

## In Buddha's Footsteps

My journey from Bodhgaya to Kathmandu was with a close eye on the events in Nepal due to the protests. The situation was exceedingly fast moving. On Monday, 8 September, there was a peaceful protest that became violent on Tuesday. Yet by the Friday, there was a new temporary Prime Minister, with elections planned for March 2026.

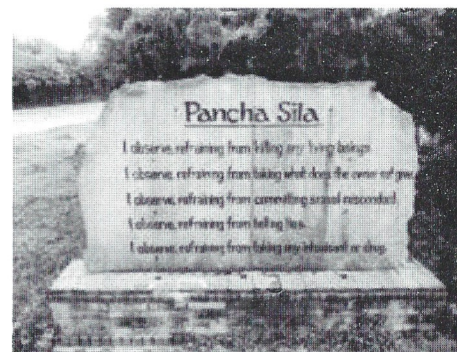
I arrived at Tribhuvan International Airport on Sunday to a cheer and a call out of "Nepal" from my fellow passengers as we landed. Understandably, there was a cautious feel to the city. My wife arrived the next day from the UK, and our time in Kathmandu was enhanced as always by the kindness of all Nepalis we met, especially at our regular hotel. The short flight south to Bhairahawa was rather lumpy due to the monsoon, but we finally landed safely to be greeted by a dear friend with an awaiting taxi.



Our destination, after travelling for over a week, was Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha. As this was my seventh visit to Lumbini in less than four years, we are blessed to have many friends in the peaceful village. Each visit has been for between one and three months. The actual place of Buddha's birth is at the Maya Devi Temple.

Each morning, we leave our guest house at 04.15 to be embraced in the unadulterated energy of the early morning at the Temple, where we enjoy our prayers and walking meditations around the tank. For the first hour, unlike at the Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, the Temple has often only a handful of devotees.

There have been many times over the last four years that, with the exception of the security staff, I have been the only person at the Temple as the day slowly breaks. I consider myself to be truly blessed every time this happens.



The walk from the village to the Temple takes about fifteen minutes and goes past a plinth with the Pancha Sila beautifully presented. The Pancha Sila in Buddhism, aka the Five Precepts, is the basic ethical code for Buddhists to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. These "rules of training" develop character and

assist progress on the path to enlightenment by avoiding harmful actions.

Although Buddhism is, in essence, the training of the mind, the body should also be given consideration to maintain good health and appropriate appearance. In Lumbini, I have the good fortune to eat very nutritious food in local restaurants and friends' homes. Fresh fruit is readily available in the village. I visit a barber every other day. A shave involves extensive processes to the face and concludes with an intense massage from the shoulders to the waist and to the tips of fingers. A break mid shave is always taken for tea.

In Bhairahawa, I visit a shoe maker where I select the soles, colour, and design of the shoes I desire. I choose fabric from two shops and a very talented tailor, then produces many wonderful suits, shirts, and shorts that refresh my wardrobe each year.

I believe religions can be considered in three groups. Of the book (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), of India (Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism) and Indigenous beliefs. In Sikhism there are influences from both Hinduism and Islam.

I embrace the importance that Sikhism places on the significance of pluralism. While I am a Buddhist, I was born in a Christian country, I wear a Sikh Kara (a steel bracelet) that is one of the five Ks of Sikhism, I have many Hindu friends and spend many months in Hindu countries. Each day, as I begin my Buddhist practice, I cherish the Islamic call to prayer.

As the monsoon is now slowly retreating from Nepal, the festival season has begun.

"Not committing any negative actions. Cultivating a wealth of positive actions and taming your mind completely. This is the teaching of the enlightened ones"

*The Water Buffalo*