

To the Land
of The Lord Buddha
(A TALE OF TWO WORLDS)

MARTYRDOM WELCOMED

A curtain of silence dropped on me, with the consequent cooling down of the atmosphere. Thereafter loomed the Himalaya Mountains on the far horizon. This range of majestic mountains shot upwards, into the mad fury of the high winds, which slashed at the snow and twisted it violently, tearing it into innumerable glistening fragments. So fascinating was this panorama that I was held spellbound and followed the scene, gazing upwards with awe until the flying fragments melted away into the azure sky. It was a scene at once beautiful and dreadful, signifying the fact that the beauty of greatness, in whatever field, must come from meeting the challenges and braving the dreadful ordeals on the way. The greater the success, the more glorious the beauty, and the greater fury of the killer winds high above must be passed through, and not by-passed. And in so doing, martyrdom, if need be, is to be welcomed. (page 3, 4)

May this booklet issued on day of VESAKHA
Serve as beacon light for progress in Dhamma
For all wayfarers between the two worlds
Men, women, rich and poor, young, old, boys and girls.

May it strengthen all loving couples
Thus making their love, sacred and noble
Like Jahan and Mumtaj, most dear to each other
Drinking the ambrosia of their love for ever.

Or like a blessing from Saint Valentine
To all the peoples with love in their minds
And with loving-kindness to each and all of them
These through the Grace of our Refuge the Triple Gem.

—*Iris*

*To the Land
of the Lord Buddha*

(A TALE OF TWO WORLDS)

and

*Phenomena at
Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda*

(WHERE TWO WORLDS MEET)

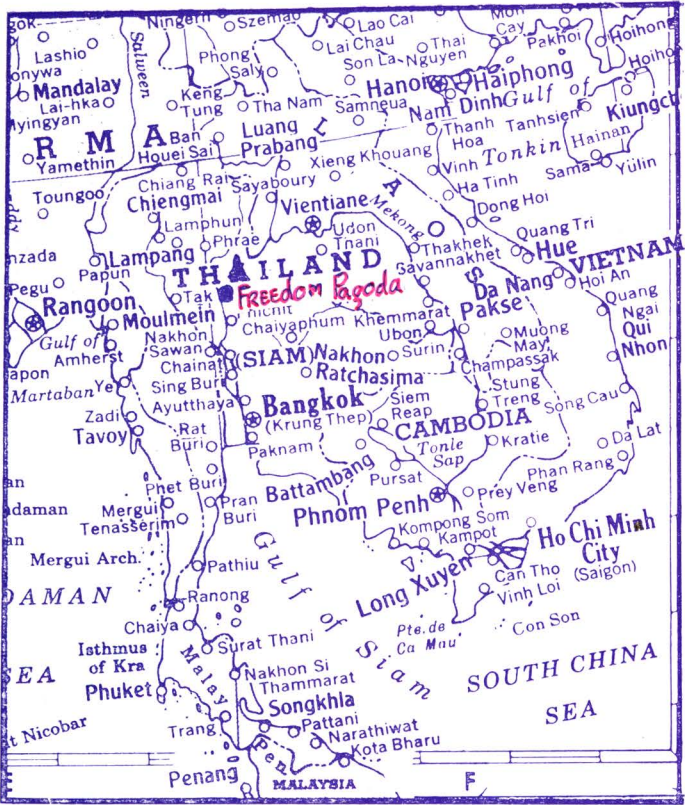
by

Sripen Chatuthasri

Home of Psychical Research
47/2 Samsen Road, Banglamphoo,
Bangkok 2, THAILAND
Tel. 2822025



**The Freedom Pagoda under construction
within the Pine Camp, Petchaboon Province,
Thailand**



Map of Thailand, Showing location where the Freedom Pagoda is situated



Phorn Ratanasuvan.

Leader of the Mission
to the Land of the Lord Buddha



Sri pen Chatuthasri.

Narrator of the accounts of both in
India and at the Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda



Siri Buddhasukh.

Translator

Foreword

The booklet here presented narrating our group's journey to India may appear to some to be bizarre and fictional as far as the writer's description of another dimension of life is concerned. Yet the readers are advised to read on, even with the feeling that it is a work of fiction. In case there is anything that is questionable therein, we are willing to make it clear to all genuine skeptics, who may feel free to write to us or to come personally to our place.

However, we would say that those who are of the opinion that this narration is absolutely incredible are most likely those who have never read the works of our research which we have published during the period of more than twenty years. The writer of this book, I would like to introduce her to them here, is equipped with a special ability to withdraw, at will and at once, into a level of meditation where she can function inside *consciously*,-- in a manner to be sharply distinguished from a dream or hallucination, that is. This capacity she acquired in B.E. 2502 i.e. 21 years ago. In our bi-monthly Journal in Thai, entitled VINYARN (Consciousness; Spirit; Soul), which is now 16 years old, there have been from time to time reports of her capacity in this field. Those having regularly followed our publications and Journal generally do not regard her description concerning life in another dimension invisible to ordinary eyes as something fallacious or

B

imaginary. For a person without a basic understanding or knowledge in this field, it is just natural that he should be inclined to assume that her narration is but a flight of the imagination. In this case he is invited to follow his inclination freely and to regard it as such. Then he may be able to go through this booklet with a feeling of comfort, without anything to interfere with his presumption.

For those who do not find this narration impossible to believe I would like to classify the 'out-of-the body' experiences in this booklet into three categories as follows:

- (1) The places that really exist but were created for her to see them in advance such as the description of the Himalayas in page 3
- (2) The events that were taking place at that very moment but that the writer was unable to see through her own meditation power. In this case she was drawn deeper to such an extent that she would be able to view them.
- (3) The events that had taken place in the past, but were created by those who used to witness those events so that the writer could see them.

Having understood these points, the readers will be able to know by themselves which of those experiences referred to the past, and which others to the present or the future.

Another point worthy of note here which has often been asked is one concerning the medium of language. If it was our King Nareusuan speaking to the writer, then

there is no question here. But in case those speaking *another* language coming into contact with the writer who cannot speak any other language except Thai, a question often arises as to *how*, or *why*, the writer is still able to understand it. To those who are still harassed by this doubt, I would say that this was made possible through what may be called the direct, mind-to-mind communication. It is the *meeting of minds*, so to speak, in which all can 'speak their minds' without moving their mouths. This direct method is commonplace on the invisible plane of life in our cosmos. The thought of one person transmitted to another will reach that person on the receiving end, either in the direct form of thought-waves or in the indirect form of words, depending on the receptivity of the 'receiver set,' as it were. In case words are required, they will come out in the mother-tongue of that receiver. An outstanding instance of this took place more than ten years ago, when Mahatma Gandhi first came to contact her. Whatever thought of his was transmitted to the writer was spontaneously interpreted in her mother-tongue. This has been true also in the case of her mentor father, a rishi or hermit at Rishigesh about 4 centuries ago, who used to be her father at that time. In case the Mahatmaji wanted to speak in his mother-tongue, it was then understandable to any Indian who listened to his words. This was how one mind could communicate with another *directly*, there being no verbal communication needed. Such a method of conveying *thoughts* from one mind to another is at present called telepathy and is already accepted as possible and practical.

D

As a matter of fact the presumption on the part of some readers that the writer's narration should result from her own hallucinatory vision is understandable. Had I not been educated first in the texts of the Pali Canon I would have thought also that such things were impossible. Moreover, my own research in the psychic field of knowledge has served to confirm the possibility of these experiences in another dimension of life. It was also under my supervision that the writer has achieved such an ability. But even with such evidence I admit there are some points in her narration that need more clarification and understanding beyond my capacity at present. To solve and settle these questions we have to go back to India once again and obtain more information from some places. If all the points in this booklet can be proved and explained, an incalculable benefit is sure to accrue to many people who believe in the truth and possibility of this narration.

Our pilgrimage to India this time to bring some earth from the Four Holy Buddhist Shrines, including our itinerary thereof, was ordered and planned by our King Naresuan the Great. That was why our journey has fulfilled our purpose and we were given all the conveniences and facilities during the half-a-month period. What we had encountered on the way is all noteworthy, some being difficult for other groups to be given such rare opportunities. Without his initiative and protection we would not have been so fortunate. As the writer noted in the early part of her narration, he said, "*I shall take command of the journey; some items of the planned itinerary may have to be changed to suit the circumstances.*"

E

There were later some changes in some items of the itinerary drawn up earlier by Mrs. Nuanchand. They later underwent some modifications through his introduction. And they eventually proved to be better.

Again, according to the writer, while waiting to be checked in at the Calcutta airport, she was greeted by Mahatma Gandhi and by him. There he (King Naresuan) said through her, to our group *"The lotus-shaped sub-continent of India you are entering now is a mysterious land, in which you will find what cannot be found elsewhere. From this sacred land originated many religions and religious founders, especially the Buddha, the Supreme Teacher of the Worlds. You will find here the lowest realm of woe, which may be called hellish realm, as well as the highest realm, which may be called heaven, both in the material, visible aspect and in the subtle one invisible to ordinary eyes. I am going to reveal them to you. Be calm and detached and do not forget to extend your loving-kindness to all."*

These and others will serve at least to confirm, to a more or less degree, how the narration in the following pages of this booklet is not hallucinatory or imaginative. The genuine skeptics are humbly advised to go through them with an open mind and they are sure to gain some encouraging information therein. Those believing it already will find the impression gained therefrom so delightful, uplifting and indelible.

Phorn Ratanasuan

December 29, B.E. 2522

Introducing

A TALE OF TWO WORLDS

This booklet, as far as any book of record of a journey is concerned, is unique in that it can be called a journey back and forth between two worlds with regard to the manner of presentation of the facts encountered. In this aspect it may be the only one so far published that dares tell what others of the same kind do not care to touch upon. Its uniqueness, therefore, implies only that it has, as far as I have known, no like, and *not* that it has no equal, let alone no better. Such is the sense of the uniqueness I mean to imply.

Now a unique product must be created by a unique producer. This is the law of cause and effect. The writer of this booklet is unique in her own ways, one of which is her capacity to withdraw into the meditation level that enables her consciousness to function, at will and at once, in another dimension of life on another frequency in the spectrum of existence. This dimension, or rather manifestation, of life, invisible and intangible as it is to untrained perception, is, to say the least, no less real and solid than the tangible world which we presume is solid and real. Thus it is, to those able to connect with it, nothing shadowy, nebulous or anything that would suggest unreality i.e. not being the product of imagination, hallucination and the like. Beings of this dimension (which consists of many planes or realms) are our neighbours

G

and silent watchers who can, sometimes and to some extent, help or harm us, depending on our own receptivity and maturity. This is the law that has been operating from the time that goes back beyond the reach of memory and will continue operating to the time beyond the reach of our thought, whether we know it, or like it, or not. What they can do so has been partly described in the interesting pages of this booklet, which tell us at least two significant facts: *firstly*, we are not alone in the cosmos ; and *secondly*, such planes used to be, and will once again be, our home.

Another point that might trouble some Buddhist scholars is what seems to be unbuddhistic in some places. Why should the water of the Ganges be sacred? Why should the earth at those Buddhist places in India have any power that is worth all the money, time and efforts involved merely to bring it back and have it enshrined in a pagoda in Thailand? Of all the reasons, or facts, behind this there are some that may be offered and explained here within the space at our disposal. *Firstly*, it is a token, of our own respect and reverence towards our Supreme Father. Whatever was associated with him, — be it his Relics, the places he used to stay and visit, even the earth he used to tread, is sacred to us. If other people lovingly cherish everything that was once connected with, say, Shakspeare, Lincoln, Christ and Sir Edwin Arnold, what wrong is there if we should cherish what was once associated with our Lord the Buddha in the same manner and spirit? *Secondly*, with such an attitude of mind we are willing to sacrifice, when it is possible for us, our money and also to go through the

H

various difficulties and trials in going to bring back at least a souvenir to remind us of our visit. *Thirdly*, despite the lapse of centuries the aura or 'atmosphere' still remains there to transmit its vibrations to those of the same frequency of mind who will 'pick up' the messages therein for their own upliftment. This the people can do to a more or less degree, depending on, as earlier mentioned, the degree of their own receptivity and maturity. *Fourthly*, the sacredness of these and other similar places, together with the evil atmosphere radiating from another kind of places such as gambling dens, liquor houses, prostitute homes and the like, are sure to exert their influences, of their own kind, to engulf and overwhelm our minds. Unless we are Arahants, there is no complete immunity or power of detachment on our part; we are bound to be influenced, more or less, by them i.e. by *both* kinds of them. So such things like the earth from those places connected with the Buddha's life are sure to be 'sacred' radiating more or less waves of uplifting influences to those having faith and being susceptible to them. Now, inasmuch as such earth can be sacred to *us*, the water of the Ganges could be no less sacred to *others* who are no less devoted to it than we are to our earth. This is the power of Faith inspired 'religiously' and there should be no wrong done in *quoting* their belief. To repeat, unless we are Arahants, those influences, beneficial and sinister, are in a position to insert themselves into our imperfect minds, some time or other, in one way or another, more or less. No worldling, however academically educated, socially great or earnestly well-intentioned, can boast of his or her complete independence or perfect immunity.

The repeated passage of *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* may be another point that appears to be sickening to some, who protest that it is nothing, but an expression of faith without wisdom. Frankly speaking I doubt the value of this attitude of mind on the part of those who appear to extol wisdom to the detriment of, or even to the exclusion of, faith. I am not in a position to determine, in an absolute manner, which is better: faith without wisdom or wisdom without faith. But I would like to point out that the troubles and turmoil **among Buddhists** today stem from one significant drawback: we have not been reminded, or have not allowed ourselves to be reminded, as often as it should be, by this passage: *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*. Overwhelmed by suffering, physical and mental, economic, financial and social, we are tempted to abandon *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* and seek refuge instead in money, gold and other matters, including body. Thus we Buddhists are often found to be economic creature, political creature, social creature and other kinds of creature,—all except religious creature. Should we take more heed in *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*, our sufferings, mental and physical, would have been much reduced, and our health, physical and mental, would have been much improved.

Of no less significance is the writer's ability to see this world while opening her eyes and then to see another world while closing them. Such an ability, although rare, has been now accepted by parapsychologists as a fact and a possibility. In this booklet there is one more ability added: to be able to hear as well as to see. Thus it is through the power of clairvoyance and clairaudience and,

more important, the ability to 'relive' those experiences (not merely to remember them) that this book has been written. Without these special abilities of hers we would not have been informed of the interesting phenomena on the other side of the veil. However, this ability is not monopolised; nor is there only one person in Thailand, let alone in other countries, who can do so. But as far as this booklet is concerned, our thankfulness goes to her due to her courage to tell and to risk being strongly criticised. We know she still has many imperfections, but then we realise that we also have ours, — as many, possibly more. We do not care much about her drawbacks. We also care less whether or not she will be able to do as well as Jeanne Dixon, Ruth Montgomery, Estelle Roberts and others. Whatever achievements she has acquired is hers, not ours; and whatever beneficial results (from this booklet) we have obtained is ours, not hers.

And to those with imperfect minds, who still have to go about in the world, or rather *worlds*, who need a healthy stimulation to refresh themselves from time to time to counter-act the present stresses and strains of economic and political life, we humbly present this 'TALE OF TWO WORLDS' as one of their faithful companions during their wayfaring back and forth between the 'two worlds'.

Another characteristic of this twin booklet is its several passages and paragraphs therein being printed sometimes in italics and at other times in

K

bold type. This follows the manner of its presentation in the Thai original, in conformity with the wish of the author in making her experiences in *another* dimension of life and those of *this* world distinct, the one from the other. Those in the former category are therefore presented in italics, whereas others of the latter one in ordinary type. The passages that are thought to be salient points of the teaching are again presented in bold type. Through this manner the readers are able to know, and can be reminded, simultaneously, when they are going to be introduced into another dimension and when they are to be brought back to their present home. We beg pardon of those who might find this manner of presentation unconventional or strange, to say the least, and sickening or revolting, to say the most. May they regard it as something of an initiative for their benefit, and its repulsiveness, if any, may be reduced at least to some extent. What absolutely does *not* exist in our mind is to look down upon the readers, thinking that they do not know which is which.

Readers who can compare the English version with the Thai original will find there are additions in several places of this translation. These have been deliberately done, in consultation with, and with the approval of, the writer, who can understand English well enough although she does not write English herself. The translator was one of the group who visited those places at the same time with her and was able to suggest something as reasonable

L

additions and also to question other things not clear and requiring clarification.

And lastly, may I offer my grateful remembrance to one who has in the first place inspired me with the decision and the devotion to undertake this translation work and then to others who have further inspired me with the words needed to materialise the thoughts resulting from that devotion, making them dawn on me and dance on these pages. Whether those words will dance gracefully and bewitchingly or clumsily and weirdly depends on the degree of my own receptivity. In the former case the readers may find the impression gained therefrom delightful, uplifting and indelible to a certain extent at least, whereas in the latter case let the book find its way into a waste-paper basket. Which fate it deserves the readers will judge for themselves.

---Siri Buddhasekh

Lecturer, Mahamakut Buddhist University;
World Fellowship of Buddhists REVIEW Editor.

