

In the footsteps of the Buddha

Pilgrimage 2014

Newsletter



The Sangha Walks With the Buddha

By Brother Pháp Dung and Sister Hiến NghiêM

Our thirteen day pilgrimage ended with Brother Shantum gifting us a traditional yellow orange thread to be tied around our wrist to commemorate the completion of our spiritual journey. In Hindi, the thread is called a “sutra” - appropriate for our pilgrimage which was themed, “Following the Steps of the Buddha”. We all are now linked



together by our two week journey, by our shared memories of steps taken on sacred sites, by our personal inner transformation and by our deeper understanding of India and Buddhism. We return home with more than just pictures and souvenir gifts. As Shantum shared in his last remarks, our spiritual journey will continue at home. India is a place of deep spiritual transformation, a place where myths and modernity mingle - a place that never leaves your heart.

The Wonderful Colors of the Sangha

Our pilgrimage was special because everyone on the trip was required to be a practitioner, and to have attended at least one retreat organized by Plum Village. We were encouraged to practice during the journey while sitting on the bus, walking, eating and interacting with everyone we met. Our delegation were in total 60 practitioners from Germany, Holland and England, America, Ireland, France, Australia, Switzerland and even India. There were two lay dharma teachers, many OI members, and eight monastics – four monks (Brothers Pháp Xả, Pháp Chương, Pháp Lý and Pháp Dung) and four nuns (Sisters Bi NghiêM, Giác NghiêM, HiêM Hạnh and HiêM NghiêM). The presence of mindfulness practitioners contributed to the richness and depth of our experience. It was a retreat on wheels, immersed in the spirituality, history, sounds, smells, sights and tastes of India.

At the magnificent Bodhi Tree, we had a chance to see how the rich colors of our own sangha had its place amidst the colors of every other Buddhist tradition. On our first morning, a small group of us woke early to walk to the Maha Bodhi Temple before sunrise. We walked in silence, mindfully, feeling at home even though many of us were there for the first time. We prostrated on the cool damp stone and circumambulated the temple barefoot before finding an open area for sitting meditation. Saffron-robed monks from Thailand were chanting in Pali up ahead, young Sri Lankan nuns and their white-clad disciples were chanting to our right, and to our left, about 20 Tibetan monks were prostrating towards the tree with speed and vigor on their boards.



Ahead to our left we heard the familiar sound of a Taiwanese temple bell and close by we heard Vietnamese words from another delegation of pilgrims. Sister Hiên Hạnh prepared tea, and we sat following our breathing, opening our hearts to listen to the present moment - a colorful, fragrant, mystical moment.

The rest of our delegation gradually assembled in silence, and soon we were enjoying Brother Pháp Xả chant the evening verse for the morning's sitting, because he knew that it would contain the lines about sitting stably under the Bodhi Tree.

Tourist to Pilgrim

The tour challenged everyone to find balance between traveling as a tourist and being a pilgrim, between experiencing the superficial and mundane and touching something deep within our spirit. We were challenged in many aspects: by the sight of crows feeding on the carcass of a cow along the pathway, by the flight of yellow butterflies dancing in the sunlight, by the skinny children chanting for a handout, or by the peddlers scratching at our side for a purchase. What we saw in our daily outings reverberated when we returned to the comforts of our hotels with fine dining and air-conditioned rooms.

The circle sharing times gave us the occasion to voice our joy and challenges of the day. We could express ourselves and be heard, and connect our shared experiences. As one pilgrim shared, "We are not here only to have a good time, to take pictures or to be charmed by India". The trip was a spiritual journey, an opportunity to look deeply at ourselves and at our passage in life thus far. We had a chance to live with and accept each other, supporting one another as a spiritual family.

Whenever we practiced mindful walking, interacting, and looking deeply at the people and sights with eyes of awareness, we were truly pilgrims. Each sight became sacred through the depth of our looking. Whether the Bodhi Tree is real depends on our true presence in the present moment. We used the practices that the Buddha had taught, to stop and to truly be present and in contact with our body, feelings, and emotions. We had many opportunities to sit quietly at the sites, follow our breathing, and contemplate the life and meaning of our Root Teacher.

The Buddha as a Sangha

Thay has shared many times that the next Buddha to be born will be in the form of an enlightened community. Many times during our journey, the presence of the Buddha, Thay and all our ancestral teachers could be felt within our collective. We saw how precious it is to travel as a four-fold community of practice, trying our best to apply the teachings in every moment. The presence of the Sangha protected and embraced us, allowing us the time and space to call both our joy and pain by their true names. The dharma felt alive in our delegation, and not just as something of the past.

At the summit of Vulture Peak, we chanted the Heart Sutra as an offering to the Buddha and our spiritual ancestors. As soon as we began the chant, a gentle blessing of rain fell on our gathering. We remained focused until the very end of the chant, by



which time the rain had passed as quickly as it had come, and we felt a sense of magical coordination with Earth and Sky. One pilgrim shared later in our circle gathering that the culmination of conditions - rain, chant, Vulture Peak, the teaching of Thay on the no birth, no death nature of clouds, the recent passing of her daughter, and the presence of her dharma friends - all these elements united and invigorated her entire body and mind. She felt her tears merging with the rain and her pain softening with a gentle smile of acceptance. Her consciousness shifted. She felt the real presence of her daughter for the first time, no longer as an intellectual understanding but as a living reality. Her child was smiling as she smiled - in perfect communion.

