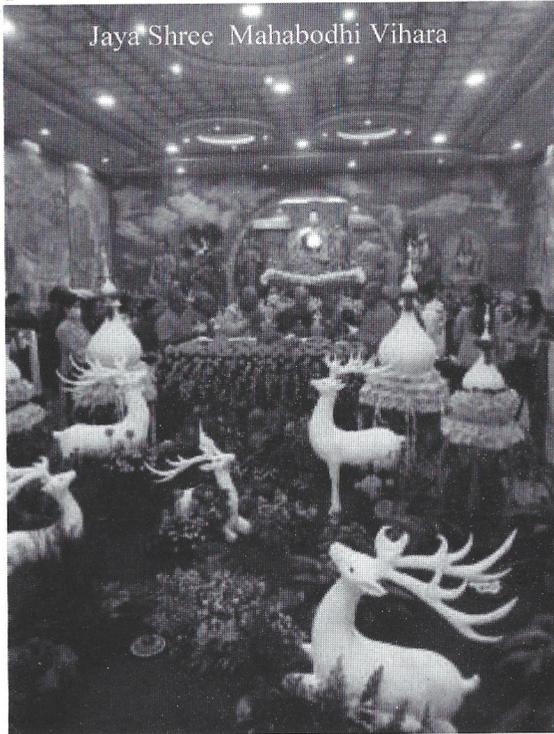


In Buddha's Footsteps

In early January, although my warm blanket successfully entices me to stay a little longer, I focus on my morning duties and depart my guest house by 04.00. With two bananas in my pocket for the "break of my fast", the skins are welcomed by the first cow I meet. The aroma of fresh Tibetan bread mingles with the morning chill across empty streets. Queuing at the Mahabodhi Temple slowly builds, until a large crowd awaits the Temple's opening at 05.00. This is an ideal time to focus on my Lamrim meditations and enter into Zazen, just being. While I am the only person who is not from an Asian country, I am blessed to be surrounded by monks from across the Asian Buddhist world.

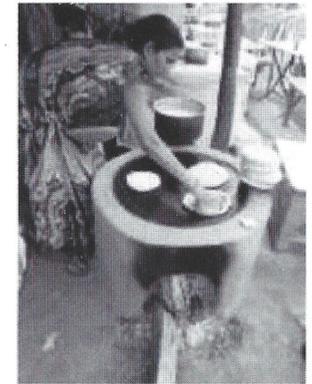


Circumnavigating the Temple on the upper deck for my four walking meditations, my hands are clasped behind my back, with a straight posture, while my head is tipped to 45 degrees. Occasionally looking up, it seems like I am the old man on the inside lane of a motorway blissfully traveling at 30-mph while others fly past in the outside lane seeing the 70-mph speed limit as a challenge. Below, there are many individual meditation tent-style pods with nets to keep mosquitoes at bay. Small plate offerings of flower heads and extensive arrangements of flowers create breathtaking displays, and ensure that the area from the middle path to the lower ground is a colourful display of Buddhist devotion. At times, my meditations become insular, almost disconnected from that which surrounds. When I look up, I am in awe of the beauty of everything that is the Mahabodhi Temple especially the devotion of others. My mornings at the Temple conclude by 06.15. After giving assistance to those less fortunate, and picking up Tibetan bread wrapped in newspaper, I go for my morning visit to the chai stall to enjoy two cups of steaming hot chai with the bread.



I had the good fortune to visit the Tergar Monastery for a third time. The monastery is the Meditation Community of Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche. In the middle of the Butsudan (a Buddhist altar), a monk sat in deep meditation. I have been blessed to have "a glimpse of the sacred relics of Buddha and his two prominent disciples Sariputta and Maha Moggallana," at Jaya Shree Mahabodhi Vihara. The energy in the Temple enthralled, and I was at one. It was notable that all those in attendance were finely dressed. With my new Indian SIM, I was able to share the ambience live with my wife in the UK.

To feed the Himalayan influx, local villagers migrate into the town to cook Tibetan bread on wood-fired, stone-built hot plates. These are housed in simple bamboo and plastic sheeting structures. The temperature in Bodhgaya has now risen into the high 20s. With the increase, many Himalayans have departed for their journey back to the mountains. After their departure, the villagers dismantled the structures and returned to their homes. The town is now a lot quieter, although smaller groups from Thailand and Sri Lanka have begun to arrive as the temperature increases.



With my flight back to the UK approaching, I am making the most of the plentiful supply of vitamin D. A traditional 45-year-old Indian bed is my perfect sun lounger and is wonderful for my back. Having embraced the opportunity for my 7.5-month winter retreat last July I will return to the East Riding towards the end of February. I look forward to seeing my wife and our home, opening up my painting and decorating business for the summer, meeting with spiritual friends, and attending the Stamford Bridge Probus. As the summer unfolds, I will become more aware of how my Buddhist practice of the past months has seeped into me.

When time permits, I am happy to meet with individuals or groups.
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The Water Buffalo