February 26, 2523/1980

To the Land
of The Lord Buddha

(A TALE OF TWO WORLDS)

Translator's Copyright Granted

The copyright of the English version of these twin books viz. TO THE LAND OF THE LORD BUDDHA AND PHENOMENA AT PHRA DHAT PHANOM PAGODA is hereby granted to Miss Siipen Chaturthasri, the narrator of both accounts in the original Thai version, who is to have the sole authority for their printing and publication from now on.

Sin Bui Shaukh

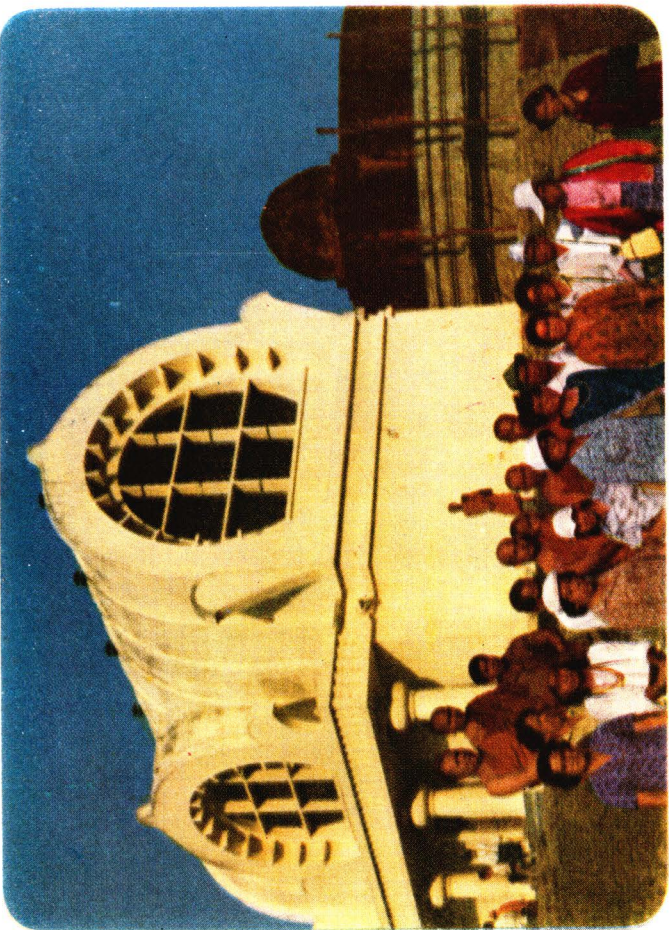
February 26, 1980



At Lumbini, the Buddha's Birth-place



**At Sarnath, the place where the Buddha
preached his First Sermon.**



At Kusinara, the place where the Buddha passed away.

CONTENTS

Royal Command	1
To Calcutta	5
To Darjeeling	9
Sunrise over Kangchenjunga	14
The Sensual, Form, and Formless Realms	16
The Bamboo Grove, Rajagaha	19
Tears of Joy and Sobs of Delight	22
Nalanda, the First University of the world	26
Buddha Gaya, Place of Enlightenment	28
Varanasi, the Sacred River Ganges	*34
Sarnath, the Deer-park of Isipatana	39
Kusinara, the Passing Away	43
Lumbini, the Birthplace	46
The Jeta Grove Savatthi	50
Sankassa Nagara	56
Taj Mahal, Poem in Marble	58
“Till Death Do Us Part” No Longer True	61
Long Live the ‘Emperor of Love’	63
Delhi, Capital Of India	64
Rishigesh, Mussourie and Delhi	65
At Delhi Once Again	72
Aurangabad, Ellora and Ajanta	74

Everybody is to obtain what he yearns for and is devoted to, be it good or evil, high or low, heaven or hell, all of which are impermanent and subject to change. Even Nibbana, the destination of life, is within reach of all who care and dare. (page 82)

The ground that used to be trodden by the Blessed One and his Noble Disciples in the past still emits the invigorating coolness of pure limpid water. But it has been consumed, at least on the surface, by the fires of the people's blind selfishness and inhumanity all through these long centuries. To ward off this vile effect, you must keep your mind calm, bathing it with wholesome thoughts. With your mind so cleansed, you will be able to come into contact with that cool, uplifting atmosphere." (page 22)

Matter is but an illusion; time is alluring. These can be overcome by realisation of the Truth that only through Detachment can the Atman that has been suffering ceaseless rebirths and redeaths be freed. Thereafter the inborn light will shine forthwith, in all its brilliance, as a result of this all-knowing wisdom. (page 55)

A person reaching the ultimate point of anything will be crowned with a blissful happiness in proportion to, and in line with, the nature of that practice. Moreover, the delicacy and profundity of these benefits to accrue to him will depend again on his level or degree of maturity. (page 61)

“With representations from all the holy places in our country collected for enshrinement in the Freedom pagoda, it is now time to bring more of them from where the Buddha mentioned as Four Holy Places to be visited after his passing away by the devotees. Let this be done and finished within this month of November.”

Such was the royal command by our liberator King Naresuan the Great. It was then that our plan to go to the land of the Lord Buddha was formulated with the above-mentioned purpose and took shape not long after that. In point of fact Acharn Phorn and I, together with our close friends, used to cherish the idea of going to visit the Buddhist Shrines in India some time ago. But we had been so engaged in other commitments calling for our prior attention that we always found it impossible year after year. Now that we were prodded by what we regarded as the irresistible, royal command, Acharn Phorn started to contact Mrs. Nuanchan Pientam, one of his followers, who was a woman with fervent piety in Buddhism. Having visited the four Holy Shrines of Buddhism in India herself, Mrs. Nuanchan was deeply impressed and would like to have

other fellow Buddhists enjoy the same opportunity. With such a purpose in mind she has organised a tour company and have repeatedly invited Acharn Phorn to accompany her on subsequent trips. But, due to other commitments that demanded his prior attention, Acharn Phorn had been unable to comply to her requests until we were encouraged by the Royal Command to do so. Thereafter Acharn Phorn started to plan the itinerary in collaboration with Mrs. Nuanchan, who managed to give whatever suggestion and cooperation were possible for the planned trip. We at first fixed a tentative day for the start of the journey and after asking our monarch what should be the auspicious day we were told that our journey was to start on the tenth of November B.E. 2522/1979.

One month before the appointed day our work at the Freedom Pagoda and the Religious Development Centre was a scene of hustle and bustle. At the Pine Camp, (former name of the place where the Pagoda and the Centre is being constructed), Acharn Phorn was hurriedly finalising the construction of the road within the area and hardly had any time to come down to Bangkok,* while I had to attend to other tasks in his place, being assisted during this time by Mrs. Phongpiew Phatthanaprapaphan and Mrs. Vanphen Amornsid. With the approach of November 10, the confusion increased as we were racing against time. What was worse, I could not help feeling heavy and uneasy at times. But I did not tell Acharn Phorn about this, lest

* The Pine Camp is about 400 kilometers North of Bangkok. It is located at about the middle point of the Northern, Eastern and Central Thailand. See map

it might give him an unnecessary concern. Only to Mrs. Pongpiew did I tell of my unusual experience, asking her to look after me more closely, since I might not know what I would be doing now and again. According to Mrs. Phongpiew, "The nearer we approach the day, the more busy we are, and the more jumbled up is our work. Looking at the circumstances of our country at this time, we can't help feeling those of our own are very much like that. Possibly this is in accordance with our Great Liberator King Naresuan's remarks that the Freedom Pagoda is the symbol of our country. That's why both are faced with the same circumstances at the same time."

To Miss Phongpiew's expression I agreed. So many troubles were threatening our country, which meant our people, who were forced to suffer from quite a number of problems, one of which was the high cost of living. There seemed to be no oasis of peace and calm to be found anywhere in our country. This also affected my mind, which soon became tired and listless. It was during one of such moments that *a curtain of silence dropped on me, with the consequent cooling down of the atmosphere. Thereafter loomed the Himalaya mountains on the far horizon* (in point of fact I had never seen them before, but something profound told me that they were really the Himalayas). *This range of majestic mountains shot upwards, into the mad fury of the high winds, which slashed at the snow and twisted it violently, tearing it into innumerable glistening fragments. So fascinating was this panorama that I was held spellbound and followed the scene, gazing upwards with awe until the flying fragments melted away into the azure sky. It was a scene at once*

beautiful and dreadful, signifying the fact that the beauty of greatness or success, in whatever field, must come from meeting the challenges and braving the dreadful ordeals on the way. The greater the success, the more glorious the beauty, and the greater fury of the killer winds high above must be passed through, and not by-passed. And in so doing, martyrdom, if need be, is to be welcomed. There was then, in the depth of my consciousness, something like a call drawing me to it and inviting me to follow.

I was now and again absorbed in the profound feeling that occurred therefrom until the tenth of November in the morning, when the sky was clear and everything was fresh and looked promising. At times there came the sound of silvery bells reverberating in every atom of the air, accompanied by the chanting, "*Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi.*" Withdrawing into meditation, I saw the Great Mahatma Gandhi, who greeted me with a brilliant smile and said, "*You are welcome to the Buddhabhūmi (Land of the Buddha) and follow in the foot-prints of the Lord Buddha.*" Of this gracious welcome from such a personage I told Acharn Phorn, who was preparing to go to the airport. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon Acharn Phorn asked all who were in his party and who would go to see him off at the airport to take part in the chanting. The purpose was to receive the transmission radiating from the Land of the Buddha, thus making it the auspicious first step of our journey. After chanting and attending to personal needs, all came to Don Muang airport at about six o'clock in the afternoon. Here we were addressed by our Liberator King who said, "*I shall take command of the journey; some items*

of the itinerary may have to be changed to suit the circumstances." This brought a feeling of warmth and gratefulness towards his kindness and I suddenly felt we were his followers, who were prepared to follow him wherever he would lead us to. Our party this time consisted of eleven persons viz. Acharn Phorn Ratanasuwan, Acharn Siri Buddhasukh, Mrs. Tiangsiri Songnijasai, Mrs. Somanas Im-ari, Mrs. Phenjand Songsirivit, Miss Boonmee Viseshanijkij, Mrs. Sunan Leumrasmee, Miss Chaovanee Leumrasmee, Mrs. Phongpiew Phatthanaprabhabhand, Miss Subhanee Hong-ngern and I myself. These were led by Mrs. Nuanchan Pien Tam, managing director of the N.C. Travel Centre Co. At the airport and before boarding the plane we were told that there would be another group of eight persons from the Eastern province of Chanthaburi who would also join us in this journey. They were: Venerable Phrakru Phisit Panyagun, Venerable Phra Samu Ong-art Boonrasri, Venerable Phra Kru Sawas Charoenniyom, Venerable Phra Surajai Charoensri, Mr. Hual Jayanganon, Mrs. Samruay Phoovan, Mr. Vichien Boonyakittikorn and Mrs. Suphatee Boonyakittikorn. So our party consisted of nineteen persons, who were led by our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan, thus making the number twenty in all.

To Calcutta

An AIR-INDIA plane soared into the skies of our motherland at 9.45 p.m., taking us all to the land of our Supreme Father the Blessed One. The first place where we were to land was Calcutta. My ears still rang with the noise of the engines and the people all around.

This made me unable to withdraw into meditation until we reached Calcutta airport at 23.35 hrs. (Indian time). Here we were greeted by two Thai Bhikkhus viz. Ven. Phrakru Samu Setthakij *Samāhito* and Ven. Pera Yart *Thirañāṇo*, who were to assist Mrs. Nuanchan in the course of our trip. These two Bhikkhus had generously offered their help and accompanied us throughout the rest of the journey.

While waiting to be checked in and to have our passports examined at the airport, I felt better and withdrew into meditation in order to let the owners of the place know that we were foreigners and would like to stay in their land for a period of time. I was greeted by Gandhiji and our King, the latter saying, "*The lotus-shaped continent of India you are entering is a mysterious land, in which you will find what cannot be found elsewhere. From this sacred land originated many religions and religious founders, especially the Buddha, the Supreme Teacher of the worlds. You will find here the lowest realm of woe, which may be called a hellish realm, as well as the highest realm, which may be called heaven, both in the material, visible aspect and in the subtle one invisible to ordinary eyes. I am going to reveal them to you. Be calm and detached and do not forget to extend your loving-kindness to all.*"

We rested that night at Calcutta Hotel just a little distance from the airport. After saying my prayers I prepared myself for a rest, making up my mind to withdraw into meditational sleep. But after a few moments of

deep and slow breathing I felt myself soaring up to a region above a dense cloud of smoke. Looking down I saw through the smoke the eerie, hazy picture of so many people putting up their hands above their heads as if to implore for help or mercy. Meanwhile the shrill cries of weeping and wailing were heard coming up from those figures which seemed to be struggling or scrambling for something. It was such a babel of voices that I was unable to understand what they intended to say or ask for. So frightening as well as piteous was the sight that I felt dizzy and thought it was too much for me. Then came the familiar soothing voice, "Don't forget to extend your loving-kindness to them and recite the passage '*Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*.'" Before I could do anything the chorus of *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* was heard and repeated time and again, but how faint and far away they were. Starting to recite, I heard a voice inserting. It said, "*Do wish them to take the vow of Non-violence.*" At this I woke up and saw that it was 4.03 in the morning. For a moment I felt trembled, with a feeling of indescribable sadness. But I did not tell this to anybody, except saying to Miss Subhanee and Mrs. Phongpiew my room-mates that I was very tired.

November 11: 7.00 hrs : Our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan took us to breakfast in the dining room of the hotel before taking us to a sight-seeing tour of Calcutta. The tour coach carried us slowly through the various streets giving us the opportunity to see both the pleasant sights and the ugly, revolting ones in details. Being once under British rule, Calcutta still has many buildings and mansions to be proud of as a harbour town. But what a population ! I will

not describe here how the town teemed with people and how wretched and miserable was those people's life. Many books have been written about this subject and those interested in it may find so many vivid details therefrom. I shall describe only what I think is different from others' works. However, to those who have seen it with their own eyes or who have heard about it from others, their ideas, I believe, is certainly to be the same to some extent. And that idea of theirs, as far as the life of the majority of people, the 'man in the street' in the literal sense of the term, is concerned, should be "a virtual hell on earth."

During the sight-seeing tour around the town, sometimes in the coach and at other times on the streets or at some important places, I felt myself in the semi-conscious state all the time. *The atmosphere all round was to me filled with a thick, suffocating fog making me feel uneasy and sick. To counter this undesirable feeling, I extended my loving-kindness and recited mentally, "Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi."* Then I heard our king say. "This is but one instance, and not the worst one, of the spiritual atmosphere of those absorbed in wrong views and selfishness. It is those Defilements that emit such a suffocating atmosphere with a thick fog. Keep your mind calm and poised and then you will witness more and more developed states of the mind. **A person who strives earnestly and has won the ultimate attainment of his religious teaching, whatever name or label it is, will be able to attain to the eternal life condition of his own religion. This state can be known only through individual experience. Keep your mind calm and poised, and make a solemn wish that it open**

itself to that noble state....However, Buddhism is the only religion by which a person, having fulfilled the requisites of his ultimate Exertion, will pass on to the level of absolute extinction, which cannot be related to and explained by anything definite. Whatever you are able to see I shall let you see, from now on."

Having finished our sight-seeing tour of the city, we were taken to the airport by our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan, who had prepared for our boarding a local plane to the town of Bagdogra, and then to further our journey by a coach to the famous hill resort of Darjeeling. This, of course, in compliance with the Royal Command.

To Darjeeling

We arrived at Bagdogra at 2.15 p.m. and went on, as planned, in a hired coach past the town of Siliguri at the foot of the mountains. From here we were greeted by the scenic beauty of the landscape on both sides of the mountains. A chill breeze was the first Himalayan host that welcomed us at its outpost, a short distance after we had taken the ascent. As usual, I withdrew into the meditational state, telling the guardian spirits of our purpose of coming and asking their protection. This has been our practice whenever we enter a land as strangers. *Once again the impressive scene of the Great Himalayan range I had witnessed in Bangkok appeared in my vision, its inviting call being stronger like a powerful magnet. In the clear blue sky the silvery peaks stood serene, a fascinating sight inspiring me with*

the thought that they were an array of celestial abodes. I heard our great monarch say. "Make a solemn wish then your mind be in contact with that exalted state and that recite the hymn in praise of the Triple Gem." It was almost sunset; Mrs. Nuanchan told me that if we were fortunate enough we might be able to view the picturesque scene of the sun setting behind the mountains. It was getting darker as the sun was sinking on the Western horizon. We were all this time climbing gradually but steadily up the mountain path with steep slopes on one side and deep, dark chasms on the other. The higher we went, the thicker the fog, there being no sign that we would be able to see the setting sun, except its light that penetrated the less dense part of the misty curtain in some places. I closed my eyes and asked others to recite the hymn in praise of the Triple Gem. When I opened my eyes a few moments after that, I was told by Miss Suphanee and Mrs. Pongphiew that, while we were chanting, the sky turned bright and golden for some moments; then it took on the pink colour, which was soon replaced by the deepening twilight. I did not say anything since I was earnestly making a request to the celestial beings, asking them to let us have the opportunity for a possible contact with them in one way or another.

