

In Buddha's Footsteps

Last winter in Bodhgaya, a cycle rickshaw man ferried me around four times a day. But now that I stay closer to the centre, I don't have much need for either an auto or a cycle rickshaw. However, as things slow down for all businesses, taking at least two such journeys a day, not only saves my legs but also supports local trade. Riding in a rickshaw enables a deeper understanding of Indian society and is a superb way to travel short distances. Just before my departure, the glorious sunshine in Bodhgaya peaked at a very pleasant 31 degrees. Although I have returned to the UK after an estimated 30-plus "winter migrations" of considerable duration, I am beginning to realise that, this time, the culture shock of UK life will be as challenging as ever. While my countdown to going home to the UK is mainly focused on organising appointments, I am also mindful of the dramatic cultural changes that await me.

The day before leaving Bodhgaya was my last visit to the Mahabodhi Temple for this year's winter retreat. Like on similar occasions here, the Golden Temple in Amritsar and the Maya Devi Temple in Lumbini, there was what I would describe as a "disconnecting from, and taking with" process to experience. My gradual acclimatisation to the UK generally begins about a week before I arrive home. This might include stop-offs in places like New Delhi and Kathmandu, passing on clothes or adjusting my diet. A cherished aspect of my time in Bodhgaya has been picking up my morning Tibetan bread to take with two cups of chai at my favourite chai stall. Strolling through the early morning streets, many are still sleeping under blankets, and the cries of babies can be heard from beneath.



I leave my guest house to take a sleeper train to New Delhi for my journey home. While my personal belongings, including new suits and shirts, are securely packed, what I truly value is within me and requires no bag to carry. Despite being only 61, according to Indian Railways I am officially a senior

citizen at 60. This entitles me to the bottom bunk in a four-berth carriage. Tasty food and drinks are served regularly at my seat. With clean sheets, pillows, and towels provided, this makes for a comfortable journey while watching the Indian countryside pass by. After two days at my hotel in New Delhi, I boarded a flight to Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday morning. The main purpose of the last 7.5 months has been my Buddhist practice. I could not have imagined receiving such good fortune and blessings. I was warmly greeted by my lovely wife in Manchester. As I landed, the events in Doha on Saturday are still to be revealed. By Thursday, Mr. Giardia made an appearance, and the following morning, he invited his friend Mr. Urinary Infection to join in my joys. My busy appointment diary was paused for a week as I negotiated between bed, sofa, and reclining armchair. Fortunately, after three courses of antibiotics, the worst was over, and my decorating business is now calling.



As I write this on Saturday 14 March, I acknowledge that many are very concerned about world events. (I say this whilst being careful to avoid any political bias.) While some question the narratives presented by our media, we are still told which countries are most aggressive and which are virtuous. However, a simple Google search of "Countries invaded since WW11 by China, France, Russia, UK and the US" might not reflect that which is understood. My personal view on current world events is that, ultimately, they could lead to a more peaceful and harmonious world. A Buddhist believes we all possess "Buddha Nature"—a pure, enlightened essence. This has the potential to achieve Buddhahood, enlightenment, and inner peace. Over the summer, I plan to explore various aspects of a Buddhist life that lead to inner peace and, ultimately, enlightenment.

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