

Buddhist Pilgrimage to India, January 2015
Spiritual Leader - Ajahn Brahmali - Bodinyana Monastery, Australia
Trip Organizer - Phalinee Sawangying - Perth, Australia

~ By Mary Dumka

I wrote this note in the airport at Varanasi, India on Jan. 21, 2015

My Buddhist Pilgrimage to India this January has been a wonderful experience. Our spiritual leader, Ajahn Brahmali from a monastery near Perth, Australia, said the purpose of the pilgrimage was to give us experiences so we could do the meditation called "Recollection of the Buddha". I feel this was well accomplished. When I meditate at home now, I can recollect the Buddha sitting peacefully in his kuti on Vulture's Peak and feel that same peace myself. Or I can imagine sitting in Deer Park, Sarnath, hearing the Buddha giving his first sermon, as if I'm there hearing him myself. It's very inspiring.

Before we visited each site, Ajahn Brahmali read out suttas given there by the Buddha and discussed the meaning thoroughly. Then on the site he would point out the important details. We often had time to meditate at the sites. Ajahn Brahmali was accompanied by 2 other monks and 4 nuns. It was wonderful getting to know the nuns and learning about their monastery.

Here is a summary of our tour (chronological re. the life of the Buddha, not the order we toured in):

- Our pilgrimage included Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of the Buddha and Kapilavatu, the town where he grew up. When he left home at 29 to search for a way to the end of suffering, he first studied under two prominent teachers of the day. When he realized they didn't have the answer he meditated in a cave on Pragh Bodhi, where he practiced austerities for about 5 years, believing suffering was the way to happiness, the prevalent belief in India at the time. But he did not achieve any results. Then, remembering a childhood experience of a beautiful meditation he wondered if happiness rather than suffering was the way to happiness.

He ended his austerities at Sujata's Village where Sujata offered him a bowl of rice gruel. He then sat under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya until he awakened. From here he travelled to Sarnath (Isipathana) where he taught his 5 former companions who had practiced austerities with him. They too awakened, letting him know that this path to happiness was teachable. The Buddha then wandered around northern India for the next 45 years, teaching the Noble EightFold Path to happiness.

- We visited the Bamboo Grove and the Mango Grove in Rajgir, his first two monasteries.
- We visited Vaishali, the place where he ordained the first group of nuns and spent his last rains retreat.

- We visited the Jetavana Grove in Savati where he spent 24 rains retreats (in the rainy season it was too difficult to travel so he would stay in one spot for 3 months).
- And we visited Kushinigar, the place where he attained paranibbana.

I have such gratitude to have been able to visit all these places where the Buddha taught and meditated.

Qi Gong

I had another amazing experience this past year. In the spring I attended a week long Qi Gong training with Master Wu in Washington State. As background, I had been experiencing astronomically high blood pressures secondary to my genetic kidney disease, despite being on 3 different anti-hypertensives. My chinese physician, Terry Tang managed to get my blood pressure down to the high normal range with herbs. This was a year ago.

A week after my Qi Gong training, I started to faint, my blood pressure was so low! Over the next week I gradually discontinued all my anti-hypertensives except for 1/2 pill. It felt like a miracle to me. But I have to work to maintain this miracle. The Qi Gong practice takes 2 hours a day. When I don't make time for the entire practice, my blood pressure starts to climb again. I think the results are worth the practice.

This Qi Gong practice is part of the Mt. Emei Shamanistic school. Master Wu's website is masterwu.net This Qi Gong practice is unique in including a "shaking" practice. The idea is that illness is due to stagnation.....things not moving....getting stuck. Shaking gets things moving. I'm happy to share this easy aspect of the practice whenever you are by for a visit.....or just get out there and dance!