Our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan asked me to send up our earnest prayer, saying she was going to take us to a spot called Tiger Hill, where we would, if we could, view the golden rays of sunrise bathing the crest of Mount Kangchenjunga, the third highest peak in the Himalayan range. It was beautiful, or rather wonderful, beyond description, but not many people could see it since it was

most of the time behind the curtain of thick cloud, especially at sunrise. It was said that only a fortunate few, with merits sufficiently accumulated, would be allowed to witness the awe-inspiring scene. She had taken many tour groups there, so she said, but never once did anybody have a good opportunity to see it. One reason was that Darjeeling, being at the altitude of more than 7,000 feet, was nestled in the region of the high mountains and was itself shrouded in a heavy fog most of the time. This made her more eager than ever before. It was also believed that there was to be something mysterious and powerful connected with this peak. Ranking third in its height, it was nevertheless unconquered. Unlike Everest, nobody has set foot on its crest so far. Some perished on its slope while others became insane after their unsuccessful attempts, and did not have time to tell of their experiences to anybody. This, according to Mrs. Nuanchan, was not her own imagination or a rumour. It was recorded and could be referred to. That was why she asked me to send up our wish earnestly so it might be graciously granted. I told her it would depend on all of us collectively, and not on my wish or prayer alone, however earnest and fervent. All of us must have a record of virtuous accumulation already, I told her, while silently expressing my wish in accordance with the Royal Command. But I could not be sure what would be the result thereof.

It was now dark all round. Nothing could be seen except the glittering lights from the houses on the terraced slopes of the hills. These lights were now in front of us, then behind, and once again above and below. Without the contours of the high mountains silhouetted against

the night sky, we would be lured into imagining that they were twinkling stars welcoming our party from above. But even though our intellect told us that they were terrestrial lights, we knew we would be welcomed nonetheless by them as well as by the actual celestial stars. It was getting colder now and we arrived at Hotel Windamere, owned by Mr. C. Tenduf-La, where we would be put up for the night, at about eight o'clock in the evening. Having been checked in and had our meal, we were reminded once again by our tour leader that those who would like to go to see sunrise on Mount Kangchenjunga would be called up at three o'clock in the morning. Then we retired to our own rooms and tried to use our imagination to the utmost, picturing what Darjeeling would be like in the daytime and, most important of all, how beautiful and impressive the famous sunrise on Mount Kangchenjunga would be.

It was very cold that night. But strangely enough, there was something that radiated warmth, life and joy into every atom of the atmospheric cold. I drifted into a pleasant slumber, with the happy thought of seeing the sunrise splendour at Tiger Hill, supported by the fervent wish for the celestial beings to bless me, or rather our party, with the rare opportunity. *Then I saw, in what appeared to be the inky space, a burst of light in all its celestial splendour, with tens of thousands of celestial beings in resplendent, rainbowlike robes. Out of these glorious colours in an almost infinite combination and hue came the soft but unusually sweet tone. It seemed to whisper something the meaning of which I was unable to make out but the soothing influence of which was to be unforgettable. The whole scene was to me a representation*

of the glory of the celestial realm, so wonderful yet so far away. I woke up when there was a knock on the door, signalling the long-awaited time.

We hurriedly got dressed and prepared ourselves to face the cold wind at the altitude of more than 7,000 feet outside. We were told to carry with us some blankets as an additional protection although we were then wearing as many winter coats as possible. Except Ven. Phrakru Phisit Panyagun and Mr. Hual Jayanganon, we got into the specially hired cars heading for Tiger Hill, the spot where we would be able to watch the sunrise and Mount Kangchenjunga most clearly. On the way Mrs. Nuanchan repeated her request, telling me to act as the party's proxy sending up our fervent wish to whoever was in a position to grant it. While on the cars, I invited all of us to chant our prayers and praise to the Triple Gem, which were finished when we arrived at Tiger Hill. Here we realised the wisdom of the advice that we bring more blankets in addition to our winter clothes. It was so cold that sometimes we felt a burning pain while breathing. The sky at this time was pitch black, dotted all over with innumerable twinkling stars. This gave us some hope since it heralded a clear dawn and we would then be able to view the summit of Kangchenjunga turn gold by the rays of sunrise. We were told the point where sunrise could be seen and another point, somewhat at right angle to the first one, where a forest of peaks were seen looming dim in the dark. The highest peak towering above this skyline, so said our guide, was the majestic, mysterious Kangchenjunga.

Sunrise over Kangchenjunga

Little by little the sky above us grew brighter; and one by one the light of the twinkling stars faded and disappeared. But the Eastern sky was as dark as ever before. There was no sign of the exact location where the sun would rise. It was then 5.40 a.m. I heard Mrs. Nuanchan say, somewhat in a despairing tone, that we were going to be disappointed like the other former groups. The curtain of fog was so thick, she complained, and it would be late in the morning before we could see the sun. By that time it would be far too late to view Kangchenjunga turn gold. In despair she said it was more advisable for everybody to return to the hotel. At this I stopped her, saying that I was doing my best in conveying the thought and wish of all of us. Thus she should not lose hope. So saying, I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply. *The next moment I felt myself melt away into another dimension. Close to my ears there was a tender voice whispering into them, "Now open your eyes, and behold the radiant splendour of 'Helios driving his golden chariot up the Eastern horizon'. It is the beauty indescribable that can be seen by ordinary human eyes."* Spontaneously I opened my eyes. It was then 5.49 a.m. I saw about three hundred people at that place, including tourists from other groups, but there was complete silence. Then I heard somebody, possibly Miss Suphanee, saying "Look there! It's the bright golden rays of sunrise. Towards the East the crimson edge of the sun is rising above the black skyline." At this all were startled and looked first at their right, towards the rising sun, then at their left, towards the spot which they thought would be the Kangchenjunga,

before turning back to their right once again. Now was the moment of great suspense, with everybody looking at the right and left alternately, fearing he would miss the most spectacular moment. This was when the crest of Kangchenjunga would be flooded by the golden rays of dawn, which our guide said would last sometimes a few seconds and at the most not more than one minute. The sun was now rising gradually higher, flashing its golden rays across the firmament towards the perennial snow-capped summits of the high mountains in front of us. Its forest of peak after peak penetrating through the sea of clouds loomed large and majestic and seemed to be floating like divine abodes. The sky was now bright and clear. In the field of vision which was now infinite, all of us were beholding the most spectacular moment when the eastern slope of the mysterious mount hundreds of miles away was gilded by the first rays of dawn, looking as if it were being painted by an unseen brush of a celestial artist. For about half a minute it glittered like pure gold; then turned orange at the top and pink at the lower level. The entire vault above was now bathed in the glowing rays of the sun. Looking from Tiger Hill, the sea of clouds below us became the sea of golden hue. So wonderful and serene was Kangchenjunga at this moment of the day that it could be compared to nothing short of the sparkling diamond in the diadem of a celestial queen. The kaleidoscope of colours produced by the sunlight being reflected at this time in the sea of snow and cloud was the natural setting to enhance the awe-inspiring beauty of that gem.

The Sensual, Form, and Formless Realms

While being spellbound by the wonderful sight, I was reminded by our monarch, who said, “*Recite the passage praising the Triple Gem and then express your gratitude to the celestial beings.*” I did so, accompanied by everybody in our group. *After that I felt being drawn inside and then hearing a profound note sweeter and more melodious than that of a harp in the hands of any gifted musician. Into my mind it conveyed the information that the glistening rays of golden light are the symbol of the Formless realms of Brahma.*

Then came another impression : the golden light tinged with a pinkish hue is symbolic of Brahma of the planes of Form.

Just as the thought was poured forth into my mind there appeared a number of celestial beings dressed in raiment that seemed to be woven out of the lotus-fibre of both the silver and gold colours. Their complexion was ivory-like and shining, with halos of sparkling light encircling their heads. Whenever they made any movement, there was emitted a blend of musical notes so uplifting in its melody and so unearthly in its nature. Never had I listened to any sound like that; nor would I think a hundred of harps or guitars on earth could produce anything close to it. I was not aware how long I had been under this ethereal spell, being thereby breathless but blissful.

*Once again the celestial voice came, or should I say permeate, through the molecules of the vapour around me, Through it I came to know that the bright golden hue interwoven with the prismatic colours was symbolic of the six planes of the celestial realms. Suddenly there appeared another number of celestial beings clothed in raiment of different colours that seemed to be woven out of the finest silk. These colours with a variety of combination were indicative of the nature of their maturity and virtue. So like the silver light of the moon was their complexion; and so tender and sweet the strains of celestial music unmatched by any in this world when, as those mentioned before, they made any bodily movement. It produced a soothing, lulling effect on my mind until it gradually faded away. But then my ears, or rather my mind, came into contact with the vibrations of a most captivating voice which should be called angelic in the best sense of the term. It was singing a song the melody of which was no less fascinating and uplifting. The finale came with the chorus of angelic voices accompanied with the sound of heavenly musical instruments. In an exceedingly sweet tone they said, **“Keep your mind calm and poised. Make it balanced and secure like the stalk of a lotus with its roots sinking deep into the soil and draw up the food thereby to sustain its life. Then turn the flower in a gesture of respect towards the purity of heaven and absorb the purifying and resplendent light therefrom.”***

I emerged once again when there was a burst of delightful expression from others all round me. All appeared to be excited, joyful and refreshed when their hope was fulfilled. Possibly they had absorbed to a certain

degree, though unconsciously, the radiating influence of the celestial beings. Mrs. Nuanchan our tour leader seemed to be most excited and delighted, as well she should be, after a succession of disappointments in the former times. All the members of our group were similarly overjoyed, many saying that such a wonderful sight from a rare opportunity was worth more than the money they had paid for and the time and efforts they had spent. I told the eleven members of our own group how that was possible through the grace of our great monarch, who had bestowed upon us the rare opportunity of seeing the most sickening sight as well as the most delightful one. I told everyone of us to convey our expression of gratitude to him for his kindness and then to humbly offer our best wishes to him so he could be blessed with progress, happiness and achievement in all respects. What was more important, we whole-heartedly prayed *Dīghāyuko Hotu Mahārājā : Long live our Great King*”,— *in his own plane, that is.*

Our hope having been happily fulfilled, we returned from Tiger Hill with delight. On our way back we were led to a Tibetan monastery, where we performed some merit-making, before arriving at the Hotel. It was now late in the morning, so we were able to see how Darjeeling was situated in the middle of a mountainous region. Looking around, we saw flowers of various colours in abundance. On the slopes of the hills were terraces of tea farms extending as far as the eyes could see. After breakfast at the hotel Mrs. Nuanchan took us to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, wherein we were excited to see the paraphernalia of the mountaineers, including their

names and records of their daring ascents. It was here that we were informed of the heights of Mt. Everest, the highest peak, and Mt. Kangchenjunga, the third highest one, the former being 29,028 feet, whereas the latter 28, 186 feet from sea level. We bade farewell to Darjeeling in the afternoon with a heavy heart; the delightful experience at Tiger Hill and its scenic beauty would be to us unforgettable for a long time to come. We arrived at Siliguri to start the first leg of our journey leading us to the districts and towns on the streets of which our Supreme Father the Blessed One used to tread and impress his foot-prints more than twenty-five centuries ago.

The Bamboo Grove, Rājagaha, The First Monastery of Buddhism

We reached Siliguri at 8 p.m. Having had our evening meal, Mrs. Nuanchan led us to the railway station, where she had hired a special bogie-car for our group. According to the former schedule, the train was to leave at 5 p.m. but because of the energy crisis it was 4 a.m. before we left Siliguri. The train carried us past the fields and towns until we reached Barauni at 3 p.m. of November 13. Here we got down from the train and got up a coach to the town of *Rājagaha*. All looked tired after eleven hours on the train and kept silent, possibly wishing to arrive at *Rājagaha* as soon as possible and picturing in their minds what the town would look like. *Rājagaha*

was in the time of the Buddha capital of the state of Magadha. In 'The Pilgrim Kamanita'* it was described as follows:

“As the Master drew near to the City of the Five Hills, day was almost over, and the mildly beneficent rays of the evening sun lay along the green rice-fields and meadows of the far-reaching plain as if they were emanations from a divine hand extended in blessing. Here and there little billowy clouds—of purest gold as it seemed—rolled and crept along the ground, showing that men and oxen were plodding wearily homeward from their labour in the fields; and the lengthening shadows cast by isolated groups of trees were bordered by a halo, radiant with all the colours of the rainbow. Framed in a wreath of blossoming gardens, the embattled gateways, terraces, cupolas and towers of the capital shone forth, delicately clear as in some fairy vision; and a long line of rocky eminences, rivalling in colour the topaz, the amethyst, and the opal, were resolved into an enamel of incomparable beauty.

Deeply moved, the Buddha stayed his steps. Joy welled up within him, and his heart leaped forth to greet those familiar forms, bound up for him with so many memories: the Grey Horn, the Broad Vale, the Seer's Crag, the Vulture's Crest—'whose noble summit towers, roof-like, all over the rest'—and above all, Vibhara, the

*THE PILGRIM KAMANITA, a legendary romance by Karl Gjellerup, page I; translated by John E. Logie. London: William Heinemann 1911

Mountain of the Hot Springs, under whose shadow, in the cave beneath the Sattapanni tree, the homeless wanderer had found his first home, his first resting-place on the final journey from Sansara to Nirvana.”

It was late in the afternoon when our group left the Barauni station for *Rājagaha*. I prayed that we reach *Rājagaha* in the evening so we could view the town at sunset, but because of the distance we arrived at our destination at almost 8 p.m. It was night-time and we could see nothing since there was a black-out plunging the town to total darkness, except for a few candles and oil-lamps here and there. But, although we missed sunset at *Rājagaha*, we still witnessed it some distance outside the town. It was beautiful enough to make us less tired to a certain degree. I consoled myself that we might be compensated by sunrise here, which should be no less beautiful. After the meal Mrs. Nuanchan told us she had some business to attend to in Bangkok. This necessitated her returning to Thailand the following day. But her assistant, Miss Piyavan Patima-Arak, would do everything for us during her absence. According to the plan, we would be led to the summit of Mount *Gijjhakūṭa* (the Vulture Peak) early in the morning. There we would find the remains of the *Mūla Gandhakūṭi*, the Buddha's first residence after his Enlightenment. Mrs. Nuanchan would be back with us once again in Delhi.

After taking a bath and preparing for the night's sleep *I felt myself wading into the pure limpid water of a river which was only waist-deep. The river-bed was refined*

grains of sand, which were soft and gentle to the touch. There was no pebble or undergrowth beneath the water that would hurt my feet; nor was there any mud that would prevent me from seeing the riverbed. The water was also refreshingly cool. However, the sun beat down fully on me and from the waist upwards I was suffering the burning pain from the intense heat. There was a babel of sound all round and out of it came the voice of our monarch, who said," The ground that used to be trodden by the Blessed One and his Noble Disciples in the past still emits the invigorating coolness of pure limpid water. But it has been consumed, at least on the surface, by the fires of the people's blind selfishness and inhumanity all through these long centuries. To ward off this vile effect, you must keep your mind calm, bathing it with wholesome thoughts. With your mind so cleansed, you will be able to come into contact with that cool, uplifting atmosphere."

Tears of Joy and Sobs of Delight

We got up refreshed at 5 a.m. of the following day (November 14), looking forward to seeing the Buddha's first residence on the Vulture Peak. We reached the foot of the hill early in the morning. It was still cool and refreshing, everything being silent since the site was in the midst of a forest. We looked around and to our delight the natural environment was very much the same as it should have been centuries ago. At least it still lived up to its appellation of the City of Five Mountains, which, what was important, still had their slopes lush green with

vegetation. The sky was cloudless and glowing with the radiance of dawn. In the morning breeze the forests on the slopes of the Five Hills greeted the dawn with their canopy of leaves turned bright green and rippled luminously. We proceeded enthusiastically to the top of the Vulture Peak, going first to the *Mūlagandhakūṭi*, the First Residence after Enlightenment of our Supreme Father, where only its remains were to be seen. This was the first place connected with the Blessed One's life-story that we came to in our pilgrimage. Everybody appeared to be absorbed in ecstasy upon seeing what was in fact the remains of the *Mūlagandhakūṭi*. We lost no time in lighting our candles and joss-sticks and prostrated ourselves in front of the remains. Acharn Phorn recited the passages inviting the celestial beings to be our witnesses and Ven. Phrakru Phisitpanya led us in saying the morning prayer, reminding ourselves of the virtues of our Supreme Father, his Dhamma and his Order of Noble Disciples. Then we seated ourselves for meditation, making our minds tranquil. Acharn Phorn undertook to say the passages inducing meditation in order to bring us into contact with the pure vibrations that still emanated from this sanctified area. Possibly through these vibrations originating from our Supreme Father a number of his sons and daughters in our group were specially receptive of the transmission, some bursting into rapturous tears whereas others sobbing with an irrisistible joy. All seemed to be more or less impressed by the serene atmosphere of that morning. Finally we got up respectfully and having made individual wishes we collected some pieces of broken bricks from the area. Then we turned back and paid homage to the remains of what used to be Venerable

Ananda's residence, which was at the entrance of the pathway leading to the *Mūlagandhakūṭi*. From there we went down to the *Sūkarakhātā* cave, where Venerable *Sārīputta* was said to have achieved the full-final attainment of Arahantship. Coming lower, we saw the spot where King *Bimbisāra* stopped to undress his regal ornaments and proceeded to see the Buddha in plain clothes. We came to foot of the hill at about 8.00 p.m., with everybody looking happy and satisfied. While on the hill I withdrew into meditation but could see nothing. What I felt was the atmosphere of quietude in the bright, blissful light. From there we were taken back to the hotel by Miss Piyawan, who replaced Miss Nuanchan as our tour leader. We were told that the place we were going to next was the Monastery of Bamboo Grove (*Veluvanārāma*), which was offered the Blessed One by king *Bimbisāra* as the first monastery in Buddhism.

