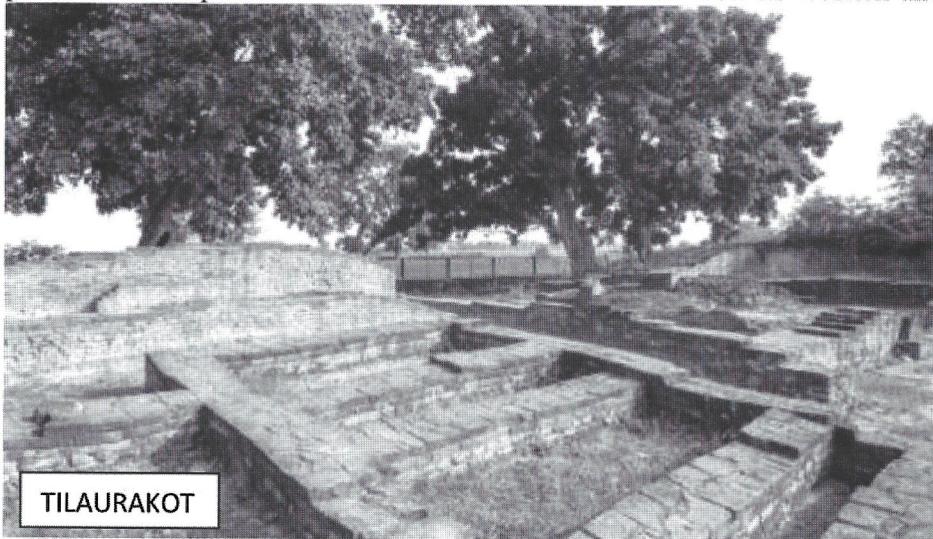


## In Buddha's Footsteps

Although the mornings continue to become colder in Lumbini, Nepal, we can still enjoy a bright sun, which takes the afternoons to a pleasant 29 degrees. Two weeks ago, I picked up new clothing from my tailor that will replace my wardrobe for next year in the UK. For now, the two winter suits and woollen shirts are perfect for the colder mornings, and will ensure I can continue my early morning walking meditations as the temperature drops and the mist increases.

There are many important Buddhist sites around Lumbini, the vast majority of which are yet to be excavated. The two main ones, which I have visited on many occasions, and also in recent weeks, are Tilaurakot and Ramagrama. Tilaurakot is the ancient capital of Sakya kingdom (Kapilavastu) and is located about 17 miles west of Lumbini. "Tilaurakot houses the vestiges of ancient Sakya palace where Siddhartha (Buddha) lived his early 29 years as a prince. The ramparts of a moat and a fortification wall with its western and

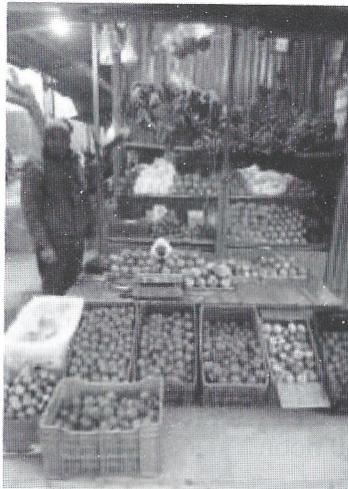


eastern gates surround the remains of the citadel including ancient structural remains in the central part of the mound. The eastern gate is known as Mahabhiniskramana Dwara, through which Siddhartha took the great renunciation at the age of 29 in search of supreme knowledge." Ramagrama is 30 miles to the east. "The Koliyas obtained one of the eight parts of the Buddha's relic which they enshrined here and built a magnificent stupa and worshipped for a long time. Buddhist literary sources mention that Emperor Asoka wanted to open and obtain the Buddha's relic to build eighty-four

thousand minor stupas throughout his vast empire. However, the emperor did not touch the precious relic out of the request made by Dragon king and people of Ramagrama. This surviving single original relic stupa standing 7 meters high on the bank of the Jharahi River is the most important stupa of its kind in the whole of the world." Ramagrama is a place that feels very much at peace with itself.

The wedding season is very much upon us. A marriage in a Hindu culture is not just between two people, it is a joining of two families under the umbrella of Hinduism. While the vast majority are arranged marriages, it seems that the couple's preferences are often given due consideration. In recent days, a lovely daughter of my Nepali family was married. Over recent weeks, ladies from the girl's family have travelled over the border to India on numerous occasions to purchase fabrics to give as presents to the groom's family. The groom's family has done likewise. The wedding takes place over many days, and I was delighted to be invited to the actual wedding and the reception hosted by the groom's family two days later. The wedding was an ocean of love. I have never seen so much love and joy radiate between a couple and from all of the guests. Wonderful food was in abundance, but I was pleased to see that there was no alcohol. The ladies' fabrics, especially the bride's, were beautiful and truly splendid.

I relished the opportunity to visit a local school of 400 children. In simple, but adequate, conditions the children are a credit and an inspiration in how they welcome their education. They are all given a modest meal each day. To appreciate the balancing act between the needs of the family and the children's education, it is noteworthy that when the land needs to be worked, school attendance declines.



The cauliflower, papaya, and orange season are now with us. I have extended a visa for the first time in over 30 years. My current 90-day visa was due to expire in a few days but, with the extension, I can now remain in Nepal until next year.

May the New Year bring you a mind as calm as still water, free from anger, worry, and restlessness.

## The Water Buffalo