The Buddha shared that the true Dharma will be his real continuation. Wherever the living Dharma is practiced, the Buddha is also present, and the living Dharma can only be found within a living Sangha. It is not in books or YouTube lectures, but in the way we can live a moment or an interaction with deep awareness, understanding and love. In minute subtle moments along our journey, when we noticed the morning light was gold, or simply enjoyed the river gently flowing, or when we sat or walked with peace, or caught the glimpses of each other's eyes, in all these moments lived with vivid awareness, we could sense the presence of the Buddha in our midst.



Looking with the Eyes of Compassion

Our eyes could not possibly look away, close shut or be numb to the amount of suffering and poverty that presented itself during our pilgrimage. Each day when we left our protected hotels and when we stepped off our buses, we saw it and felt it. For those in India for the first time, it was challenging and even unbearable on a few occasions. The beggars knew every mental trick in the book for they were the storehouse of many tourist behaviors who had come before. They were smart, and many of us, accustomed to the sterile environment of Western society, where the aging, sick and crippled are far from sight, were unprepared for such strong stimulus. Some of us felt weakened as the trip continued amidst this strong poverty. Sometimes, we returned on to the bus as if it was a haven of relief, fresh water for those dried from the emotional heat - a relief from the dust, squawk, and neediness of the Indian commotion.



In some sense our experience could be compared with that of the young Siddhartha when he left his protected palace and entered the market place. Supposedly, after witnessing the sight of the sick, the aged, the dying, and the peaceful one, he awoke from his dream and began his spiritual journey. We too were awakened to the reality of life, the poverty of India, and the richness of people's hearts. In our lives back home, with plenty of material comforts and external distractions, we may have had few opportunities to look deeply at ourselves and the world; now the poverty of India offered us a chance to reflect and to touch the spiritual realm and to find a deeper meaning for our lives.

Black gold between mountains and rivers

A few miles from Bodhgaya, our Sangha walked the edges of rice fields to the stupa commemorating the place where legend has it that the young village girl named Sujata offered kheer to the exhausted ascetic Siddhartha. Ahead of us flowed the river Niranjana on whose banks it is said Siddhartha fainted. In the distance, the sharp Dungasiri Mountains projected upwards above the palm trees - the very mountain caves where Siddhartha practiced austerities.

We trod in single file between the rice plots careful not to fall down into the water-filled paddies. We saw village women in the distance effortlessly balancing a bundle of rice stalks on their heads, crossing the field with ease and grace. We passed others making buffalo dung patties: "black gold", as they call it. They were kind enough to let us join them. And so some of us did, digging our fingers deep into the warm, moist, fragrant, black treasure, and forming it into simple discs with a hand-slap. Although we lacked their skill, it was a pure and simple opportunity to practice the mind of no-discrimination: seeing the lotus in the mud, and cherishing the treasure in the dung, the most precious fuel in the region.

Bringing the Buddha home

Some of us who had a chance to stop in the middle of the green rice field could feel the quiet and the peace, and sensed the harmony around and within us. The sharp rocky mountains protruding afar were poetically balanced by the gentle sinuous river, just as they were in the Buddha's time. We could see the appeal of the challenge of the caves to the young man. We also see the immense peace and beauty of the natural world. Not far from here is where Siddhartha, after six years of searching, found the middle way. He no longer had to strive for an escape from this world but realized the true interbeing nature of things and thus freed himself from its bonds. Some place nearby was where he made the great vow to help all beings realize this same truth. As we stood there, we felt grateful to the land that supported his efforts, to the mountains and rivers, to the rice fields and kusa grass, and to the village children and their families.

Now some of us have a more endearing understanding of our source teacher – a warmer and closer relationship that will help us touch him within ourselves and within the dharma that he transmitted. When we look into the star-filled sky, we can now look more with his eyes. When we walk with our Sangha, we can now make steps more with his feet, that is, gentle and free.



The insights continue

Monika Sauer-Meder – 10. November 2014

Zuhause

Ich bin angekommen
ich bin zuhause

Zuhause

in meinem Land
in meiner Stadt
in meinem Haus und Garten
ich bin zuhause bei meiner Familie, meinen Freunden, in meinem Umfeld

Zuhause

in meinem Körper
mit meinem Atem
mit meinen Empfindungen, Wahrnehmungen und Gedanken
jetzt im Augenblick gegenwärtig
ich bin zuhause bei mir selbst

Zuhause

in der großen weltumspannenden Sangha
getragen – geborgen – sicher

immer noch spüre ich die Kraft der Sangha in Indien
ich fühle tiefen Frieden und Freude in mir
aber auch ein bisschen Angst, diese wieder zu verlieren
alles ist Veränderung

Brother Pháp Dung

Lost and Found

Things are lost
Then some things are found
Left behind

Passed unnoticed

A moment of distraction

Between seat crevices on old Indian tour buses

In hotel closets and table drawers

So many memories

So many pictures

How many faces and how many names

If you forget or lose something

Someone will remember and find it again

If you delete it upon exit

No need for note taking

Unbound

Limitless

Brother Pháp Dung

What the Cows Moo

The plump cows of France are well tended to. In their rich and green pasture, they roam freely within the boundaries of electric fences. When hungry, they have fresh hay served and when thirsty, fresh water is even provided. Some even have personal doctors that give them special medicines when they are sick. It is a blissful life. Eating and sleeping are their main activities. They wait for their turn to enter into the large metallic barn, never wondering and asking each other why they are treated so well, nor asking themselves, "Where shall we go beyond the barn?"