We reached the gate of the monastery of Bamboo Grove at 9 a.m. Of course, its condition at that time was sure to be different from that in the time of the Buddha. Nevertheless, there were still a number of shady trees to make us refreshingly cool. The Bodhi trees (tree of Enlightenment)* near the pond supposed to be the '*Kalandakanivāpa*' (the place where squirrels were fed)**

**ficus religiosa*, or, in its popular name, *pipal*

**this originated from the story that one of King *Bimbisāra*'s ancestors was saved by a squirrel from being bitten by a poisonous snake. The squirrel made a noise and woke him up while he was having a nap in this place.

were also shady, with their canopy of leaves rustling like the sound of rain when they were blown by the wind. The lawn was kept green and the *Bougainvillaea spectabilis bougainvillaea* were in full bloom. I learned that the Indian Government had undertaken to plant bamboos in clusters scattered all over the area. The paths within the area were flanked by beautiful flower trees. Many squirrels were seen running to and fro on the ground, without fear of men who came close to them. The cool of the shade together with the gentle breeze made us buoyant and blissful. I pictured the monastery of Bamboo Grove when it was still graced with the saffron robes of the Noble disciples of the Blessed One, with the chanting of the Buddha's teachings in rythmical, tuneful tones. So impressive was the scene; then I heard our monarch speak softly to me, "*Take some sacred earth from the first monastery of Buddhism, the spot where the Buddha delivered the Ovāda-pātimokkha address to the 1,250 Bhikkhus on the Māgha fullmoon day, and have it enshrined as token of its sacredness in the Freedom Pagoda, at the district of Pine Camp, in Lomsak district, Petchaboon province, Thailand.*" A thought of doubt arose to me then, as to where it should exactly be. *Then a flash of six-coloured light appeared at a spot, as if to answer the question still in my mind.* I told Acharn Phorn that spot and he led the party to it and lighted the candles and joss-sticks. He then recited the passages invoking the celestial beings to be our witnesses and said our prayers together. This produced a reverberating sound pervading the atmosphere and driving away the filthy smoke of wrong views and selfishness that reigned there. *The place shone with a bright light dispelling the darkness while we were chanting.* After that we obtained some earth from the ground near the Buddha statue by the side of the pond.

From the Bamboo Grove monastery we were led to see the mineral water called *Tapodhāra* some distance from the monastery. Then we headed for *Nālandā* and *Buddha Gayā*.

**Nālandā,
the First University of the World**

Nalanda was situated not far from *Rājagaha*.

After some time we came to the Thai Nalanda monastery, where Ven. Phra *Mahā Yod Bhūripālo* was its abbot. We were cordially welcomed. The abbot had heard about Acharn Phorn for a long time, so he was glad to know him in person. We had a delicious meal in the Thai fashion here. After the meal we collected a sum of money from each of us and arranged a *Phā-pā* donation for the monastery. This consisted of some more paraphernalia for Bhikkhus which we had prepared for this purpose from Bangkok. After the meal Venerable Phra *Mahā Yod* acted as our guide leading us to *Nālandā* and explaining to us its history from the day of its birth to that of its being burnt down. The area of what was once *Nālandā* was very wide, extending as far as the eyes could see. It was therefore impossible to see it all in one day. It would take a whole day of study and seeing everything that was left,—the debris of the buildings that were razed to the ground. But it was enough for us to picture how large and prosperous it had been during the zenith of its fame. Venerable Phra *Mahā Yod* gave us a lot of details about what was left but I did not hear much of it since I did not follow close to him all the time. Often I wanted to see what its inner atmosphere would be like after the long

centuries of time and behind these dreary remains. From my own experience in my country, behind such remains could sometimes be seen in the invisible world the former, complete structure, thus enabling me to see what they actually looked like in their times.

But I was disappointed, when I withdrew into meditation in order to see the former structure and study its history myself. *The inner atmosphere covering these remains were loaded with a dark, dense cloud of smoke.* Nothing was left to be seen more than what appeared in the human world and nobody was there for inquiry. I asked my mentor father why it was so and what we should do to disperse the heavy smoke. He told me it would take more time and greater power of meditation before such an atmosphere could be replaced by a light that would clear up the suffocating smoke. As such, I was unable to know anything from *Nālandā* myself, except from its brief history from Ven. Phra *Mahā Yod* and from a book (in Thai) by Mr. Pairoj (La-Or) Koompairoj to the effect that it used to be the greatest educational institution of Buddhism, being also the university of the world. It was built to accommodate tens of thousands of Bhikkhu students. From B.E. 1000 to 1700 there had been several well-known teachers such as Ven. *Sīlabhadra*, *Santarakshita* and *Atisādiḡhambara*. The town was the birthplace of Venerables *Sārīputta* and *Moggallāna*, two foremost disciples of the Buddha. The place was also visited several times by the Buddha himself.

About two hundred years of the Buddha's passing away, king Asoka the Great undertook to revive Buddhism to its pristine purity once again after a period of decline due to the laxity of Bhikkhus' behaviour. Later on, when the Muslim armies were successful in invading most of the India, thousands of Bhikkhus and Buddhist students were massacred and Buddhist shrines in India, especially *Nālandā* university, were razed to the ground. It was said that this place was burnt for six months before the whole area became the debris of bricks.

We were led by Yen. Phra *Mahā Yod* to visit the *Nālandā* museum, in which there were many beautiful Buddha statues from the *Nālandā* debris. The place interested me greatly. I told Acharn Phorn we should some time later come back here and stay longer so I would be able to develop and strengthen my meditative power and see or learn about more facts concerning its history. In the meantime, however, we had to hurry to the Thai monastery at Buddha *Gayā*.

The First Buddhist Shrine, Buddha Gayā, Place of Enlightenment

We left *Nālandā* university, or rather its ruins, after 3 p.m. and then arrived at the Thai monastery of Buddha *Gayā* at 8 p.m. 'Always in our journey we arrived at our destination for the day in the evening, when it was dark, and so were unable to see what the place should look like, except for the glittering lights here and there. Having known beforehand that we were

going to reach Buddha *Gayā* that night, we hoped to see it towering over the tree-tops glowing in bright spot-lights. But, as in *Rājagaha*, there was a black-out and we could see nothing, except a faint contour of the Pagoda silhouetted against the western sky. Thus all were disappointed, but we tried to console ourselves that we would be able to see it in the morning anyway. As for myself, after leaving *Nālandā* I was feeling half-conscious and the rhythmic recitation of *Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi* seemed to be reverberating in my ears all the time. It permeated the gloomy atmosphere following us all the way from where we departed i.e. *Nālandā*.

I tried to calm down my mind, sending my thoughts to the Blessed One and mentally reciting *Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi*, trying to make it blend with the echoing voice that I was hearing. Before long I gazed forward and saw, in the dark through which nothing could be seen, a small light shining gradually brighter. By the light I saw the looming figure of the Pagoda. It looked like the Blessed One standing majestically with his robes covering his shoulders and facing north. I was filled with a rapturous delight when Ven. Phra Yat Thiradhammo broke the silence saying, "Look at the looming figure on our right side. It is the Buddha *Gayā* Pagoda. We are going to pay homage to it tonight after our evening meal at the Thai monastery. Then we shall go once again in the morning to have a closer look at it."

We entered the Thai monastery at Buddha *Gayā* and having had our evening meal were led by Ven. Phra Yart to the Pagoda, which was about 200 metres away

from the monastery. We went into the area and paid homage to a big gilded image of Buddha in the Victory attitude* We prostrated ourselves before the image with a feeling of deep reverence. But I was feeling strangely unwell. My head was heavy and my ears ringing, with my mind being distracted. It could be because of the tiresome journey, I thought, so I told Acharn Phorn to hurry back to the monastery since I was feeling like vomiting. Then our group went back while Acharn Phorn said that at four o'clock on the following day we were all invited to get up in order to meditate together under the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha was seated while he attained to the full-final Enlightenment. This privilege was granted us by the Lord Abbot of the Thai monastery ven. Chaokhun Phra *Dhamma Mahā Virāṇuvatti*, who had assigned Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay* to be his proxy leading us there. Usually, the gates of the Pagoda would be opened at 6 a.m. Those wishing to enter the place before this time had to be escorted by a Thai Bhikkhu at the Thai monastery.

The next day, which was Wednesday 15th November, we were led by Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay* to the Pagoda. Our group then consisted of Acharn Phorn Ratanasuwan, Mrs. Phongpiew Phaddhanapraphaphan, Miss Suphane Hong Ngern, Mr. Siri Buddhasukh and myself. We were

*This refers to the image of the Buddha seated with the left hand on his knee and the right on his lap. It signifies the fact that he had conquered *Māra* the Temptor by not getting up from his seat, or throne, of Meditation, where he sat during his great and final Exertion before Enlightenment.

warmly welcomed by the watchman at the gate, who later kindly provided us with a number of mats to sit on under the Bodhi tree. Acharn phorn took the lead in lighting the candles and joss-sticks, invoking the celestial beings to be our witnesses and reciting the prayers before meditating. We were later joined by Mrs. Sunan Leumrassamee, Miss Chaovance Leumrassamee, Mrs. Phenjan Songsirivit, and Miss Boonmee Viseshbhanijkit

*The atmosphere at dawn under the great Bodhi tree there was clothed in a silence so profound and blissful. Just then there appeared a great Bodhi tree with its verdant canopy of leaves spreading out its shelter over the whole area. It stood majestically towering above other trees. Under its shade there was the cool of peace and bliss undisturbed by the hustle and bustle outside, with none of its leaves being stirred by the sinister winds around. Those leaves hung down unmoved, looking like being carved out of stone. A moment later I saw a six-coloured light appearing gradually under the shade. The light became clearer and more intense in brightness while the familiar hymn of *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* was heard more distinctly, its rhythmic echo ringing and resounding in a chorus enthralling beyond compare. Our monarch said to me, "Despite the sinister influence of outside disturbances, for those with their minds established in *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* there will be nothing that can lead them astray. **Recite, therefore, the passage *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* whenever you are beset with suffering,** and you will be blessed with security. Now take some of the sacred earth under this Bodhi tree, at the place where the Blessed One was seated, to have it enshrined as a token of sacredness in the*

Freedom Pagoda at Pine Camp, Lomsak district, in the town of Petchaboon, Thailand.” We followed the Royal Command and looking at the watch we found it was exactly 6 a.m. All were happy and looked fresh as if we had just had an invigorating bath, despite the fact that we were still tired by the journey. After that we walked back to the Thai monastery to have our morning meal. Then we prepared ourselves to visit the home of lady *Sujātā*, who was said to have offered the Buddha, then still a Bodhistta, the delicious, specially prepared rice gruel. This was the last meal the Buddha ate before his Enlightenment that night. In fact I did not want to leave the Enlightenment Pagoda at all, but since it was in our itinerary I was compelled to go with others in our group. However, I told Acharn Phorn that, having reaching lady *Sujātā*'s home, I would let the others go about as they pleased, while I myself would like to come back and sit meditating under the Bodhi tree once again.

So we crossed the river, or what was once the river, *Nerāñjalā*, there being now only dry sand, but no water at all. Acharn Phorn, Mrs. Phongpiew, Miss Subhanee, Mrs. Tiangsiri and myself hurried back. It was on our way back that I noticed the Enlightenment Pagoda standing 170 feet high from another angle. At that distance we saw it clearly rising above the tree-tops as a square tower tapering off to the top like a pyramid, but at a far steeper angle. This square tower was crowned by a round, cone-shaped pagoda with intricate design. It can proudly boast of being a masterpiece of craftsmanship of Indian art. The Bodhi tree under which we meditated was behind this Pagoda. While walking back on the sandy bed of what

was once river *Nerañjalā* I felt drifting into another dimension, seeing the river as it used to be in the time of the Buddha, its ripples glistening lustriously in the morning sun, while the hymn of *Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi* was still resounding in that atmosphere. Having arrived at the Bodhi tree, we seated ourselves once again under it. Here I was drawn deeper and deeper and soon felt the atmosphere round the Bodhi tree precipitating, becoming drops of invisible vapour sprinkling on the heads of all who were sitting there. This produced a feeling of unprecedented delight to everybody of us. Possibly it was the remnants of the purest and most sublime power of the Buddha that dispelled a degree of darkness which had shrouded the place. What resulted was the fading away of the superimposing blackness, which was replaced by a glowing light with purifying and soothing effect both on us and on the astral beings there. I heard a mighty chorus sounding like thunder throughout the area. It said, " **Buddhism, the teaching that results from Enlightenment, is to lead human beings to a blissful peace. The Pagoda symbolic of Enlightenment is the only shrine not destroyed by the wretched blind.**" I told Acharn Phorn what I had heard, but he said nothing. Possibly he was drinking in the ecstasy of the blessing from the tree of Enlightenment.

After that we once again paid homage to the Buddha image within the Pagoda and walked leisurely admiring the place round it. Then we returned to the Thai monastery and having had our midday meal arranged, as before, a '*phā-pā*' charity for the Venerable Abbot. We also learned from him how he managed to open a Sunday school, in which Buddhism is taught to the children of Hindu families in the nearby villages. As a result many Hindus, both children and grownup people, became Buddhists. On

that day a number of Indian children who were Buddhists assembled in the Uposatha or Convocation Hall to receive the clothes to be distributed to them. Venerable Abbot had them recite the Buddhist passages in Pali so we could see how they were able to do so fluently. A number of us also contributed a sum of money to defray the cost of clothes given to them, especially to those who were hard-working and successful in their study. We left the Thai monastery in the afternoon. It was really a forced departure and we could not help thinking why the Buddha should have called this place *Saṁvejanīya*, which meant a place inducing the feeling of Weariness or Disenchantment. From there we headed for Benares (or *Vārānasi*), another most ancient town in India, which was on our route to the Deer-park of Isipatana or Sarnath, as it was presently called. This was the place where the Buddha delivered his First Sermon to the Five Ascetics. It was another place of the *Saṁvejanīya* group.

Vārānasi :
the Sacred River Ganges (or Gaṅgā)

As usual we arrived at *Vārānasi* after sunset i.e. 7. p.m. this time. But *Vārānasi* being a big city, we were able to see through the lights in the streets and marketplaces many houses and buildings. The name of the town was familiar to the Thai people who used to read Buddhist stories and watch the *Likay* performances in Thailand since almost always the name of King Brahmadatta ruling over *Vārānasi* was mentioned again and again. In my mind, therefore, *Vārānasi* was a really ancient

town made more holy by the river Ganges. Having reached the hotel and taken a bath, I tried to meditate but was disappointed since I was not able to do well enough. Possibly it was the modern civilisation shielding the ancient one from me, I told myself. That night I slept with the thought lingering on *Vārānasi* and its legendary background,— the centre of all divinity and mystery, the sacred Ganges being most sacred when it reached *Vārānasi*, with its water regarded as being able to wash away human sins. Thus it had been for thousands of years the home of rishis or hermits and other kinds of recluses. It was also the first place where the Buddha came to after his Enlightenment in order to deliver his First Sermon to his former attendants the Five Ascetics then residing at the deer-park of Isipatana. For this reason it was the place where the Buddha set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma, the epithet of his First Sermon, and where the Triple Gem occurred in the world for the first time. This was when one of the Five Ascetics, Ven. *Aññakoṇḍañña*, was enlightened into the Path of a Stream-Enterer, becoming thereby a Noble Disciple and first witness to the Buddha's Enlightenment. Later it was here that the Five Ascetics achieved the full-final attainment into the Path of Arahantship through subsequent sermons of the Buddha. Even the youth Yasa, the first lay disciple who realised the evils and dangers of lay life, and then his father and mother, were the first male and female lay disciples who met the Buddha here. At present, from what I was told, *Vārānasi* was still the most crowded city on the sacred days of Hinduism. It was said that the cremation fires on its bank had been burning continuously for more than 5,000 years. The *Kāsī* silk, most famous since the time

of the Buddha, was also made from here. Such was how *Vārānasi* was to me a city of mystery and magnificence in many ways.

I woke up in the morning with a heaviness in my head, which seemed unresponsive to anything. I was told last night by our tour leader Miss Piyawan Patima Arak we would be taken to a boat trip along the bank of the Ganges this morning. Somehow I was dazed, feeling rather excited at the thought of being about to witness many things of this many-splendoured city.

