

In Buddha's Footsteps

Over the past month the monsoon has slowly eased with a lot less rain but the humidity can still be a challenge at times.

Those, like myself, who do walking meditations each morning at the Temple keep their eyes to the ground to avoid stepping on the large and, at times, numerous ants. For a few weeks, I watched as a Tibetan gentleman, with a brush and dust pan, swept up all the ants and put them in the borders.

In Buddhism, the six perfections are an elementary aspect of your practice. These are giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom. Leaving the Temple each morning, the opportunity to give financially abounds.

Although Bodhgaya is nearly 700 miles east of the capital, Delhi, and has a resident population of only 48,000 it still attracts notable visitors. In recent weeks, the Indian Prime Minister and also the Bhutanese Prime Minister have both spent time in the town. The Mahabodhi Temple was closed for the visit of the Bhutanese Prime Minister.

I have had the good fortune to visit the Dungeshwari cave (Buddha's fasting cave). It was in this cave that Buddha practiced extreme asceticism and fasting for six years before his enlightenment. This intense period led him to realise the middle way which is fundamental to Buddhism. There is a modest climb to the cave but, for the less able, there is the option of an Indian Sedan Chair. For only £9 two strong men will carry you to the top.



As I met my wife in the Madhyamaka (Sanskrit: middle way) Buddhist Centre

near Pocklington, 28 years ago, this gave the cave even more meaning to me. I arrived with a friend at the cave by 08.30 and spent about 30 minutes there meditating. Even at that time, the heat inside was immense. During the day, and especially over the winter time, the cave is very busy with devotees. At times, I was blessed to be alone in the cave with just the priest.

For me, the cave is the most inspirational and breathtaking Buddhist site I am aware of. The energy is intense and awe-inspiring.

This week I have been closely monitoring the events in Nepal. Following a close down of social media, protests resulted in a full dissolving of the government. As I write this, there is a curfew in the capital Kathmandu, and ongoing discussion to form a new government. I fly to Kathmandu in two days.

My time in Bodhgaya for this visit comes to an end tomorrow. The past two months have been a time for reflection, growth and solitude. My Buddhist practice has travelled from "senses" to "craving" and is currently contemplating "detachment". I am focused on expanding this profound word and understanding how it balances the three poisons of Buddhism - anger, attachment and ignorance.



The Water Buffalo