The cows of India are homeless, roaming unbound in the streets and country side. They scrounge for food from one garbage pile to another, rummaging through plastic scraps and packaging, by-products of modern conveniences. They rest on the road side and sometimes at intersections, oblivious to the honking of passing traffic. Their bodies are cubist, with bones almost protruding through their skin. They wander aimlessly without owner or anyone to bother them. The Indian people have deemed them sacred animals. Their dark eyes are kind when we have a moment to peer into them. They seem to question with their lazy swinging tail, "Where we humans are going in such a hurry?"

Buffalo's gold

Stop and see

Not with your eyes or lens

Open and feel

The warmth of primordial richness

Only when you touch and spread it in your hands

Will its true nature and gold be revealed

Daring

Undiscriminating

Only then you will bow to your knees

And drink the precious water in the buffalo's footprint

(Do not be afraid of your suffering, avoiding or covering it up in so many ways. Only when you can stop and pay attention to its signal will you be able to see its true nature, know its cause and possibly find relief. Be daring and humble to what it may teach. Accept it as it is. It may be the only chance you have.)



Greet de Weger

I feel especially connected with the Plum Village Sangha these days. And think often of the first dharmataalk of Thay that I ever heard (in 2006, Thay was about 80 years old) in which he told about the Buddha being about 80 years old, inviting his disciples to go to the island within themselves and not to be dependent on a teacher. A wonderful lesson.

I just sent an email to Shantum and take some parts out of it, possibly this can be used (or not, or for a small part) for the sharing with the pilgrimage-group.

You asked for our experiences and observations.
Some points that are often in my mind now:

The first week at home I just didn't look at my to-do-list, and this was perhaps the best thing I have learnt a little bit better: life is possible without my habit-energy of working on a to-do-list ;-). Although I'm pulled back now to working hard, I am aware of and growing towards another way of life.

What I tell most people first about India is what I saw from the bus and in the streets. Somebody in the circle summarized it wonderfully as: vitality and equanimity.

I remember Shantum saying: everything you say about India is true, and the opposite is also true. So I know it is only a very small part of life that we have seen, but it was so different from what I expected, that I was really surprised.

Another thing that I remember very well is walking on Mother Earth in India. The Earth that the Buddha walked upon, and the same Mother Earth as in the Netherlands, we are not living so far apart.

I remember (hopefully I remember well) that Shantum mentioned that the Buddha was not satisfied with all kinds of exotic meditation techniques, because he was just looking for a way to handle normal human suffering. I was happy to hear that, to see more clearly the way that I myself want to go; sometimes you need to hear things many times in different ways before you really hear them.

I'm happy you and Shantum invited us to look at our experiences in a mindful way.
But this doesn't mean that what I write is important for other people... so please feel completely free to do nothing with it.

See you somewhere somehow!

With a smile,
Greet de Weger

Gratitude

Theresa

Dear Shantum,

Thank you, thank you for your generous and open hearted letter/email to us all. It has been of great comfort to me.

Arriving home from what for me was a most wonderful experience, has been difficult/perculiar.

In some way I have been feeling as if I am recovering from a sickness (maybe the cold I caught latterly). Lacking in any kind of energy for everyday life. Physically tired but mentally and emotionally absolutely full to over flowing!

I am still dreaming of India. Everything I do and see at times reminds me of something on the pilgrimage. But many things are different, for one thing the silence!!

I spent the first couple of days typing up my journal, written in rather a dull way really, but I was amazed at some of the really important moments I had missed out, but could still connect with.

I just want to say how deeply grateful I am to you and all your team. You all worked so hard to make sure that we all enjoyed every possible experience and opportunity. I always knew that I would only travel in India with you, and now I know my intuition was correct.

As I watched the aeroplane take off from the inside, I whispered a little message, 'thank you India for opening your heart to me and for teaching me to open mine.'

Love to you and your family and team.

with love and much appreciation
Theresa

Anke

Dear Shantum, Gitu, Anamika and as well Nandini,

thank you very much for your heartfelt letter with so many deep thoughts for our re-entry at home. I did really arrived quite well at my home. On the journey there had been some difficulties, beginning with the taxi-driver, who had not been those who picked me up at the hotel, but his very young brother – a wild rider of his car, who did the whole distance to Lucknow in about three and a half hour -, and ending in Hamburg after one taxitour and four flights where my luggage including the Buddha-statue didn't arrive with me. But don't worry: My inner Buddha did, and I felt so lucky and thankful for all the love and experience I



have got from you, the monastic sisters and brothers, our sangha and the so lovely and lively Indians, all the colours and especially the spirit of Buddha, so that I didn't worry about these difficulties.

I always like very much to arrive at home, and I'm very grateful to have a home, my garden, but more than this to be a part of my family: my sisters – my brother and one of my sisters and my father died already, my mother died when I was a child of nine years – my three children and my three grandchildren, my partner and not at least my friends within the groups to those I offer Qigong and meditation in the spirit of Buddha and the way I have learned by Thai and now as well by you and the monastic sisters and brothers.

On the last day of our journey the virus that was going around in our sangha (cough and laugh) visited me as well and until today the virus still enjoys to sit in my nose, my throat and my head; the four times the aircrafts were going down from heaven to the earth I was really suffering.

Here in Hamburg we have got autumn, and I think it is a very good season for re-entry, because the nature is showing us how to do: The trees for example let their leaves go for a dance with the wind and later on to become new earth for new growing and at the same time they concentrate and conserve the essence of spring and summer and bring it down to the roots. And that is the way I do, and so the experience with you and the sangha to get in touch with the life of Buddha, his spirit and dharma, your wonderful deep way to walk with us on the traces of Buddha and as well of Thay, and as well all the other experiences in your lively country (they have got the time, we have got the clocks, they are in contact, we are so busy, ...) will become parts of my roots, there will be a wider fundament for my life. Thank you so much!