Friday 16th November : Not long after we left the hotel we arrived at the path leading to the landing-places on the bank of the Ganges. It was early in the morning; yet the place was alive with the noise and voice all round. The sound of sacred music was heard from almost all houses and shops that we were passing by. This, coupled with the noises and voices of the devotees rushing through the streets, showed how after thousands of years *Vārānasi* still maintained its greatness as far as its sanctified tradition was concerned. We made our way through the crowd of people, and also of the beggars, to our boat, a middle-sized one, which soon glided downstream at some distance from the bank. Looking forward at the opposite bank, we found to our surprise there was absolutely no human abode thereon. This was contrary to another bank, which was crowded with beautiful houses, shops and temples with funeral pyres in a group at one place. We were told that the bank on the other side was regarded as the land of hell, whereas on this side it was considered the bank of heaven. That was why there was only silence and solitude, but no

human abode on it. What we saw was only a sandy beach and a vast plain. Even the birds and crows seemed also to prefer to hover on this side and in the middle of the stream. Looking back on the nearer side, we saw from our boat a strong stone embankment stretching alongside for a long distance. Behind it we saw to our excitement various aspects of the people's life,—the *Vārānasins* who appeared to be seriously performing their sacred rituals, all the time oblivious to the stare of a considerable number of tourists, Europeans as well as Asians, who hired boats plying up and down the river at the same time with our group. Some were enjoying the dawn and the landscape before them ; others earnestly chanting their prayers, still others practising Yogic postures, which to us appeared sometimes as if they were dancing to pay homage to the Sun-god. At many landing-places we also saw a number of devotees performing their ritual bath ceremony on the steps, whereas others were brushing their teeth while standing waist-deep in the water. Many landing-places were reached by a flight of wide and high stairs. Yet all of them were crowded with devotees walking up and down, thus showing how the city was eternally a bustling centre of religious rites of Hinduism. High up from the bank we saw the fortified palaces of the *Mahārājās* built for the sake of washing off their sins here. There were also several Brahmans' temples, a widow's tower and then the places where bodies were being cremated. Some men were working at the simple pyres on the river-bank, burning the bodies, with a few more lying on the ground waiting for their turn. There were a number of relatives standing nearby watching the remains of their beloved ones being cremated. So this was the place, I told myself, where it was said the crema-

ting fires had been burning continuously for more than five thousand years. *At this point I was overcome by frustration and then drowsiness which was so irresistible. The following moment I found myself in a dense and suffocating cloud of smoke and could see nothing outside. Spontaneously my mind flashed towards the theme of meditation on death, when my ears heard the faint sound of Buddhaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi. Then the cloud of suffocating smoke gathering on the waters of the Ganges gradually took on a denser form, with streaks of black, red, green, yellow and blue interweaving one another within it. By this time the condensed, multi-coloured cloud curled itself in response to the interwoven colours and rose high above the water, with the deep, intense colours becoming lighter and brighter as it rose. In a few moments even those hues melted and merged into a pure white ribbon glistening like myriads of diamonds soaring heavenwards. Then the thought came spontaneously to me, "This is the Milky Way leading to the celestial land of Sukhāvati."*

I was aware once again of the environment when the boat was approaching the landing-place on its way back. Still a little bewildered at the sudden change of dimension, I looked at the water of the Ganges and to my surprise found that it was so clear that it looked green. This meant that it was not as muddy as it was thought to be, despite the fact that there had been so many people bathing in it, washing near it and wading into it for nobody knew how long. This was not to mention the throwing of parts of human remains or of the ashes thereof into it every day. That was why the Brahmans regarded that the sacred river

flowed from the celestial plane. According to what I had learnt from the scholars, the river originated far up north; in the range of the mighty Himalayas.

After the boat trip we returned to the hotel, each with a different feeling towards what he or she had seen along the bank of the sacred river. On our way back we had a little shopping in the marketplace. Having had our morning meal, we got ready for the trip to Sarnath, the place where the Buddha delivered the "Wheel of the Law" sermon to the Five Ascetics and where the third Gem i.e. the Sangha in the real sense of the term was born, thus completing the meaning of the Triple Gem.

The Second Holy Shrine: Deer-park of Isipatana, Sarnath

The Deer-park of Isipatana at Sarnath is at present about 9 kilometres from *Vārānasi*. We first arrived at the Chaugandhi thupa on the left side of the road. The Thupa is situated on an earth mound and was built with bricks. It was crowned with an octagonal tower-like structure and was erected by royal command of king Asoka the Great at the place where the Buddha was said to have met the Five Ascetics his former attendants and disciples. *This I heard from somebody whose voice I did not recognise since it came to me only faintly, reaching me like waves vibrating near my ears. I was not feeling like being myself, but was somehow drawn, as if by a magnet, into a cool, shady forest of stately trees of various kinds. The beams of sunlight could be seen penetrating through the leafy canopy*

overhead in a few places. By this light I was able to see dim figures of a number of hermits and recluses in their serene meditating posture. They were all unmoved, being apparently absorbed, in their rapturous bliss of meditation and were thus oblivious to the serenades of the birds and the rhythmic chorus of wind-blown leaves around them. I looked forward and saw at a distance and the next moment a bright light like that of the sun at midday time. It illumined the dim place in the shady forest and made it shine brighter. I was going to look around to observe more things in this enchanting forest when a voice reached my ears," Let's go to the museum, otherwise it will be closed. It's almost 4 p.m. now." I said I would like to go inside and see the Thupa but since most of us wanted to see the museum first I had to comply and entered the museum with them. But I could see or hear little inside. After some time I walked out of the museum with Miss Suphanee and looked for the car to take me to the Thupa so I could pay homage to it. However, I could not find it and had to walk almost around the area until I finally came to an entrance. *Here I felt like being followed by someone and hearing my name being called softly. I stopped and drew a long deep breath in and out. The next moment, in another dimension, I saw a Ceylonese Bhikkhu of dignified stature, who said to me kindly, "Do you recognise me?... It has taken you many days before you can arrive here. I appreciate the task of one who works selflessly to make the Light shine. May you be blessed with security."*

I emerged and opening my eyes saw Miss Suphanee and myself standing in front of the *Vihāra* of Venerable *Anāgārika Dhammapāla*, the Ceylonese Bhikkhu who

had devotedly struggled to revive Buddhism in India, mainly to bring back the Four Buddhist Shrines into the custody of Buddhists. I told Miss Suphanee we would go to join our group first. After finishing our religious task there, we would come back here and pay homage to the image of Venerable *Anāgārika Dhammapāla* in this *Vihāra*.

It was then 3.30 p.m. Miss Suphanee and I came to join our group at the Dhammekha Thupa, where the Buddha met the Five Ascetics and delivered his sermons to them. The Five Ascetics were *Koṇḍañña*, Vappa, Bhaddiya, *Mahānāma* and Assaji. Of these five, *Koṇḍañña* was the first who at the end of the First Sermon realised the Path of the Stream-Winner and thus became the First Noble Disciple, witness to the Buddha's Enlightenment. Thus he was later called *Āññā Koṇḍañña*, meaning the *Koṇḍañña* who had realised the Truth. While Acharn Phorn was leading us to light the candles and joss-sticks and was invoking the celestial beings to be our witnesses, *I was drawn back to the scene of the enchanting forest I had seen a few moments ago. The light of the noonday sun appeared once again to my mind's eye, accompanied with the familiar recitation of the passage Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi. which became more distinctly heard. Now the hermits and recluses that used to seat themselves motionless appeared to move a little in their places and to listen attentively to the resounding passage. At this moment all was quiet, there being no chirping sound of the birds nor any rustle of the wind-blown leaves, except the echo of the Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi pervading the whole area.*

I heard our monarch say, "Take some earth from anywhere within this sacred place and have it enshrined as representation of the sacredness in the Freedom Pagoda, at Pine Camp, district of Lomsak, town of Phetchaboon, Thailand." We did so and Acharn Phorn led us to pay homage to take another quantity of sacred earth from the Gandhakuti, the Buddha's residence, not far from the Dhammekha Thupa. Strange to say, while we were chanting our prayer within the area of the Gandhakuti, there was a drizzle giving us a feeling of coolness permeating both our body and mind. I felt being surrounded by a large number of people and hearing their reverberating murmur which said, "The Sun of the world is at present being hidden behind a mountain. As such it can give the world but a dim and shimmering light. Let us, therefore, recite the passage Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi with all our devotion so we can demolish the mountain that stands between us and the Light." This was followed by a tuneful, rhythmical recitation of other passages in an enchanting chorus of celestial voices filling every atom of the whole area. Having finished our task here, we all proceeded silently but happily to the Vihāra of the Venerable Anāgārika Dhammapāla, which was about 500 metres away.

Having paid our homage to the Buddha's Relics within the *Dhammapāla Vihāra*, we went to the Thai monastery of *Migradāyavana* (i.e. the Deer-park), which had been built by a Thai Bhikkhu by the name of *Phra Krū Prakas Samādhiḡuṇa*, to arrange for a *Pha-pā* charity as usual. We could not stay here long since it was late in the after noon and we had to hurry back to our

hotel at *Vārānasi* to prepare for the journey on the next day to *Kusinārā*, where the Buddha passed away. It was another Buddhist Shrine in our itinerary.

The Third Buddhist Shrine : Kusinara, where the Buddha Passed Away

Next morning we were taken by Miss Piyawan out of *Vārānasi* at 6 a.m. of Saturday 17th November. In fact we were scheduled to leave at 5 a.m. and were called up at four. But the coach arrived late and so we departed one hour later than the appointed time. We reached Gorakkhapur, the junction where we could go to both *Kusinārā* and *Lumbinī*, at 11.30 a.m. Having been checked in at the hotel and had our midday meal, we proceeded to *Kusinārā*. From Gorakkhapur to *Kusinārā* Venerable Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, who accompanied Ven. Phra *Mahā Vicit* from the Thai monastery of Buddha *Gayā* to do some business for the Lord Abbot Chaokhun Phra Dhamma *Mahā Vīrānuwat* and was therefore our associate member, had kindly told us many things in the episodes of the life of the Buddha connected with the Buddhist Shrines in India. So we passed the time happily and almost forgot the feeling of tiredness because of the journey.

Kusinārā, which is presently called Kasia, has been remodelled by the Indian Government and is now a cool and beautiful place, being like a park with shady trees. It is called *Sālvānodayāna*. It was about 4 p.m. when we arrived, so there were not many people to be seen. This

made the place more quiet and serene, with the chirping noises of the cicadas heard occasionally from a distance. We strolled along the small path for some moments and soon reached the *Thūpa* and the *Vihāra* originally built by King Asoka the Great. It must have been in a state of dilapidation through the lapse of time and had been repaired occasionally, with some re-modelling and enlargement. Now it was dilapidated again and was being repaired, with scaffolds to be seen all round it. Within the *Virāha Parinibbāna* there was a Buddha image made of sandstone in the reclining attitude representing his passing away. It was about 20 feet long, with its head towards the North and its face looking towards the East. It looked so much like a real human being who was sleeping. We approached to pay homage to it and were overwhelmed by a feeling of disenchantment while being reminded of the law of change and destructibility of all things in the world. I was then wondering where the twin *Sāla* tree under which the Buddha passed away should be. There should be, so I said to myself, some remains to be seen like those of the Bodhi tree at the place of Enlightenment.

At this thought the place was plunged into a serene silence, with a pair of leafy and stately Sāla trees standing before my eyes, its fragrant flowers blossoming all over. Under their shades there appeared a six-coloured aura radiating from a centre. Then I heard the voice of our great monarch say, "Take some sacred earth from the Thūpa where the Buddha passed away, and have it enshrined as his representation in the Freedom Pagoda, at Pine Camp, Lomsak district, province of Petchaboon, Thailand." I told

this to Acharn Phorn, so we went out of the *Vihāra* and walked towards its back to take some earth from near the sacred *Thūpa*.

While Acharn Phorn was lighting candles and joss-sticks and, as usual, was inviting the celestial beings to be our witnesses, *I was drawn into solitude and heard a soft cry of weeping and wailing not far away. This was followed by a long and low rumble of voices which seemed to belong to a great many people saying in unison that although the Sun of the world had sunk below the horizon, yet the light emanating therefrom was to illumine the world for ever; let us recite, so the voices continued, Buddhāṃ Saraṇāṃ Gacchāmi repeatedly so we could destroy the mountains that had veiled the sunlight from us.*

Having obtained the sacred earth from where we wanted, we proceeded to arrange, as usual, for a *Phā-pā* charity for a Burmese Bhikkhu in charge of the *Vihāra* before going to the *Makuṭa Bandhana Cetiya*, where the Buddha's body was cremated, which was about 2 kilometres away.

It was now almost 6 p.m. The sun was now low on the Western horizon. Possibly it was through my own imagination, or it could be because of the feeling of sadness overwhelming my mind, that I was moved to see the sinking sun radiating a faint and gloomy light that made my heart sink too. With the encroachment of the dark of night, I came to realise more than ever before how this place had wielded the greatest disenchanting power on my mind. The cool and serenity of the place inspired me to see the

truth of Impermanence and Changeability, the wheel of rebirths and redeaths which was ever-rolling, never-retarding and all-inclusive. No matter how high the celestial realms and how low the nether planes, they were all set rolling within this all-powerful wheel of change and destructibility. Our Lord the Buddha was the first person who was delivered from this wheel,—the vicious cycle of rebirths and redeaths. With such thought in mind I recited, paying humble obeisance to our Supreme Father, ‘*Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi,.....*’

We returned to our hotel at Gorakhpur with a heavy heart which still dwelled on the passing away of the Blessed One, and prepared ourselves for the journey to *Lumbinī* on the following day.

Lumbini, The fourth Buddhist Shrine on our Route

On Saturday 18th November we left Gorakhpur at 5 a.m. heading for *Lumbinī*, which was in the land of Nepal. At 9.30 a.m. we arrived at the Naugarh outpost, where our tour leader Miss Piyawan took our passports to the immigration office for entrance permission. It was almost 11 a.m. before we arrived at *Lumbinī* our destination. So dusty and bumpy was this part of the road leading to *Lumbinī* that it was a real trial to most of us. We were told that on this road if vision was good we would be able to see the Himalaya Mountains. But due perhaps to the dust or the heat, vision was so limited on that day we

were unable to see anything pleasant, except the dry, parched fields on both sides of the road. I felt heavy in my heart and had to warn myself that we were on our way to the places inducing disenchantment, and not those of enjoyment. This feeling, therefore, was to be expected as a matter of course. At this thought of detachment I was drawn inward and became oblivious to what was going on outside. *Then I saw the long and seemingly endless range of the Himalaya Mountains with the forest of their perennial snow-clad peaks, their lower slopes wrapped in the mantle of ever-green foliage, which had hidden from view the sources of many a mighty, life-nourishing river of the lotus-shaped sub-continent. Nevertheless, its delightful cool could be felt and the murmurs of its brooks and rivulets heard under the leafy canopy which was bedecked with sweet-smelling flowers of variegated hues. Wafted by the breeze, these ornaments of the forest sprinkled on the carpets of grass and undergrowth below, creating on them a multi-coloured design so impressive beyond description. In the midst of this beautiful, ethereal setting there stood a stately tree rising high above those around it, with its pure white flowers bestrewing the area like flakes of snow. It was under the cool shade of this majestic tree that an aura of six colours was seen shining bright suddenly, illumining at the same time the galaxy of flowers in that area. Then there came the familiar recitation of *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi....*," and I heard our great monarch say," Take some of the sacred earth at the point where the Buddha first set foot on the world and have it enshrined as his representation in the Freedom Pagoda, at Pine Camp, Lomsak district, Petchaboon province, Thailand."*

Next moment I was aware of what was going on around me. By this time we arrived almost to the gateway

of *Lumbinī*. I got off the coach and followed others in a somewhat semi-conscious state, feeling buoyant like floating rather than walking. After some time I was wondering where it should be that the infant Siddhattha first set his glorious feet on this planet Earth. *As if in answer to my mental question, I was drawn inside once again and saw a column of bright light rising up from a place not far away. It was met also by a beam of light, equally bright. This took place near a great Bodhi tree by the side of a pond somewhat opposite to the Māyādevī Vihāra.* I told Acharn Phorn we had to go there. He questioned why I did not take it from the Bodhi tree nearest to the *Vihāra*, but I did not answer anything, possibly because I could not, being then in a semi-conscious state. I led our group to the place where the two beams of light appeared and met each other, near the Bodhi tree. Then Acharn Phorn lighted the candles and joss-sticks and invoked the celestial beings to be our witnesses before reciting our prayers. After that we sat down and meditated for a time. *It was during this meditation period that there occurred the rhythmic recitation of Buddhāṃ Saranāṃ Gacchāmi in the background, while in the foreground the resounding voices said to the effect that this was the place where the Bodhisatta was born. Being the last of the four Holy Shrines on our route, it augured the start of another period of progress for the Dhamma of the Buddha's Enlightenment. This Dhamma would serve as the beacon light, following which the world would be blessed with real peace. The darkness that had been blanketing the world for quite a long time would then be dispelled, giving way to the bright light of the Dhamma. The life of all that had the nature of growing, and even of the mountains and the sky,—all that came to be called this planet, would be*

refreshed when they were bathed in the light of Dhamma. Recite, therefore, Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi and make it sink deep into your minds. Such was what the resounding voices advised us all.

Having obtained enough sacred earth from the place, we went on to the monastery of Nepal, where Miss Piyawan had prepared the midday meal for us. After we had arranged, as usual, for the *Phā-pā* charity, we left the birthplace of the Buddha with a lingering thought on it, which might be different in accordance with the tendency and taste of each.

