Geshe-la took two million dollars in cash to Singapore. Once he arrived, he and his assistants drove around in a cab until he pointed at a building and said "Stop here!" He walked inside and said, "I would like to purchase your building, please." This is now [KMC Singapore](#).

KMCs and International Retreat Centers are starting to sprout in many places. The Germans were telling me how progress on [KMC Germany](#) is going: Apparently they removed a low ceiling recently and found a lovely plaster ceiling beneath, much older and more ornate. They had to strip all the paint off very delicately, and for over two weeks many of them were up on scaffolding with razor blades, painstakingly peeling off layers and layers of old paint.

Meanwhile, on the KMC-Manjushri grounds, they are building a [new art studio](#) to supply Buddha statues and other artwork to all these new KMCs. Wow!

## **AND NOW, I'M HOME**

So, that's what I did on summer vacation. It was such a meaningful time away, and I am so glad that I had the chance to recharge my spiritual battery. I am once again ready to rock-n-roll here at my home Center, having brought the inspiration, energy, and fresh ideas gathered from practitioners from all around the world back with me. I hope that some of them go home with inspiration from me after having told them about the World Peace Cafe and our other projects.

I am ready to equalize myself with others, destroy my self-cherishing, and improve my ability to benefit others. My goal for the year (because I consider Summer Festival to be the end of one year and the beginning of the next) is to improve my practice of moral discipline as my main practice.

Wish me luck!

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