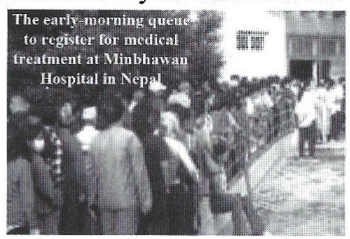
In Buddha's Footsteps

Almost immediately after arriving home in the UK in February from seven and a half months in India and Nepal, my health has been somewhat of a challenge. After a urinary infection and then two kidney stones that required a stent to be fitted between my kidney and bladder for 14 weeks, I am now relieved to have finally said goodbye to the stent. This is now replaced with a second stent for 10 days. In some ways, the stent caused more discomfort than the reason it was put in.

Impermanence is with everything to which we grasp so tightly. Good health, especially as our youth becomes a mere memory, is more appreciated as we wake each morning to a new day. The bar for measuring good health as we approach our advanced years is wisely lowered. In places like the Maya Devi Temple, Lumbini and the Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, I have witnessed the most breathtaking displays of flowers made each day as offerings; for Buddhists, flowers represent impermanence. One day they are full of youth and beauty. The next they are already ageing and greeting their death.



While many in India and Nepal will experience similar health challenges that I have, they do not enjoy free access to a health service like the NHS that I was fortunate to receive at York Hospital. While a small percentage can afford private health care, for many even buying simple medicines is beyond their financial means. In the Lumbini area of Nepal, while the hot summers reach temperatures of over 40 degrees, it is the winter that takes more lives. Across the Vale of York, we have all experienced the temperature inversion over winter months. The inversion in Lumbini is much greater and more severe; it is caused by being trapped between the high



The early-morning queue to register for medical treatment at Minbhawan Hospital in Nepal

mountains of Kashmir and the mighty Bay of Bengal. I have witnessed January in Lumbini and, although I am blessed to have tailored-fitted winter clothes, warm nutritious food and appropriate accommodation, the inversion still penetrates my core at times. Without access to medical care, warm clothing, shelter, and food, many local people succumb to the persistent thick fog and damp cold air.

One of Buddhism's fundamental teachings is the six perfections: Giving – Moral Discipline – Patience – Effort – Concentration and Wisdom. During my previous visit to Lumbini, I was blessed to meet an inspirational Buddhist nun from Vietnam. She asked me a most profound question: how can we receive if we do not give? Giving is not just about money; we can give in many ways, including with our time or a simple smile.

I am already aware that the health challenges I have faced over the past five months will have a significant effect on my Buddhist practice. My karma has meant that I was born in a country with a health service that has nurtured me with kindness and an unprecedented commitment to serve. When I walked out of York Hospital in May with a newly fitted stent and feeling rather weak, I looked back at the hospital and to me it was a Buddhist Temple. I see those that work inside the hospital as Buddhas. While being humbled by their kindness, compassion and wisdom, I was also immensely inspired by them all.

In North Yorkshire, the second most popular first language is Nepalese. This is probably due to the number of Gurkhas who serve with the British Army at Catterick Garrison. As a country, the UK will always be indebted to Nepal. Personally, it is a debt I can never repay. Nepal has changed my life. Thanks to Nepal, my body and mind were both healthy enough to respond positively to the health challenges of the past few months. Throughout it all, I was mindful that suffering is merely purification of my past negative actions.

In a few weeks, if I have the good fortune to receive Buddha's blessings, I hope to be flying to Kathmandu en route to Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha. Given my knowledge and experience of the Lumbini area, I hope, with the help of good friends, to be in a position to assist some of those who find the winter months challenging.

Rejoice in your good fortune and cherish all living beings.

Email:waterbuffaloibf@gmail.com **The Water Buffalo**

THIS MONTH'S FRONT COVER

This month's front cover is by Harry Sykes and shows Aldby Park, overlooking Scrayingham. Aldby Park was built in 1726 on the site of what was once a castle for Edwin, the King of Northumbria. The land, which has been in the Darley family since 1557, sits on a bend of the River Derwent.