On our way back we dropped at another place of archaeological interest supposed to be the town of Kapilavattu and *Nighrodhārāma* (The Banyan Grove). The area glowed gold in the afternoon sun because of its yellow mustard flowers. At the Banyan Grove there was a quantity of some black rice found on the ground. Some of us collected a handful of it each as a souvenir. I withdrew into meditation but could find nothing to confirm the reputed fact, so I was not in a position to say for certain how much truth there was in the presumption. We arrived at Gorakkhapur after 7 p.m. and all were very tired. Nevertheless, my thought was still lingering on *Lumbinī* and my ears ringing with the resounding voices *Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi*.

While having our evening meal together, Miss Suphanee said to me that that day was the sixtieth birthday of her uncle, meaning Acharn Phorn. Hearing this, Miss Piyawan invited us all to sing Happy Birthday as a blessing

to Acharn Phorn. Then Mrs. Supharee said, "I was also born on this day (November 18)." At the same time I heard someone in our group say, "It is a marvellous thing that, while paying homage to the place where the Buddha was born, the day should be the birthday of two members of our group. What a coincidence it is that our birthdays should fall on the day when we come to visit the Buddha's birthplace." While we were singing Happy Birthday, I still heard the recitation *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* inserting itself until I went to bed and fell asleep because of tiredness.

**The Jeta Grove, at Savatthi,
where the Buddha stayed
for the longest period**

It was a wonder that even after I had waken up in the following morning the passage *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* still resounded in the atmosphere. We left Gorakkhapur at 5.30 p.m. of Monday 19th of November to proceed to the Jeta Grove, in *Sāvattthī*, the state of Kosala ruled over by King Pasenadi in the time of the Buddha. I was not able to learn about the feeling on the part of others, but to me it was a sheer feeling of ecstasy, with everything all round looking unusually bright and pleasant. Possibly I had in the recess of my mind what the Buddha used to say to Venerable Ananda, "Any Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, *Upāsaka* or *Upāsikā*, O Ananda, who comes to these places with the belief that the *Tathāgata* was born, attained to Enlightenment, set in motion the Wheel of the Law and passed away, and is impressed thereby, will after the dissolution of the body enter a realm of bliss."

According to Acharn Phorn, the passage was in the *Mahāvagga* of the Long Sayings section of the Pali Canon (10/163). I wondered how much truth there was in this passage and, what was important, why other places connected with the life-story of the Buddha were not included in this category. Why should these four places be seen by devoted Buddhists and having seen them, why should they be able to enter a celestial realm after the dissolution of the body? Another question was: Will those living near these holy places also enter such a realm after their death? Now, since there really exist the divine, invisible beings with some power, why had they not protected these places from being ruthlessly destroyed by the spiritually blind people? But all these phenomena were indicative of the Truth of Changeability and Destructibility discovered and revealed to us by the Buddha. There is nothing around us, in our life, that is permanent and eternal. Whatever has been born is sure to suffer change and decline. Never is there anything that can stay this process. It is the wheel of change that rolls on, ceaselessly, eternally, encompassing all that is mundane in this relative world or in other worlds that are still relative and mundane. *As my thoughts reached far out, my feeling drew me deeper in, with the rhythmical chorus of Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi being like a musical chord always in the background. Then came the melodious notes of the movement which said, "With the appearance of the moon there reigns supreme the blissful quietude produced by its cool and gentle light. Thus the dancing moonbeam on the earth is the delicate dream standing for the tenderness of the wisp of cotton falling gently onto the ground. But the rise of dawn brings with it a strong, powerful light which*

will soon break up the gloom that has so far hidden from view what is there to be seen. In the same manner the light of the Buddha Dhamma will break to pieces the wheel of change and destructibility. Recite Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, and receive the forces of security at the Jeta Grove. It was here that the Buddha dwelt longest to preach his Doctrine to mankind."

From Gorakhpur to the gateway to the Jeta Grove I had been in a somewhat semi-conscious state, half-dreaming and half-waking, speaking with others in our group like from a body some distance away. I was back to normal when we got off the coach and started walking into the Grove. I was enthralled by the thought of being about to see the place which was offered to the Buddha by a millionaire by the name of Sudatta, or in a more popular name, *Anāthapiṇḍika* (one who always has lump of rice for the poor) and where our Lord the Buddha had stayed for 19 years,—the longest period of staying in any one place during his mission of 45 years after his Enlightenment.

To the physical eyes the Jeta Grove was very wide, being a fenced area within which were grown many shady trees giving cool shades. It looked somewhat like a town in itself. This showed how the Indian Government has taken pains to preserve it as an important archaeological site. There are still a large number of remains of ancient structures scattered all over the area, These are reminiscent of how prosperous the place had once been in the time of the Buddha. In it we were led to see the remains

of the Buddha's residence called *Gandhakūṭi*, the residences of Venerables *Sāriputta*, *Moggallāna*, *Mahākasapa*, *Sivali*, *Rāhula*, *Upāli* and others. There was also a large and leafy Bodhi tree called *Anandabodhi*. All these were explained to us by Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, but during this time I was almost unaware of what was going on outside. An Indian who looked after a well by the side of the Buddha's *Gandhakūṭi* kindly drew water from it and handed it over to us for drink. According to Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, this was a sacred well since it had existed since the time of the Buddha and even the Buddha himself also used water from this well. Other members of our group were excited and drank it and washed their faces with it saying that it was refreshingly cool and tasteless. Yet all this time I was rather dazed, being unable to see or think clearly. Such a feeling gave me a headache, so I seated myself down by the side of the well and did not pay attention to anything but closed my eyes and took a deep breathing in and out. *Soon I felt comfortable and buoyant and saw a brilliant light inflaming the whole area with the recitation of Buddhāṃ Saranāṃ Gacchāmi lulling me softly all the time. Then I heard the voice of our monarch say, "Take some of the sacred earth from the Buddha's Gandhakūṭi and from other Noble Arahant disciples of his and have them enshrined as his representation in the Freedom Pagoda, at Pine Camp, in the district of Lomsak, the town of Petchaboon, Thailand. Then make your mind calm so you may be receptive of the pure force from the Gandhakūṭi."* I told Acharn Phorn and everybody about this. We then managed to take some of the sacred earth from those places and sat meditating in the area of

the *Gandhakuti* for a while. After that we came to drink the water from the sacred well and washed our faces with its cool and refreshing water. We then proceeded to other residences of the Arahant disciples and collected the sacred earth therefrom.

Our task having been finished, we gathered together to have our midday meal prepared for us by our tour leader Miss Piyawan within the Jeta Grove area. Everybody looked happy and refreshed. After the meal we went to see what was supposed to be the house of the millionaire Sudatta or *Anāthapiṇḍika*, who bought the Jeta Grove with a skyrocketing price to offer it to the Buddha. There was also the house supposed to belong to Ven. *Āṅgulināla*'s father. There was at these two places no contact whatever from the astral vibrations. We came to a Ceylonese monastery not far from the Jeta Grove and, as usual, dispensed the *Phā-pā* charity to the Lord Abbot there. While the Abbot was reciting the passages acknowledging our meritorious deeds and we were directing our thoughts to follow his blessings, *I was once again drawn inside, where every atom of its atmosphere seemed to have been charged with the recitation of Buddhāṃ Saraṇāṃ Gacchāmi.* To the readers this might seem monotonous and boring since there has been mentioned this recitation of *Buddhāṃ Saraṇāṃ Gacchāmi* so often, or too often, in the foregoing pages and there will be more in the pages that follow. But to me it is sweet, tuneful and impressive. Wherever the Blessed One had trod or set foot on, there the atoms were scented as well as charged with the recitation of

Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi, with a blazing light on his trail. But after the passage of time and, more important, due to the blind ignorance of people, the Light has been veiled by a heavy fog produced by people's erring minds. Nevertheless, the light itself can never be dimmed; it is still shining as bright for those seekers after the Truth and can help them break away from the vicious cycle of rebirths and redeaths.

We left the Jeta Grove at 3.30 p.m. but I was still followed, as if being seen off, by the low murmurs of so many people who said, "*Matter is but an illusion; time is alluring. These can be overcome by realisation of the truth that only through detachment can the Atman that has been suffering ceaseless rebirths and redeaths be freed. Thereafter the inborn light will shine forthwith, in all its brilliance, as a result of this all-knowing wisdom.*" Hearing this message, I could not help presuming that it might be the gist of the teaching while the Blessed One was still living and preaching to mankind. During this time we were going on to spend the night at Lucknow, capital of the state of Uttra Pradesh. In the following morning we were scheduled to go on to *Saṅkassa Nagara*, which was supposed to be the place where the Buddha descended from the *Tāvātimsa* heaven after he had preached to his own mother in that realm. Ven. *Phra Mahā Amnuay's* voice was still heard while he was telling us many useful pieces of information concerning India. But I was most of the time in a semi-conscious condition.

Sankassa Nagara

As usual, we left Lucknow before dawn i.e. at 5 a.m. and were unable, again as usual, to see much of it since we arrived last night at almost 8 p.m. What we saw then was only the houses and buildings looming in the dark. But I was surprised why I should feel uncomfortable and thus very miserable in spite of the fact that both the hotel was of a good kind and the food offered appetising enough. I complained dismally about this to Miss Suphanee and Mrs. Phongpiew my room-mates until they were soon as miserable in sympathy with me. To encounter this feeling I mentally recited *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*, but there was no tuneful and rhythmic murmur that I used to hear in response to my recitation. This was quite different from what I had experienced so far. *Only once in a long while did I hear it in a soft, faint tone. It sounded like coming from very far away and could be heard only when I deliberately strained my ears to listen to it with all my force.*

Soon I drifted into an atmosphere of suffocating smoke, with so many people running around in a disorderly manner. By something in the depth of my mind I came to know that these people were all Muslims. So I extended my loving-kindness to them and requested that we were to stay here for only one night. It was then that the suffocating smoke dispersed.

We left Lucknow on Tuesday 20th November in the morning. On my way to *Sankassa Nagara* I was told that Lucknow, the place where we stayed for the night last night used to belong to the Muslims for many hundred

years. This I learned from Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, who told us on our way to *Saṅkassa Nagara*. He related to us its history and pointed at the mosques and the ancient palaces of the Moghul kings, which were very large. I kept silent most of the time and was still extending my loving-kindness the way I had done the night before at the hotel.

It was quite a distance from Lucknow to *Saṅkassa Nagara*. The weather was dry and the road dusty. I was so unwell that I had to take some medicine. We arrived at the place supposed to be *Saṅkassa* at about 2 p.m. The weather became more hot and dry. The remains of what was supposed to be the place where the Buddha descended from the *Tāvatiṃsa* heaven was superimposed by the *Sivaliṅga* of the Hindus, who built it thereon. They were performing some rites when we arrived and were playing gramophone records through the loudspeaker with such a blaring noise that could reach up to heaven, or possibly it was their purpose. I tried to enter into the meditational state but could not do so since the weather was oppressively hot. However, something inside told me that it was certainly a wrong presumption. The place could **not** be the one where the Buddha descended from the *Tāvatiṃsa*, as it was supposed to be. There was nothing cool and calm that came into contact at all. That it was presumed to be so was perhaps because there was nearby a pole supposed to be built by King Asoka. Traditionally, there was a lion's head at the top of the column, but this one, strangely enough, had on it the sculpture of an elephant standing on a platform carved with the design of lotus-leaves turned upside down. Seeing nothing of much

interest, we backed out our car to enter the main highway and proceeded to Agra in order to view the world-famed love monument Taj Mahal.

Accounts of my pilgrimage to the Buddhist Shrines should have ended here since from now on we were going to visit places that are not directly connected with the life-story of the Buddha. But the itinerary planned by our great monarch was not complete. Possibly he wanted us to see more worthy to be seen. Following, therefore, were our further experiences.

Taj Mahal, Poem in Marble, World-famed Monument of Love Eternal

It was late in the afternoon when we approached Agra. The sun was gradually sinking and losing its oppressive heat. Ven. Bhikkhu Yart said, "If we can arrive at Agra before dark, we shall see sunset on Taj Mahal. It shines bright and is really an impressive sight beyond words" This aroused the interest of all who heard him and we wished to be there as soon as possible. But our chauffeur, like all others in India, was invariably cool-headed. No matter what happened, he preferred to go at 40 kilometres per hour at the most. But ususally he would not go more than thirty. Going at that rate on such a long distance made me feel very drowsy and somewhat boring, with my mind lost in thoughts that were all incoherent. After all I was certain, and accepted the fact, that we could not be at our destination before sunset. During this time Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay* was narrating various accounts

for us all including the story of Taj Mahal and that of the Moghul dynasty. Apparently he had no word of praise for this monument of love eternal.

Then I felt myself drifting up in a soaring flight, seeing a great crowd of people walking to and fro. They were all beautifully dressed, with their multi-coloured clothes and elaborate ornaments. There were both men and women but they were all Indians. In the midst of this crowd there were a couple,—a man and a woman, remarkably more beautiful and attractive than the rest. The man dressed himself in white clothes, his turban being crimson red bedecked with glittering jewels. The woman covered herself with red gold-embossed dresses, and wore a crown on her head. Her veil was of white colour and edged with silver braid. It covered her body full length and stretched long behind her. They were walking away hand in hand, followed by a great crowd of people, the tinkling of their bracelets and anklets fading away in the distance. Then I heard a voice telling me the opposite of what was related to us. It said, “Taj Mahal is the monument representing the love tender and profound. Contrary to the rumour and record, it was not built out of blood and tears.”

Here I was brought back to full consciousness and recalled having heard, while going out of Darjeeling, Mrs. Nuanchan say, “The Taj Mahal having been completed, Shah Jahan had the hands of his craftsmen cut off and their eyes gouged out. The purpose was to prevent them from constructing another place which would be equal in craftsmanship to Taj Mahal. In his idea, there must be

only one Taj Mahal in the world." However, Mrs. Nuanchan added that she had heard it from someone else and therefore could not say whether or not it should be true. But there was one thing she assured us. "Be that as it may," she said, "the Taj Mahal is irrefutably so beautiful. It is a piece of art built with exquisite workmanship. Just think of a solid block of marble sculptured into a curtain with frills and roses with tender petals. So like real roses they are that you will be tempted to pluck them out. You will wonder how they were carved out of such a solid, hard marble block. The setting of jewels was also done with great care. They were all buried into, and not merely fixed on, those slabs of stone; nor were they painted to look like the precious stones." Such a vivid description made all of us more eager to see it.

As usual, it was after sunset, i.e. about 7 p.m., when we reached Agra. So we lost our opportunity to see Taj Mahal at sunset. My thoughts at this time was dwelling on the background story of Taj Mahal heard from others and then on the beautiful sight of a lovely couple walking hand in hand with all the appearance of happiness and followed by a large crowd of admiring and joyful people. It was such an impressive and indelible sight that I could not get it out of my mind. This despite the fact that many of us seemed to be unenthusiastic about seeing this monument of eternal love. Some there were who said it was but a kind of tomb or that it was built out of one person's cruel selfishness,—a person who had brought about untold misery to thousands of his own subjects just to gratify his own selfish desire. There seemed to be nobody looking at the bright side of it at all. Yet something in my mind

made me oppose their viewpoint silently and for this reason I looked forward to seeing it more eagerly.

While being lost in this thought the resounding and rhythmical chorus of Buddhāṃ Sarāṇāṃ Gacchāmi came to my ears from all sides. In a moment a voice inserted itself and said, "A person reaching the ultimate point of anything will be crowned with a blissful happiness in proportion to, and in line with, the nature of that practice. Moreover, the delicacy and profundity of those benefits to accrue to him will depend again on his level or degree of maturity. But, however blissful it is, such a condition is like being chained at all times by his own desires. Recite, therefore, as often as possible, the passage Buddhāṃ Sarāṇāṃ Gacchāmi."

Having checked in at our hotel, Venerable Phra Yart invited us to see Taj Mahal, saying, "It is also very beautiful after sunset although it is not a moonlit night. By this we may be able to compare, when we go to see it again in the morning, which is more beautiful, and in what way." A number of us went with him, but unfortunately the gateway to the Taj Mahal had already been closed, so we had to see it only in the morning.

**"Till Death do us part"
no longer true**

We left the hotel early the following day, which was Wednesday 21st November, and were able to view the Taj Mahal before sunrise. There had been already many

people waiting with the same purpose, a number of them being Western people who apparently were no less enthusiastic. Here we realised for ourselves the subtle meaning of the sweet and tender beauty of this poem in marble. *Gazing at it, I came to realise the feeling of one who had been blessed with the nectar of love and then would like to have others share the same immortal flavour of that ambrosia,—so delicate and fragrant yet so serene and lofty it was. To him it was what he cherished with the most tender and loving care. While I was drinking in the lovely wonder of the Taj Mahal in front, the couple I had seen the previous day appeared to me once again. As before, they strolled hand in hand with all the appearance of those blessed now with the ambrosia of their eternal love being fulfilled. How illusory was the passage I used to think was the most beautiful when it said, "...till death do us part." Here and now I was witnessing the immortal couple, smiling the smile of those who had reached the zenith of their blessed love, walking happily together after what most of us had concluded, naively, that they must have been parted for ever through their 'deaths'. Obviously they were enjoying each other's company and would be drinking the ambrosial nectar of their love for nobody knew how long. Now no 'death' could part them as long as they did not want to part company with each other. Then I heard a voice coming from the morning mist which they were walking in and which engulfed me as well at this time. Gladly and eagerly it said to me,*

“This piece of art, so lovely and delicate, is evidence of the fact that it did not originate from cruelty or selfishness; nor was it built by the use of force.