I regret that I didn't write earlier but I had and have still got a problem with my internet connection (just now I use the laptop and connection of my partner). In fact I did not really worry about it, because the two weeks I stood with you in India I didn't use the internet and I had only a very few contact to my family and my partner, just enough that they had not to worry about me. I think it is not so bad to recognize that it is a far way from India to Germany and from Germany to India. And you and I, we know that there is the spirit connection to our family and as well to the sangha without internet, sms, phone, ... (In my life I have got the chance to sit and wait and hear to my heart when my three children were doing social work at more or less dangerous sites in Africa, Indonesia and Guatemala)

Of course you can use my letter or parts of my letter for information and as well you can give my name to people who are interested in the transforming journeys you offer. I think that there will be some photos which tell a lot about the way you be a part and at the same time the leader and teacher of the travelling sangha.

Perhaps you like to know that I gave a donation of 200€ to the eiab, because in reality it is more a donation of you than of me.

When I got in contact with buddhath I already wrote that there is a place to stay for you in Hamburg whenever one of you will be here.

With warm regards to all of you

Anke



Gisela Chaponet

Dear Shantum

Thank you so much for this marvellous experience we could live with you.

Your presence, your teaching, your organization.
I'll never forget this time.

Since 5 days I have arrived with my body in Germany, but not with my mind.

It will need some more time. To-day I went through the city like a phantom looking at all the people who were busy.

I am still sitting under the Bodhitree with the sunray shining on my face, sitting at the river looking to the lotus floating on the water and many other moments like this

I close my eyes and I am in India with you and the sangha.

Happiness for you and your family and all the people who have worked to organize this pilgrimage

Gisela Chaponet



Insight poems

Annabelle Zinser

Finding it Everywhere
Breathing in – breathing out
There is just breathing
Rumble – Bumble with the loving Sangha in the Bus
Rajgir, Bodh Gaya, Lumbini, Sravasti
Step by step
There is just walking
The Frangipani blossom in my hand
There is just smelling
Isn't that enough?

Engelbert Jennewein

Personal Insight
In old days
- Blood (bloody feet)
- Sweat (sweating 'cause of long walking)
- Tears (maybe tears in front of the shine)

Nowadays
- A/C air-condition in the bus
- Potholes and bumps
- Mindful walking, talking and breathing

Experiencing
- Long bus rides/ plastic rubbish/ waiting for others/ Shantum's long talking

Practicing
- Patience, tolerance, acceptance

Learning
- Breathe | Walk | Talk
- Yes, but its slow slow, dhiredhire



Gisela Chaponet

My heart is like a door
Which opens a little bit more every day
Golden light is coming in which spreads in all parts of my body and
enlightens my mind.
It's like a sunrise in the morning
The more time passes by, the more I feel this warm feeling
Maybe this is happiness?

Margot Mazuel

Ich bin dankbar dass ich hier ilin kalrk
Danke Shantum
Danke Sangha
Danke dem Leben
Unglaubliches Indien!
Wie es in der Werbrug heißt

Sister Giac Nghiem

In the Garden of Lumbini
(GERMAN)

Nelliek Van der Kraan

Inside and Outside, all falling together,
Pure nature of love

On the river of life
Lotus flowers are floating
A never ending journey
I saw the jewels in their heart

Carolien Balt

To see suffering and self suffering
Fade away in the radiance
of deep looking eyes.
India, you learned me so much



Karin Haider

Border experience – experience with the own limits - in Buddha's nearness

Limits of experiences

I – You – We

Healthy – Ill

Poor – Rich

Individual – Group

Loud – Silent

On the way – Arrived

Thanks for the endless variations of new experiences

Grenzerfahrung - in Buddhanähe

Grenzen der Erfahrungen

Ich - du - wir

Gesund - krank

Arm - reich

Individuell-Gruppe

Laut - leise

Unterwegs - angekommen

Danke für die unendliche Vielfalt neuer Erfahrungen

Peter Widmer

If you meet the Buddha,
You have arrived in India

Mandeep Arora

Intro in German (?)

Life is beautiful but ? is ? struck together moment by moment

We discover this step by step –

Trying to find Buddha in us

It is journey we shared with our friends –

Highs and lows

But everything flows

Let it flow/ with glow

Let it flow

Br Phap Ly

Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha
Let the Buddha walk
Through India of the past and present
Happiness

Paul Rees

Dear Buddha

My inspiration

My teacher

My friend

I am sorry it has taken so long to visit you. And I was too late, seeing you laying here in Kushinagar, under a golden shawl.

Dear Paul, No problem. You haven't missed me. I have always been part of you

Ana

Was I there as the sun, one great red ball, set across the rice fields?

Was I there on the very spot where Buddha was born?

Was I there walking with both Buddha and Jesus, in deep conversation, learning about love?

Was I there as another beloved relation was finally laid to rest upon the fire?

Did I travel upon the Ganga and share the new chant to great father sun with sister, as the ruins first rays reached the boat across the water like an umbilical cord.

Did I again shed a tear at the re-enactment of the Buddha's death

Was I there the misty morning sitting by the river's edge where the Buddha's body was burnt?

Watching the flashes of silver as the fish jumped and the defining and existing of the Indian flowers?

Did I walk with the Sangha under the hot sun through authentic village in the countryside.

Did I actually enjoy the knowledge of spending time with so many children in their happy school?

Was I there at sunset on vulture peak?

