

Mindful chaos



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Tibetan lama Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche visited Google in Mountain View. He also swung by Facebook during his trip to Silicon Valley.

Tibetan lama enlightened by visit to Google, Facebook



MIKE CASSIDY
SILICON VALLEY
DISPATCHES

ONLINE EXTRA

Read Mike's previous columns at www.mercurynews.com/mike-cassidy.

MOUNTAIN VIEW — As I drove to the Googleplex to meet Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche, I was pretty sure I was headed to that place where worlds collide.

I mean, the Rinpoche, as he's called, was a Buddhist teacher; a lama; a man of calm, introspection, meditation and deliberation — a deep breather who lives his life searching for self-actualization and helping others in their journey toward the same. And Google, well Google is the frenetic poster company for Silicon Valley frenzy and its relentless drive toward tomorrow; the hyper-connected, hyperkinetic corporation with its hands in a million different businesses and an outfit that never, ever, looks back.

But I can report that no heads exploded, no flames erupted, and in fact, we had a visit in the courtyard of the Googleplex

that was, well, peaceful. It was no accident that the Rinpoche had come to the capital of chaos to increase his enlightenment. Silicon Valley, he explained, is incredibly influential in our everyday lives and anyone who wants to understand how we're living today, better understand Silicon Valley.

"What I'm doing," the Rinpoche told me, "is more of an exploration. I'm trying to explore how things are working. What does it look like? What are people thinking? What are people trying to do in this tech valley?"

Yeah, thoughtful guy. It's kind of an occupational hazard. Trungram Gyaltrul, who was born in India of Nepalese parents, was recognized as the reincarnation of a revered teacher when he was a baby. His

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— Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche

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LIPO CHING/STAFF

Tibetan lama Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche recently visited with employees at Google in Mountain View.

Cassidy

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next stop was a monastery, the first step on a scholastic career that ended with a Harvard doctorate in Tibetan and Himalayan studies. So, in some ways he fit right in with the brainiacs at Google, who've been known to flirt by asking, "What's your advanced degree?"

And as we talked, I learned that the nonstop culture of Google and Silicon Valley and the Buddhist culture that the Rinpoche is working to spread across the Western world intersected in many more ways than I had imagined. You could say the Rinpoche opened my mind.

Oh sure, he said, there is plenty that modern technology can dish up to obstruct mindfulness and awareness of the moment. "For example," says Rinpoche, dressed in a simple maroon robe and clutching a smartphone, "if you look around you can find people sitting around tables, two people sitting together to talk to each other, but each one is holding a cellphone and actually not talking to the person next to them, but to someone else far away."

But of course, those cellphones are also creating a connection, perhaps

not as rich and real as the face-to-face connection, but who's to say?

The Rinpoche spent five days in the valley, visiting with employees at Google and Facebook and talking to organizers at Wisdom 2.0, an organization working on creating beneficial connections through technology. Let's just say he was something of a hit.

"He's an interesting guy," says Bill Duane, one of the Google employees who met with the Rinpoche. "There certainly aren't too many Nepalese monks with Ph.D.s from Harvard floating around, who come to have lunch with Google."

And yet it's surprising it doesn't happen more often. Google, you see, is mindful of more than just the bottom line. For years the company has offered an on-campus course called "Search Inside Yourself," launched by Chade-Meng Tan, who started at Google as an engineer and whose job description now reads, "to enlighten minds, open hearts, create world peace."

They think big. Speaking of which, the Rinpoche, in one short visit, quickly grasped the valley's mindfulness potential. He's a man who uses a cellphone, laptop, the Internet and has a Facebook page (who doesn't); and he doesn't buy the notion that technology and mindfulness are diametrically opposed. He came across many valley-dwellers

who enthusiastically agreed — for instance Duane, who's a learning and development manager at the search company.

"I think about the supposed tension between the two," Duane says of tech and mindfulness, "and I don't see it. I frame it as, how do we have a wise relationship with our tools and with tools that have such a high potential for good?"

And wouldn't you know it? It turns out that two of the valley's most successful companies provide an ideal metaphor for the very foundation of Buddhist teachings — wisdom and compassion. Buddhists like to describe each as a wing, explaining that you need two wings to fly.

"At Google I found they're more interested in wisdom. They want to search inside oneself," the Rinpoche says. "Then I went to Facebook and their interest is related to compassion, the other important point. They're more about social networking and friendships."

Sounds like the makings of the perfect corporate merger — at least if you consider eternal happiness to be an acceptable return on investment.

Contact Mike Cassidy at mcassidy@mercurynews.com or 408-920-5586. Follow him at [Twitter.com/mkcassidy](https://twitter.com/mkcassidy).

Pitch

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cal for early stage investors to listen and keep learning from the entrepreneurs they back. The pressure is immense; you can either be crushed by it or prosper. The bonds formed during those times are incredibly important to me.

Q What kinds of pitches are you looking for right now?

A Mobile. Mobile. Mobile. Did I mention mobile? Seriously though, the opportunity cost for me makes it hard to get excited beyond mobile. I always try to remain open-minded, though the probabilities of persuading me to invest outside of mobile are low.

I am most interested in great entrepreneurs who are leveraging the scale and ubiquity of mobile to disrupt a large market. Areas for mobile disruption I am currently exploring are education and health care.

Q What's the biggest mistake entrepreneurs make?

A Too often, we can confuse motion or hype with progress. (Entrepreneurs need to) measure real progress and talk about what is not working.

Internally, remember that problems are opportunities, and platitudes are not to be trusted. Externally, don't get distracted from the mission that led you to start this thing in the first place.

Also remember to have fun along the way and try to stay healthy.

Q What's the next big thing going to be?

A We are still very early in the transformation to mobile-first services. There are plenty of real-time innovations and disruptions to come. Mobile will grab a bigger and bigger share of actual commerce in the brick-and-mortar world.

On the back end, we will need breakthroughs in anticipatory computing, so we can meet the escalating demands of users and give them contextually relevant services that make a difference in their daily lives.

A little farther out, I'm excited about the opportunity for cheaper, ubiquitous sensors and the services they may eventually enable.

Q It's been just over 10 years since eBay bought PayPal, an event that made possible the rise of LinkedIn, Tesla, Yelp, Facebook, YouTube, SpaceX, Palantir... Did you have any inkling when you made that first investment that it was going to change Silicon Valley?

A Indirectly. I believed Peter Thiel and Max Levchin were extraordinary people, who in turn hired some of the most insanely smart and driven folks one could imagine. I'm not surprised by their successes.

However, I am in awe of what Elon Musk is doing right now. For one person to simultaneously disrupt such large and important markets has to be unprecedented.

Q What one company in your current portfolio has the potential to be as transformative as PayPal?

A I actually strive to meet this bar with every investment. But the immediately obvious answer is Waze. (Note: This interview was conducted shortly before Google agreed to buy the social mapping app for \$1.1 billion.)

The team is immensely talented and driven. They completely disrupted the old notions of map creation, and they're now redefining this critical interface at the exact right time for mobile consumers. Waze maps are now real time, and soon they will be much more social and informative in a way that will improve our lives.

It is a true pleasure to work with such talented people.

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