“Such a lovely thing must come out of the heart nourished by the milk of human kindness and nurtured by a tender and delicate feeling.

“Taj Mahal was born of the nobility of a man who was devoted, religiously, to the lady that has captured his heart.

“It is symbolic of the truth that love is a wonderful, ‘many-splendoured thing’

“All who participated in the crystallisation of this Taj Mahal are filled with an ecstatic delight whenever they see how others still admire their devoted skills and efforts expended lovingly on this masterpiece of the monument of love. This they had willingly and whole-heartedly done with the purpose that it might be known and admired throughout the whole world.”

Long Live the “Emperor of Love”

Spellbound by the voice telling me the true background story of the building of Taj Mahal I transmitted my thankfulness to it. I recited *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* and extended my loving-kindness to the happy couple and all their retinue. May the great emperor of love Shah Jahan, the creator of Taj Mahal, be blessed with the everlasting happiness with his beloved and loving queen Mumtaj Mahal. May the same blessing of happiness be bestowed upon all the craftsmen who had helped crystallise this wonderful edifice out of the devoted love and sympathy for their Majesties. And may they all

know that, despite the criticism that the Shah had exorbitantly spent a large sum of money merely to gratify his own desires, there is at least one person from a distant land who admires his devoted love and sees how it has paid off in drawing a large sum of money from a large number of tourists to India. So many of these people, men and women, young and old, from both the East and the West, and far and near, have come to acknowledge and admire this monument of the love tender, delicate and eternal.

Having seen the Taj Mahal inside and outside and from all angles, we returned to the hotel and prepared for the journey to New Delhi to pay our homage to the monument of Mahatma Gandhi, the noble leader of India and great statesman of the world. We have learned from his biography how he had strictly upheld his principle of non-violence in his selfless struggle for the independence of his mother-land. It was through his heroic, magnanimous sacrifice that India has become independent of the British domination, being a free country to this day.

Delhi, Capital of India

From Agra we reached Delhi after 7. p.m. It was dark as usual and so we had no time to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his monument. While having our evening meal, Miss Piyawan told us that we would have to leave next morning at 5 a.m. for Rishigesh and Mussoorie. I asked her when we could go to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his monument. She replied that on

our way back from Mussourie we would come to Delhi once again and would be able to go by that time. However, I could hardly sleep that night, but felt uneasy and troubled and had to tell my mentor father that I was feeling unwell. I also conveyed through him our gratitude towards the Mahatma for his kindness in having guided and protected us along our journey. We would certainly go to his place, so I said, after our return from Mussourie.

Rishigesh, Mussourie and Delhi

On Thursday 22nd November : we left our hotel in Delhi at 5.30 a.m. and reached Rishigesh at 11.30 a.m. We were disappointed to see that the real Rishigesh we saw that day was far different from the Rishigesh we had pictured in our minds. We used to imagine there would be dense and mighty forests, with the rishis and other recluses seated under shady trees absorbed in their meditation. But we saw a crowded town with none of the rishis we had dreamed of seeing. There were, if at all, those looking like wretched beggars and being very dirty, there being nothing in them that we thought should deserve our respect. Then we passed out of the town and ascended the slopes of mountains. There were a number of divine places of worship of the Hindus to be seen along the way. Looking down we saw river Ganges winding its way through the high mountains. It became more beautiful when later the mountain path took us up the steep slopes where the river was seen more closely alongside the road. Far out stood another range of mountains like a colossal wall. Here we could see the pebbles on the riverbed clearly. According to Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, this was the source of

river Ganges. It made us eager to touch its pure limpid water with our hands, Acharn Phorn told the driver to stop so we could gratify our wish.

Ven. Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, who used to stay at Rishigesh and study Yoga here for some time, later led us to a Hindu monastery built by Venerable *Swāmī Sivānanda*. There were a number of students from foreign countries coming to study and practice here. At the entrance to this monastery there was a stone square column on the four sides of which were inscribed a number of rules set forth for those who wanted to stay here. While Phra *Mahā Amnuay* was reading and translating these rules, *my consciousness was drawn inside, and I saw a Hindu monk of dignified stature, but with his eyes radiating a profound, serene peace. He said,*

“Your visit is welcomed. Peace is the destination of all. The paths leading to it may be different, but the point is the same,” I accepted his words reverently and felt like being hypnotised to walk into a hall nearby and to call other members of our group to follow me while they were listening to Phra *Mahā Amnuay’s* explanation. Entering this hall I found it looked like a cave since its walls were made of marble. All was silent within this room. When the front screen was opened we saw the coffin in which was laid the body of *Swāmī Sivānanda*. It was impressively decorated and there was also a beautiful altar in front. Above the coffin there was a niche with the life-size sculpture of the holy *Swāmī*. For a moment I was spellbound when I saw that the Hindu monk here was

none other than the one whom I met and who spoke with me a few moments ago.

Having paid respect to the *Swāmī*, we were led by Phra *Mahā Amnuay* to walk out past a divine place devoted to the Lord Hanuman in order to see the practice of Yoga on the other side of the river spanned by a suspension bridge. But we were again disappointed since there was on that day no training of Yoga at the place. What we saw was only a large and noisy crowd. This gave us no peace of mind whatever. So I asked Mrs. Pongphiew and Miss Suphanee to walk back. While walking back and crossing the suspension bridge to our waiting car, we passed a caravan of donkeys all loaded with heavy stones on their backs. Despite the load so heavy that they could hardly move, the men in control of the caravan still beat them mercilessly in order to make them walk faster. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of pity for the poor animals and said to Miss Suphanee, "Just look at these men, --how they beat the animals cruelly. How heartless they are to beat the suffering animals while they are themselves walking happily." I was being strongly moved by this sickening sight when a curtain of profound silence dropped on me. *The next moment I found myself standing in the solitude of the Himalayan jungle. So grim and chilling was the silence here that it filled me with apprehension and awe. Around me were stately trees with luxuriant foliage overhead and the tangle of liana dangling like ropes and swinging gently. Somehow they looked like out-stretched hands trying to reach out to me and hold me in their 'embrace.' This made me feel rather uneasy and tremble,-- spiritually,*

however, rather than physically. Looking another way, I saw the Ganges, not so wide here, being iced up partly, meandering and murmuring through the rocky pathway, part of it being under the lengthening shadow of the overhanging, inter-laced branches. As the brook gurgled, carrying its icy cold water downwards, it lashed here and there against the protruding rocks and broke into glistening, flying fragments as they reflected and refracted the sunlight. Then I caught sight of the dignified Hindu monk standing on a picturesque rock by the side of the brook. He raised his hand in a blessing attitude while I heard the vibrations of his voice reaching me in a low, ringing tone,

“This part of water has flown from the abode of the divine, celestial beings. It will flow on to wash away the evils of the faithful. Do come down to touch this sacred water and take some stones as its representation to be enshrined at the Freedom Pagoda, memorial to King Naresuan the Great, so they may serve as the connecting link between us.”

At this I emerged and was conscious of the outer environment again. We three i.e. Mrs. Pongphiew, Miss Suphanee and I crossed the suspension bridge and while passing the divine place for Lord Hanuman we walked down the steps to the landing place in order to touch the sacred water.

It was when we arrived at the very bank of the river that we saw how the rock formation at this area was very beautiful. The water was so clear that it looked bright

green and, having touched it with our hands, we came to know it was colder than the water in a refrigerator. We were later followed by the group, who saw we had been there and were therefore curious in the same manner. Thus Acharn Phorn seemed to be more glad than the rest in having his wish gratified this time, that is, to touch the water of the Ganges in this area with his own hands. All washed their faces and some ventured to drink it and found to their surprise that it was refreshingly tasteless, or with a bit of sweetness in it. I told Miss Suphanee to pick up three round, smooth stones from the riverbed. They were of light green colour. This was in obedience to the voice I had heard some moments before. Having refreshed ourselves with the water, we walked back to our coach and prepared ourselves for the next leg of our journey i.e. to Mussourie, another hill city.

While on the coach, Phra *Mahā Amnuay* told us that the town which was the gateway to Rishigesh was called Haridvar, meaning the town of Lord Hari, another name for Lord *Nārāyana*, one of the Supreme Gods of Hinduism or Brahmanism. I could not help wondering why the town should have such a name. There had to be something, so I thought, in the ancient times that had resulted in such a belief. Should that be true, then we would at that time be entering the town of a Supreme God.

According to Phra *Mahā Amnuay*, we would soon reach the town of Dehradon the gateway to the hill city of Mussourie. If we should look back from Mussourie at night, so he told us, we would see how beautiful was Dera-
doon, which sparkled in the dark of the night like twin-

bling stars. His words produced a pleasant lulling effect and I pictured to myself the Dehradun of his description. The road from Rishikesh to Dehradun was a gradual but steady ascent. On both sides of the road were big trees of lush green forests which I thought several decades ago must have been more beautiful than this. We saw the river occasionally on one side of the road but there was hardly any water now. What we saw was only round pebbles of various sizes. In fact they were beautiful in their own way, yet I preferred seeing more water and fewer pebbles. That would be a far more refreshing sight than this.

We began the real ascent after we left Dehradun for Mussourie. The coach took us up a steep slope while it zigzagged up one hillside after another of the same mountain range which offered us a breath-taking and awe-inspiring view of the landscape. Looking down we saw tree-tops below in rugged but beautiful wide valleys and the meadows that extended as far as the eyes could see. Looking up we saw a forest of peaks looming in the late afternoon mist. The mountain road was narrow, steep and had many dangerous bends and turns. Some members of our group felt so uneasy that they had to close their eyes while approaching these dangerous spots. The higher we went up, the lower was the temperature. It was 5 p.m.; the sun was setting in the direction of the town of Dehradun we had left. Looking back we saw the sun which was sinking behind the mountains with its glory no less impressive than sunrise, although it gave us another kind of impression.

We now came to a milestone which told us we were 17 kilometres from Mussourie. Everybody gazed at the setting sun with a feeling that should be more or less similar and different, depending on individual tendency and background. However, all voiced their opinion that we should stop here and feast our eyes on it to our hearts' content. During this moment I started once again to be drawn inside. Sitting on the protective railings that prevented the car from going over the road into the chasm, I gazed intently at the picturesque scene before me. The blue-pink aura of the setting sun was giving way gradually to purple, which in turn was being replaced by a curtain of dark red, deep grey and black respectively. *Then a voice came vibrating to my ears, "What is there that is permanent and unchangeable? Should it be Atman, celestial beings or the universe itself? What is behind the phenomena of change which is irresistible and always at work and thus has produced nature such as is seen around us with its innumerable expressions? Do contemplate these phenomena of change to induce disillusionment and recite Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, Buddhāṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi...."*

Then I emerged and we got on the coach for the next leg of our journey to Mussourie. Strange to say, I was filled with a chilling fear, so I withdrew once again into the meditational level and solemnly asked for permission and protection in our journey. I did not tell anybody about this but was still trembling inside and overwhelmed with a strange and unprecedented fear. However, we reached Mussourie safe and sound after 7 p.m.

We found that it was colder in Mussourie than in Darjeeling. After our evening meal I withdrew into meditation and once again requested permission and protection from the celestial beings while we were within their domain. Not long after that I slept peacefully.

At 5 a.m. of the following day, which was Friday²³ November 2522, we went out to see sunrise and were able to see the Himalayas bathed in gold, but they were too far away, so we could not see them as clearly as we had admired the Kangchenjunga at Darjeeling. We also had to hurry since some of us wanted to go back to Delhi as soon as possible. We ate our morning meal in haste and started out. It was on our way back that we were able to see Mussourie closely in the daytime. It was another beautiful hill city, being about 6,000 feet above sea level. The slopes of the hills were dotted with houses and buildings. There were also some pine trees and other plants on both sides of the road. Its valleys were beautifully adorned with colourful flowers. Looking down from our coach we saw clusters of houses on terraced slopes, many of them peacefully nestled in blooming orchards. The town looked clean and healthy and the climate bright and invigorating. I wished then that we should have had more time here so we could learn more about it.

At Delhi once again

It took us seven hours from Mussourie to Delhi, where we reached at about 4 p.m. and where we had a combined midday and evening meal,— both at one and the same time. Then we proceeded to pay homage to

Mahatma Gandhi at his monument, which was made in the form of a place for his burial. It was 6.40 p.m. when we prostrated ourselves at the place and sent our thoughts of reverence to him. *Then a soft, kind voice whispered into my ears, "You are going to finish your mission now. May you be blessed with security at all times. How about your journey in the land of the Blessed One and following the paths he used to set his blessed foot-prints on? Henceforth you are going to another place, which is to be your final one here. It is a place wherefrom the Sun of the world will shine forth once again... Make your mind peaceful and be firm in the practice of non-violence. It is now time to extend our forgiveness to those who try to do away with this dilapidated physical body."* The next moment a strange scene unfolded before my eyes. In it I saw a large crowd of people in great excitement, running in all directions and uttering incoherent cries. Soon the thunderous voices of Ram... Ram... Ram... was heard rumbling all over the area.

When I regained outward consciousness I saw many members of our group busy taking photos. Venerable Phragru Pisiddhi Panyagun led other Bhikkhus to perform the *Pañsakūla* rites (i.e. rites for the deceased). After that we left the place and I walked back being still impressed in the Mahatmaji and his instructions.

We were then led to various other parts of the city so we could view Delhi at night-time. What it looked like there is no need to describe here. We returned to our hotel almost 9 p.m. and was greeted here once again by Mrs. Nuanchan, who left us while we were having our evening meal at a restaurant. We were again welcomed to

a light meal by Mrs. Nuanchan and were told that on the following day we would be taken to admire the caves of Ellora and Ajanta, two other places of wonder at Aurangabad.

Aurangabad, Ellora and Ajanta

At 6 a.m. of Saturday 24th November 2522 we left our hotel for the Delhi air-port to board a plane to Aurangabad, where we arrived at 5 a.m. After that we took a car to Ellora and arrived half an hour later. We were then given a picnic lunch, which was a pleasant change for everybody. After the meal we were led into what were called the caves of Ellora. However, these 'caves' were not natural structure; they were carved out of huge solid blocks of stone and made into large rooms, or rather halls, for the purpose of making them *Vihāra* or Abodes for the divine beings that were worshipped at that time. According to Venerable Yart, there were here 34 caves altogether, twelve of them belonging to *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, seventeen to Brahmanism and five to Jainism.

It was noontime; the air was oppressively hot. Somehow I was not so eager to have a look at them at all. I tried to view its historical background from the inner dimension but unfortunately my meditative ability was then so feeble so I failed to obtain any information from the inner source. I followed the group half-heartedly, yet I could not help admiring the patience and devotion that those sculptors had in attempting such a kind of laborious work and

wondered how it could have been done. Venerable Yart advised us not to devote all our attention here since there were more wonders awaiting us at the Ajanta caves. However, before leaving he took us to cave No. 16, which was a wonder associated with Brahmanism. It was called Kailasa cave of Lord Isavara.

It is really a wonder of the world, — this cave depicting the Kailasa Mountain of Lord Isavara of Brahmanism. One cannot help wondering how the whole solid block of rock that size could have been carved out and made into such a magnificent piece of art. Were it to be constructed by outward material brought together there would be nothing wonderful about it whatever. But considering the efforts and the difficulties expended to make it so beautiful, so delicate in design, I believed we as Buddhists are not ashamed to whole-heartedly admire the devotion of these sculptors to their gods. While being lost in wonder, I felt myself in complete silence for a moment before a voice came in vibrations to me from all around. It said,

“Those who have attained to the final, ultimate point of their ideal, whatever it may be, are entitled to experience the glorious beauty and wonder it offers. Go on to Ajanta. There you will witness the wondrous beauty, serenity and purity. It was created by people who had realised the Truth. What is beautiful and wonderful here was after all the product of distorted views and rivalry.” I walked deeper into the cave in a state of semi-consciousness until I came to a great hall, wherein there existed a *Sivalinga* (male genital organ supposed to represent that of Lord Siva)

beautifully made and decorated. Here the air was filled with a strong, choking scent of gum benjamin. Somewhat dazed, I stood there and heard discordant, buzzing noises all round. Seeing this was too much for me, I walked outside and was greeted by the dazzling sunlight and its oppressive heat. The sudden change from one extreme to another made me feel sick and I had to hurry to take shelter under a shady tree. After all of us had come out, we drove off to see another wonder waiting for us at Ajanta. At this moment I had lost interest in seeing anything more but wanted only to go back and have a rest. "It is to be the same after all, whether here or anywhere," so I told myself, and the next moment there came the familiar voices vibrating to my ears. *Do go to witness the evidence of what was produced out of the purity of those who had realised the Truth in all its entirety,*" it said.