Did I manage all those steps with Thay's help?

Was I beneath the Bodhi tree listening to the evening chant

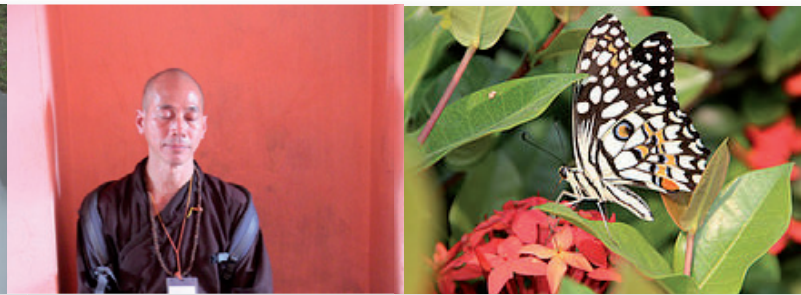
Was I there in the Jettagrove where the Buddha manifested around me as a butterfly?

Yes I was there –

Walking in the footsteps of Buddha with friends, many Sangha people, many nations, breathing as one.

unknown

Der Bodhibaum ist längst vergangen,
Zu den Früchten kann man nicht gelangen,
Aber fest in Hier und Jetzt,
Blüht der Bodhibaum zu guter Letzt.



Verena Bottcher

How beautiful the morning mists
And the quiet flow of the river
I smile, my heart open, my mind at peace

Every sound, every image
Gives rise to thoughts, to feelings
All these perceptions serve as a mirror
Showing me the patterns of my habit energies

As the electricity in our dining hall breaks down once again
I deeply enjoy the sound of silence

Klaus Meder

My Indian Journey
Touched by the live in India
I see also its beauty
Walking on the footsteps of Buddha
I am aware of every step
Hearing Shantum's teaching feeling the energy of the Sangha
I get closer to the Dharma

Urte Sagar

On the road, a cart
In front of the cart, a buffalo,
On the cart, a man
In his hand, a smart phone
India

India and
the rest of the world
are one

The man on the cart, the smart phone in his hand
The person in the bus, the camera in his hand
regarding the man on the cart....?

My practice ... needs to be deepened

Philippe

In Varanasi
too much to see
I saw death
I let it all go...

From Einstein I learned about the relativity
of space and time
From Shantum I learned about the relativity
of spirituality,
which he so eloquently expressed as bla bla bla...

Stefan

Wont(?) stroke the most during the travel on the footpath of the Buddha
1. The deep religious and spiritual atmosphere at the Mahabodhi temple
at Bodhgaya
2. The moment at the river on October 20 in Kushinagar. That was the
time when my mo (?) died I found out later
3. The Lumbini's peace stupa and the temple besides where big lotus are
used to pray a mantra

Burghard Lippke

Im Angesicht des Leidens ist es gut, mich weit zu öffnen und das Leben
durch mich hindurch fließen zu lassen.

Anna

Bei allen Abenteuern, die in meinem Leben noch auf mich warten, kann
ich sicher sein im Schutz von Buddha, Sangha und Dharma.

unknown

Ich bin da
Und ich bin darüber
Froh und dankbar

Du bist da
Und ich bin darüber
Froh und dankbar

Die Sangha, ist da
Und ich bin darüber
Froh und dankbar

All die unterschiedlichen
Menschen sind da
Und ich bin darüber
Froh und dankbar





Nanne Hessel

Peace in oneself
Peace on ones human relationships
Peace in the world

Josef Leuchtner

Dear Buddha,
I have come to walk in your footsteps. Having worked in many directions, both on solid ground and on a more slippery ground, the depth of my mind. With the mindful help of the Sangha, I trust I make a significant step into an additional direction, which is my much spiritual path.

Angie

Breathing In
Breathing Out
My mind body and spirit are full of India, an incredible journey of bump bump bump – true Sangha
Breathing Out
My mind body and spirit are full of India, an incredible journey of bump bump bump – true Sangha

Catherine Hoskyns

Maintenance
I like the wise words of the Buddha
About the cart tied up with string
Too much maintenance required to keep it going
I shall be 80 next year, near the age when the Buddha died
I intend to keep going for the moment
But I hope in the future
To have wisdom enough to know when
too much maintenance is required

Paula

In Holland life is structured. Old people live in old people house, animals in farms or house or whatever, everything has its separate place – In India I see lots of things together in the street.

Gabrielle – Heller Lotus des Herzens

Liebe Sangha
Ich dankbar all meinen
Ahnen und fühle mich
tief verbunden mit ihnen.
Ich bin das Ergebnis
Unzähliger Leben – kosmische
Erlebnisse und bin nun angekommen
In den Fußspuren
Buddhas
Buddha in meinen Tun
In meinem Herzen
In meinem Geist
Du bist in mir Buddha
Ich bin in dir Buddha
Und wir gehen zusammen nach
Deutschland mit Freude und Liebe



Shantum

Who am I, enquired the Buddha
I am you and you are me
We inter-are
It is easier to realize this in a harmonious Sangha and he suggested a 4 fold Sangha. 2600 years later we walk in his footsteps and live his model. This is happiness
Where am I, asks the Buddha
It helps to know that he is still enjoying the sunset from vulture peak, Sitting under the Bodhi tree, enjoying the birds, Eating kheer from Sujata and making a cushion from kusa grass, while the buffalo boy's mother makes cow patties to cook dinner.
Some friends from Europe join her for a while. He walks through the ripening paddy fields that his father has ploughed. Meets his friends to share his insights and a path of awakening, then gets on the bus again. He gets cremated by the Hiranyamati river, reflecting on his life.
And making sure, no one is kept in the dark, we cross the borders and boundaries between birth and death and each other and enjoys lunch at the Kings hunting lodge.
We are reminded that for the Sangha to remain harmonious, we need the help of mindfulness trainings.
To have a common ethical understanding that transformation of the terrorist is possible.
Is everyone's second body here?
Who am I, enquires Thay
Where am I, enquires Thay
I am not in the stupa and I am not outside the stupa either



Indian Street Life

Playing children
Walking cows
Beautiful woman in sari
Buzzing bugs
Piles of trash
Old people sitting
Sleeping dogs
Barbers working
Goats eating
Waiting men in their shops
And motorcycles and card
TOET
TOET TOET
TOET TOET TOET



Greet de Weger

Walking in Buddha's footsteps
I touch the earth
And I know that I'm alive
Very thankful to walk on this path

Monika Sauer-Meder

Walking between heaven and earth
Walking on the paths of Buddha
Touching the earth with my feet
Looking at the blue sky with my eyes
Feeling the warm and golden sun on my skin
Breathing in –
Smelling the taste of India –
Breathing out
Being between heaven and earth
Getting close to Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
Feeling a big calmness, peace, a silent harmony and happiness in me.
Thank you Buddha, thank you Thay
Thank you Shantum,
Thank you Sangha

unknown

Awake
Alive
We breathe
All life
Kindly received
Everything dissolves

Maya

3 neue Gründe glücklich zu sein
1. Ich konnte Buddhas Wirkungsstätten besuchen
2. Ich hatte die Chance, dies mit der Sangha zu erleben
3. Es ist keine Notwendigkeit mehr für eine Pilgerreise
I have arrived – I am home

Ute

Außen – Outer Journey
Indien ist für mich wie das Leben selbst. Die Reise macht meine Haut dünner und dünner – Tag fuer Tag fuehle ich mich offener und verletzlicher zugleich.

Innen – Inner Journey
Zusammenfließen – mit der Sangha. Hand in Hand auf Buddhas Weg
Verstehen, unterstützen, lachen, trösten, singen
Danke – Sukhriya

Angelika (Kushinagar While Walking Meditation)

Gentle morning rising
Embraces the grass
Deep and clam
The river is floating
Carrying white lotus blossoms
My heart is at peace

Birgit

Ich war/bin sehr glücklich in Indien und habe jeden Tag als Geschenk empfunden. Diese Reise war so wunderbar organisiert, wir haben so viel gesehen und erlebt, daB mein Herz gauz voll davon ist. Die Meuschen hier – so freundlich
Das Leben – so viel farbig und bunt.
Die Tiere und Pflauzen – so faszinierend und aufregend.
Die Landschaft – so abwechslungsreich und fruchtbar.
Ich habe auch die Armut gesehen
Die Not der Menschen
Gestank und den Müll
Ich habe mein Herzen geöffnet
sie haben zurückgelächelt
Und geweint
Es ist, wie es ist.
Wo der Buddha gegangen ist
eine überwältigende Erfahrung
Die heiligen Orte, wo auch Stille war
Der Buddha in mir – er begleitet mich
Danke Indien, danke Shantum & crew, danke Sangha



Tina

Golden feet
Shade of the tree
Red stupa bricks
Wishy rain on Vulture peak
I saw your compassion as the snail crawled on your hand
I saw your patience as you sat eating mindfully next to me
I saw your passion to serve and your shivopian humour
I saw your loving kindness as you hold me to hug the inner child tightly
I saw your suffering as you scratched your mangy body
I walked behind you...knowing you for real

Maria McLellan

In the footsteps of the Buddha
From Bamboo Grove to Jeta grove
I witnessed and experienced many times the flexible mind with huge tolerance and with the understanding that there is straight line, simply a guideline.
Namaste India

India (out of the purple bus)

I like your buffaloes
I like your tiny homes
I like your burning fire
I like your funny talk
I like your prayer
I like your music from the soul
You are living your life
I like your being together
I like your beautiful smile
Sacred earth
Land from the Buddha
Here we walked together
Bholzanu Diwati

Sister Bi Nghiem

Sitting on the bus
Watching the cows pass by
Cities, shops, villages and markets
Cars, goats and elephants
Rice fields, mountains and rivers –
Watching it all with amazement and great love
Looking for understanding, a solution
Finally letting it all be as is, merely observing
All seems so normal now – interbeing of cows and cars and all

Ingeborg Leuchtner

Oh Buddha
Von weit bin ich gekommen in dieses Land
Dankbar für die Möglichkeit, Dir so nah zu sein
Ich habe Deine Anwesenheit gespürt an vielen Orten
Am Geiergipfel, wo Du schon warst,
In Kushinagar, wo Du gestorben bist,
Und in Shravasti, wo Du viele
Lehrreden verfasst hast.
Eine Sehnsucht ist in mir entstanden, Dir leibhaftig zu begegnen.
Was für ein Glück – das Wissen hat sich fortgesetzt und in Thy auf wunderbare Art manifestiert.

Anonymous – as not worthy!

To come on a journey with Shantum Seth is to uncover a new joy at every step. His organization, his knowledge and will make sure that each of us learn more than a bit about the mystery of Buddha, his history and life while changes so dramatically, having taken a wife. The stories of abstinence and journeys so far intermingling with history of his country – India
So take up your mats pilgrims, sunscreen and hats, and strive to do better in the future – that's that!

Coppelia

I have no insight
I have no poem
Only an impression
Of a long winding river
Tall feathery purple elephant grass
On the banks
And white lotus blooms
Swirling softly
Downstream.

Saried women water buffalo herding
Rice paddy fields of golden green was transparent dragonfly in mindful gratitude, walk with the Buddha.





HAIKU

Begging scoundrel monks
Dressed in orange parachutes
Buddhas every one

JOSHU'S COW

In India the cows are oddly silent.
In India the cows don't moo.
Everything Mu's.

FOOTPRINTS:

Following in the footsteps of my teacher in the sand at the Jeta Grove.

The above one line poem goes with the enclosed photo.
was transparent dragonfly in mindful gratitude, walk with the Buddha.



Stephanie Judd

Diese Reise hat mir Buddha als einen Menschen gezeigt.
Wunderbare Erzählungen seiner Wanderungen, Stationen und
Begegnungen. Erzählt an Orten, an denen diese Geschichten spürbar
und greifbar sind - mit viel Freude geteilt - einfach in sich aufnehmen.

Luca Storch (age 14)

Ich habe gelernt, dass man nur durch ein Lächeln oder eine Geste
eine Person fröhlich machen kann.
Am schönsten fand ich den Ausflug am Dienstagmorgen,
als wir die Blüten in den Fluss gelegt haben.

Maire Eibhlin Nic Giolla Bhríde (Mary McBride)

The footsteps of the Buddha
Lorg means footsteps in Gaelic.
(My) Mindless footsteps
(My) Mindful footsteps
My unfolding footprint

Mick McEvan

Struggle - Ease
Regardless of how I perceive reality
Be it sick or healthy
Hot or comfortable
In silence or amongst the noise
In solitude or with the crowd
I realize I can always breathe in with ease and release
my craving and grasping
Smiling statues, stupas and relics I know I can always
walk with the Buddha within



Ute Storch

Hingabe

ich bin wieder in Deutschland -

alles ist so anders

wo sind die Farben, der Lärm, die Menschen, das Lachen,
meine Reise-Sangha...?

Hupen..Hupen..Hupen...der Müll

aber

ich genieße auch mein Zuhause - das eigene weiche Bett,
Herbstlaub, Stille...

auch Sicherheit, Vertrautheit...und Alltag

Und dann wieder Sehnsucht -

ich rieche am indischen Schal...

sofort kommen Bilder und ich fühle eine sprudelnde Freude
hochkommen

mein Herz ist weit und offen

wahre Hingabe - tiefe Demut

an den Strom des Lebens

das lernt mich Indien,

seine Menschen - die mir Ihr Leben so direkt zeigten, dass ich mich
nicht verstecken kann.

Manchmal ist es mir zuviel - aber ich kann mich nur aufmachen,
sonst müsste ich fliehen.

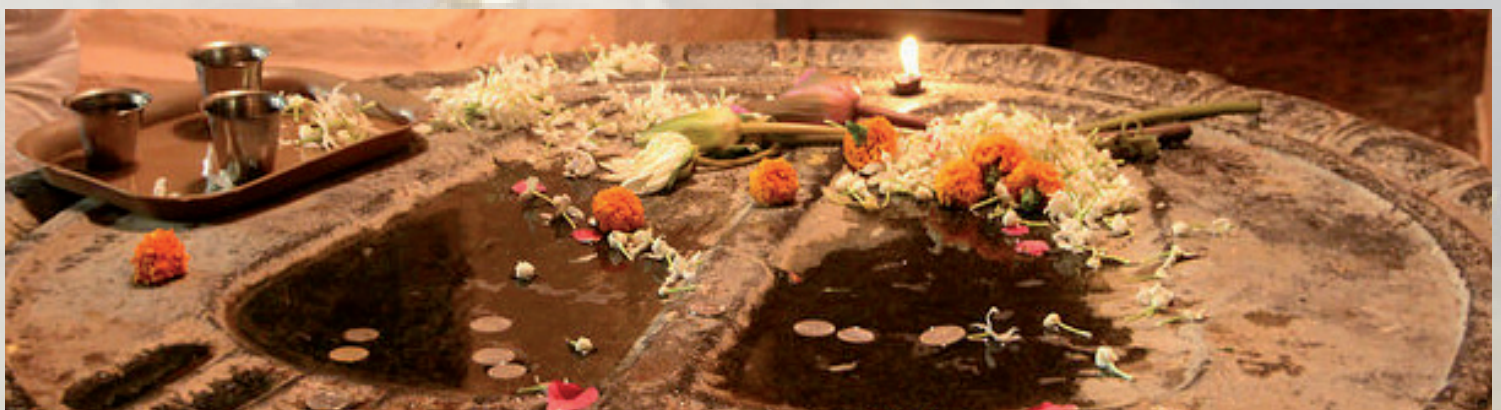
Und

Die Glocke - sie war so wichtig auf unserer Reise

Sie schaffte - Stille - Durchatmen - Achtsamkeit

Sie schaffte inneren Raum, wo der äußere manchmal eng war

Ich bin dankbar





Jadzia

So many people, so much noise
And yet the quiet from within emerges
Plays hide and seek - refusing to be held
And then surrenders.
Quiet and calm in the temple
Within - for now
for now

On The Buddhapath

Hurry hurry: Stop!
Pain, Rebellion, Conflict
Slowing, slower, slow
Moon illuminating
Dawn awakening
Sun shining
Buddha in me: Me in Buddha
Buddha in me: Me in Buddha

Ellen Esser

In old the old village of Uruvela
We met your children, dear Thay,
Now I understand:
Sravasti, Sundeta and all the others
They are still here,
With their smiles,
Their openness,
And eager of knowing

unknown

Where is the scotch tape? When will we pee?
How long till we get there? When will I see?
Lean back in silence
Sit under the tree
Together in Sangha
We are already free





Dear Thay, Dear EIAB pilgrimage sangha,

Welcome home and welcome to the here and now for those who have not arrived.

Thank you so much for your heartfelt letters in the last days, and experiences of re-entry.

I feel very grateful to all of you for coming and giving me the opportunity to share the Buddha's path in the way that we did. It was special since I had the opportunity to learn so much from you, and I feel I have another 70 teachers. It was a blessing to have our monastic sisters and brothers with us.

I realise it was quite an intense journey and getting home may seem like a culture shock (in reverse). Am glad that most of you have sangha friends, relatives and partners close by.

As I continue on the 'path of awakening', I thought I'd write just a few thoughts and recommendations for re-entry. I hope it will be useful. Sorry, it has taken me a few days to send this to you. I just arrived in Mussoorie to be with Gitu, Anamika and Nandini (our elder daughter) last night, after spending a couple of nights en route in Noida.

It was lovely to spend a day with my parents and my office in Noida. I feel so grateful to the Buddhapath team of Bina, Charu, Kamendra, Sunita, Mandeeep, Mathews and Jagdish, besides my family for all their support.

Re-entry is always a tricky business. As my friend Pico Iyer writes, "The last destination isn't the final place on the itinerary, but what happens when we get home and try to make sense of it." It is an opportunity to look at our familiar surroundings and habit patterns with our 'pilgrim's eyes'.

-We have all had an immersion into another cultural/spiritual reality. The pilgrimage we made together does not end with the air-trip home but will continue for the rest of our lives. Things will continue to emerge and deepen for us in years to come.

-Take some time, if you can. Don't rush back into your normal life and routine. Watch and witness what comes habitually and see if it truly nurtures well-being. You have some new perspectives from our experiences together and you can re-choose your life and view it anew. It is a precious time to be especially mindful.

-Share your pilgrimage with the people you love and people who are open and interested. Don't be disappointed if some people don't have the patience to hear everything right away. If you find it difficult to get started about speaking of the experience, share a few photographs and that will evoke questions. Your stories and transformation will continue to unfold. You could continue writing in your journal and sharing with others. It will affirm and deepen the power of our pilgrimage. Also share your experience of the rich teachings we received where you feel moved to do so.

-Stay in touch with other pilgrims in our travelling Sangha. We shared deep and powerful moments together and we have a special bond. I am loving hearing unfolding insights and processes, as you re-integrate into your familiar surroundings at home. Each letter you have sent is so valuable. Br Phap Dung suggested we put together a newsletter within a month and your contributions are most welcome. Verena Bottcher has kindly agreed to coordinate the effort. She will be writing to you and her email is verenaxs@gmail.com if you can forward your contributions to her.

-Rest and sleep more than usual and drink lots of water. We went through many physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual spaces together. Your body and mind will appreciate the time and space to integrate.

-Try and set aside time each day, for meditation, reflection and cultivation of practice. Try and read some sutras as I feel they will have a deeper meaning and association. During our journey we have generated an energy whose quality is easy to lose if we don't sustain it and then we will not be able to retain our insights and integrate them into our lives. Continuing with the 'strucks' and insight poems is another way to nurture reflection.

Part of my personal re-entry process asks me to reflect on how well the pilgrimage was facilitated and where it could be improved. Thanks for taking time to some of you who filled the feedback form. Those who did not, please do if you have the time. I have requested Bina to send it electronically. It is most useful to us, in our endeavour to improve. Thanks too for the suggestions on raising awareness about the pilgrimage to a wider audience, and encouraging others to take this journey. Thanks too to all of you to take so many of our 'propaganda' flyers and posters to put out at appropriate places.



Also if you want to send a quotable quote, which we can use for publicity, please do.
You could also write a comment (hopefully positive) on TripAdvisor on our site which is called Eleven Directions Day journeys.

If you have the energy, inclination and resources, do join us again or just come and visit us in Mussoorie/Dehradun.

I am looking forward to reading accounts of the journey if you write them up. Also photos from those who put it together. Would love to receive a CD/DVD of photos from anyone who can put it together. Also do tag Shantum, Eleven Directions and Buddhapath with the photos if you are using FaceBook. In fact it would be good to 'friend' and 'like' each other on FB if you are on. Stefan has kindly offered to find a way to post our photos on the web/cyber space together.

Each year, I send a few names at random of people who have been on the pilgrimage to people requesting information about the journey. I trust it would be OK to offer your name on such inquiries. If not, please do tell me.

For those who wanted to support social, educational and dharma work we are involved in through the non-profit Ahimsa Trust, you can send a cheque in the name of 'Ahimsa Trust (FCRA Account)' and mail to me at 309-B, Sector 15A, Noida 201 301, India. With it should be a letter saying that this money is for a donation. If you prefer to send the donation electronically, we can send you the bank details or you will find them on www.ahimsatrust.org. Incidentally, we put 10% to 15% of the income from the pilgrimage into the Trust's work. Thank you so much for the generous offering some of you already made.

Thanks again for being the Sangha body that helped share the Dharma and manifest the Buddha. I do hope our paths continue to meet. You are of course most welcome to India and our home.

With warmth and love,

Shantum and Gitu



Journey to Nowhere

We are all moving on a journey to nowhere,
Taking it easy, taking it slow.
No more worries, no need to hurry,
Nothing to carry,
Let it all go.