On our way our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan briefed us on what should be known beforehand concerning the Ajanta, saying that there were 29 caves at Ajanta, these being 5 caves less than those of Ellora. But they were all associated with Buddhism, there being none of Brahmanism or Jainism like those of Ellora. According to the archaeologists' calculation, the Ajanta caves were built before those of Ellora. This suddenly reminded me of what I had heard before from the familiar voices: that the caves at Ellora must have been constructed to imitate those of Ajanta and also to rival them in gaining more popularity from the people. Such a wonder and beauty, therefore, was tainted with an impure motive. This part of the journey was a rather long one and Mrs. Nuanchan possibly being

afarid we should be bored and tired managed to help us while away the time by singing melodious songs and inviting us to join her also. This made me feel better, relieving me of the daze, the discordant noises and the condition of hovering between two dimensions. About ten kilometres from Ajanta I began to feel buoyant and refreshed, without any bewilderment any more. It was then almost 4 p.m. The air was cool and pleasant. The car took us up the slope of the hill. I looked around and saw that the landscape was beautiful, offering us a feeling of calm and serenity. As we approached Ajanta, we were greeted by a pleasant, peaceful atmosphere. We all agreed that in the ancient times the place must have been far more peaceful and impressive than at present.

We reached Ajanta at 4 p.m. Our tour leader Mrs. Nuanchan said that we did not have much time left, so she would lead us to see only the most important and outstanding caves. There were 29 caves in all and it would take us the whole day to admire them all. The most important cave with its unique beauty and serenity, according to her, was cave No. 1. There were two kinds, as far as the motives were concerned, of carving out these caves. Those of the first category were made into great rooms to serve as assembly halls for the purposes of performing the activities of Sangha such as chanting together and listening to the Dhamma instructions. They were regarded as sacred halls, being something like shrine rooms or Uposatha (Convocation hall) in our country. In such halls as these there were sculptured Buddha images like our Uposathas. The second category was those carved out in the form of small cells to serve as living quarters for Bhikkhus. The

walls and ceilings of those halls were decorated with beautiful paintings depicting various episodes of the life of the Buddha. The skill exhibited in carving, sculpturing and painting in these caves were indicative of exquisite workmanship reflecting how the arts of architecture and painting were highly developed in those times. Moreover, so said Mrs. Nuanchan, the acoustics of these halls were also excellent. Whatever was uttered in them would reverberate and could be heard clearly by all listeners without the speaker having to shout to the top of his voice and without resort to the use of any microphone or loud-speaker at all. In the cave No. 1 there was sculptured Buddha image in the attitude of delivering the First Sermon. It was a real wonder and masterpiece in that we could not help wondering how, with only hammers and chisels, the ancient sculptors were so admirably able to make the image reflect three different aspects, or moods,—if we should be permitted to use this word for the thing representing the Buddha (who was beyond all moods or emotions). When the spotlight was trained at the image from in front, the image would look serene and blissful and we were tempted to feel the same way. When, however, the light was moved to the left and then to the right, the image would give an expression of a radiant smile and then one of a mild sadness respectively. After this Mrs. Nuanchan said it would be more advisable for us to go and witness it with our own eyes, for that would be far better than a thousand words of description and would also prove how her words were by no means an exaggeration at all.

There were about eighty steps of the stair-case leading to the caves or what was called *Buddhāvāsa* (the Buddha's

abode). Then we were able to witness a beautiful view of a horse-shoe mountain with a small stream flowing in the middle. There were many shady trees all round and the murmur of the stream far below could be heard up here while we were strolling along the stone pathway in front of the series of these caves.

We were taken in to view cave No. 1 first of all. When the watchmen guarding the cave had trained the spotlight on the main Buddha image therein, we were all convinced how Mrs. Nuanchan had known what she was talking about. All were amazed and spellbound by what they were seeing before them. It was such a serene and wonderful beauty that we could hardly bring ourselves to believe that it had been made by human hands and skills. Then there was a voice among one of us -- I did not remember who he, or she, was -- uttering the following exclamation, "I don't think it was made by human hands. Only celestial beings were able to do this." We all laughed although we were inclined to believe so ourselves. *I was at this moment gradually oblivious of the outer environment and soon felt myself in the midst of another dimension, wherein a large crowd of people appeared before me. They were all beautifully dressed, indicating the fact that they were at least well-to-do people, with some of them being Bhikkhus. All appeared to be beaming with joy and satisfaction. Of these people some were busy at their sculpturing work, while others were giving instructions to the sculptors. Then there were a number who were chanting their prayers. After a few moments a balmy scent like that of flowers mixed with the aroma of a delicate perfume started to fill*

*the air around me. Then the crowd of happy people gradually faded away, leaving me with the silence of a profound bliss. This was followed the next moment by the familiar reverberating sound of *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* rumbling throughout the evening atmosphere of the Ajanta mountain. Amidst this thundering rhythm out came a stentorian voice, which said,"*

This is evidence of those who have been convinced of the ultimate point of their Truth. Its beauty and wonder will attract many who are following the similar way and will help those Truth-seekers find the Truth they have been seeking after. The Light of the Sun will disperse the cloud of darkness, becoming thereby the beacon for sincere and earnest wayfarers. Do recite *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi..*"

I was not fully conscious during this time, but followed the rest to see other caves in a semi-conscious condition. Around me the passage *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* was still resounding its thunderous echo. Finally we returned to our car and left the wonderland of Buddhism or, if I should be permitted to say, of the world as well. But I felt part of me was still with it; or possibly part of it was still with me. It was then late in the afternoon, with the sun sinking gradually on the Western horizon and the darkness of night eclipsing the sunlight and descending to cover the whole area. It was almost 8 p.m. before we reached Aurangabad, yet the rhythmical

resounding of *Buddham Saranam Gacchami* was still echoing in my ears, or I should say my heart, thus clothing it with a rapturous delight all this time. I told myself that while Taj Mahal on the one hand had given me an impression of delicate and profound sweetness coming out of the loving hearts, Ajanta on the other hand had clothed me with such a bracing, buoyant and blissful experience no less delicate and profound. Whereas the former was after all still engulfed in the realm of passion the latter emanated from a condition, or whatever we might call it, that was delivered therefrom. I had come to realise then, although in my small way, how much we should be grateful to our Supreme Father the Blessed One, His unexcelled Dhamma and his group of Noble Disciples the Sangha.

Now it was the last day, or rather night, in which members of our group could be together after we had gone 'up hill and down dale' together for half a month, sharing moments of inconveniences as well as of comforts, and those of aches and pains as well as of joy and delight. So Mrs. Nuanchan called for a friendly and farewell meeting at the hotel, in which we were asked to 'speak our minds' to her. Needless to say, what 'our minds' had been spoken that night was all the praise showered on her for her responsibility and ability to live up to her watchword "*With tender love and care from N.C. Travel Centre.*" We knew then that on the following day i.e. Sunday 25th of November would finish our 15-day pilgrimage in following the foot-prints of our Lord the Buddha. After leaving Aurangabad by a local plane for Bombay and spending some time for sight-seeing there, we would board a plane heading for home, which was both our father-land and

mother-land, where we were born, grew up and would die as well. All appeared to be merry and happy possibly both because we had 'returned' to the sacred atmosphere connected with episodes in the life of our Supreme Father and because we were going to return to our home after two weeks' departure. We were scheduled to board the plane at Bombay in the evening of the following day and to arrive at Don Muang airport at 2 a.m. of Monday 26th of November

After the farewell meeting, in which all compliment was showered on Mrs. Nuanchan for her devoted, selfless service, we separated, each going, with a lingering thought of one kind or another, to his or her room. I recited my prayers while recollecting what our group had encountered throughout the period of fifteen days together. At the same time I did not forget to bid farewell to the guardians of various places we had passed who had so kindly given us their protection during our long journey. *While drifting into slumber, I felt every atom of the environment vibrating with the utterance of heavenly blessing, which said,*

“May all of you be blessed with security in your journey through lives, so you may be able to render your selfless service effectively in steering the people away from the mire of misery and danger. Everybody is to obtain what he yearns for and is devoted to, be it good or evil, high or low, heaven or hell, all of which are still impermanent and subject to change. Even Nibbāna, the destination of all life, is within reach of all who care and

dare. Do recite *Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi....*”

I woke up the next morning refreshed and rejoiced, and once again did not forget to prostrate myself in paying homage with a heart most faithful and grateful to my Supreme Father the Blessed One, without whom I would never have been blessed with the eye to see his beacon light and other phenomena so wonderful and impressive beyond compare.

So ends the narration of our group's pilgrimage to the land of our Blessed Father, following various places which he had set his sacred foot-prints on and bringing back some earth therefrom as a representation and remembrance of his exalted being and also of our own grateful hearts. For countless times in the foregoing pages of this booklet I have recited *Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi*; and for countless times in the following pages of my life, or lives, I will continue to recite this sacred, uplifting passage: *Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi, Buddham Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi.*

Phenomena at
the Phra Dhat
Phanom Pagoda

(WHERE TWO WORLDS MEET)

PREFACE

I had the opportunity to go to the monastery of Phra Dhat Phanom, the town of Nakhorn Phanom, three times in the year B.E. 2522/1979. The first time was on February 26; the second time March 10 and the third time March 21. On the first time the purpose of our group was to obtain some holy souvenirs from the Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda and the holy water from Venerable Chao Khun Phra Deb Ratanamolee, Ecclesiastical Governor of the town of Nakhorn Phanom, in order to have them enshrined within the Freedom Pagoda, monument in remembrance of our Liberator King Naresuan the Great, which has been constructed within the Pine Camp, Religious Development Centre, the district of Lomsak, the town of Petchaboon. According to the Royal Command, we were to go to all the towns and cities of Thailand to bring back the sacred things within those towns and the holy water therefrom and have them all enshrined within the Freedom Pagoda at the Pine Camp. In our first journey on February, Nakhorn Phanom was the 47th town on our list and we were able only to pay homage to the sacred Relics of the Buddha from outside the place where they were kept. But we submitted our request to the Venerable, asking him to allow us to witness the sacred Relics with our own eyes before they were brought back to be installed in the newly constructed Pagoda of Phra Dhat Phanom to replace the old one that collapsed in B.E. 2518 (August 11)

B

On March 10 we went there once again and this time our wish was fulfilled, to the delight of all concerned. We all felt we owed a great deal to the kindness of the Venerable Chao Khun. I was convinced that Buddhism must have been established in this region for more than two thousand years. Seeing the Relics elsewhere had not been for me an experience so delightful, impressive and convincing like that at the monastery of Phra Dhat Phanom, which has had a historical background dating back further than any other place of the same kind. What was more important was the fact that we can be sure the Relics therein are the genuine ones. The readers can learn of more details from the writer's narration in the pages that follow.

Our third trip was on March 21. The purpose this time was to participate in the royal ceremony in celebration of the Relics. This was because on March 22 the Supreme Patriarch would preside over the ceremony for raising the golden multi-tiered umbrella (called Chatr in Thai) to have it installed on top of the newly repaired Pagoda and on March 23 Their Majesties the King and Queen and their Royal Highnesses the two princesses were to preside over the ceremony raising the Relics to be enshrined permanently in the niche within the Pagoda. This was a grand celebration taking place from March 21 to 23. We had informed Venerable Chao Khun Phra Deb Ratanamolee on February 26 and then on March 10 we would come back once again and report what was going to happen simultaneously in another dimension of life on an invisible plane. This would at least serve to confirm the genuineness and sacredness of the Relics to

C

be enshrined there. The report to be presented in the pages of this booklet was meant to inform the Venerable of what had happened at that time and in that place. He understood the principles of this truth and had faith in it too. Such a report as this, I would like to say, is rare to find and occurs only once in a long while. To me the significance of this unusual report is that it serves to confirm the fact that the Relics enshrined within the Pagoda of Phra Dhat Phanom for more than two thousand years are genuine and thus can be believed to be sacred and to possess the power that is reasonably believed to be associated with the Relics of the Blessed One. This leads to a further conclusion that Buddhism has been established in this region for quite a long time. The area called *Suvannabhūmi* still a controversial matter among scholars as to its exact location should be determined now that it certainly exists in Thailand.

—Phorn Ratanasuwana.

May 8, B.E. 2522/1979

Home of Psychical Research
47/2 Samsen Road, Banglamphoo,
Bangkok - 2, THAILAND
Tel. 2822025

Translator's Preface

This is my second attempt on the work of the same author, the first being the booklet entitled "TO THE LAND OF THE LORD BUDDHA" with the sub-title A TALE OF TWO WORLDS. There is no need to say anything more except to point out a few facts as follows :

1. Unlike the first book mentioned above, there is in this one no recitation of *Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi* repeatedly heard. In my opinion, it might be that there was no need to. In the country of Thailand, especially in the area where Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda is situated, the prevalent atmosphere has been one dominated by Buddhism already. Thus there was in its place the choral hymn in praise of the Triple Gem often heard on occasions.

2. This report, once again 'A Tale of Two Worlds' on different occasions and places, will serve to encourage the readers how the Thais can justifiably be proud of their invaluable heritage they have bequeathed from their pious and devoted ancestors. This is the chest-bone Relics of the Blessed One being enshrined more than two thousand years ago in the Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda. Perhaps the people of the North-East should be more proud of this than those in other parts of the country. That they, and consequently we, have survived the threat of aggression to this day could have resulted partly from the protective

E

powers of the sacred Relics and partly from their, and consequently our, faith and devotion to those sacred powers. Who knows ?

3. It is difficult to say whether this book should be sequel to the first one or vice versa. In any case, however, I suggest both of them be read in combination with each other. If one can create some uplifting impression, then the other will give no less subtle influence. But should one find its way into a trash bin, the other is sure to follow suit. And, as before, the readers may feel free to decide their fate themselves.

—*Siri Buddhasukh*

26 February 2523/1980

THE PHENOMENA AT PHRA DHAT PHANOM. WHERE TWO WORLDS MEET

It was on February 26, B.E. 2522 that we visited Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda the first time. I shall not describe our visit in detail here, but only mention that on that day we paid homage to the Buddha's Relics securely kept by the monastery authorities. They were sealed within a number of caskets and cupboards all covered. Nobody was able to have a look at what was inside. We were informed only that the relics were kept therein. In ordinary moments I could see no more than what others saw. Only when I withdrew into meditation was I able to witness a spectacular phenomenon of a bright light of prismatic colours emanating from inside these protective coverings. This showed how really sacred were the Relics of this pagoda. The ever-emanating rays of these Relics engulfed all who came within the area and those sensitive enough to the radiation will 'feel' it to a certain extent, depending on the degree of their own receptivity. This made me anxious to see what the source of this powerful and sacred radiation would look like.* I told Acharn Phorn my intention, or rather my desire. He later referred it to Venerable Chaokhun Phra Debratanamolee, Eccles-

*the Relics were originally preserved in the old pagoda that collapsed in B.E. 2518 (August 11). Now that the pagoda has been repaired and re-constructed, the Relics are to be enshrined once again in the newly finished pagoda

ialtical Governor of the town of Nakhorn Phanom and also Lord Abbot of the monastery of Phra Dhat Phanom, who in fact would like to comply to our request. But the Relics were most carefully kept and could not be opened to all who would like to see them. This, however, was a preventive measure against those who might have a malevolent motive towards Buddhism. To open all those caskets the three officials each holding one key must be present at the same time. This necessitated a prior appointment and thus it took some time before arrangements could be made for the purpose. So we knew how it was impossible for us, at least on that day, to see the Relics with our own eyes. What we did was only paying homage outside and sending our thoughts of reverence to what was inside.

According to the Chao Khun, there was going to be on March 21, 22 and 23 a ceremony for the enshrinement of the Relics and other sacred things into the newly constructed pagoda. This was to be followed by the accompanying ceremony of raising the golden multi-tiered umbrella (called Chatr in Thai) to the top of the pagoda. This report struck me with dismay; I was convinced then that within a few days the Relics would be enshrined high up in the pagoda and could thereafter never be seen again. Acharn Phorn then asked Chao Khun we would come back some time before the significant day so we might be able to see with our own eyes the sacred Relics that had been enshrined for more than 2,000 years in this beautiful pagoda. They must be really sacred, we thought, otherwise they would not have been so reverently worshipped for more than twenty centuries despite the fact that most

people had never seen what was inside. Venerable Chao-khun, however, only smiled in appreciation for our efforts and good intention, but he could not give us any promise whatever. At this moment I withdrew into meditation and humbly sent my thoughts of reverence to the celestial beings and the *Nāga* (invisible serpent) chief there, all of whom were guardian spirits of the Phra Dhat Phanom pagoda. To them I spoke, mentally--of course, telling them we would come back once again with such a purpose in mind. I also asked them to help us in whatever way they could so we might have our wish fulfilled. Then we left for our camp with our thoughts always dwelling on the Relics.

On March, 2522 our group consisting of Acharn Phorn Ratanasuwan, Mrs. Phongpiew Phatthanapraphaphan, Miss Sam-ang Yimsiri, Mrs. Suniphand Vuddhisathien, Miss Supanee Hong Gnern, Mr. Phiphob Ratanasuwan, Mr. Kamphol Chatuthasri and I went to the North-east for the second time. This was after we had brought representations from all the provinces in our country. This time we headed directly for Nakhorn Phanom, where the Phra Dhat Phanom pagoda was situated.

It was 6 p.m. of March 9, 2522 when we arrived at Sakol Nakhorn, the town under the shelter of another famous pagoda called Phra Dhat Chergchoom. We decided to rest here for the night before proceeding to the town of Nakhorn Phanom our destination on the next day. *That night I meditated until I slept and then had a dream in which I found myself standing by the side of a river I knew not where it was. While watching its water being*

rippled by the gentle breeze and gleaming in the morning sun, I soon saw a boat sailing from far upstream. When it approached I saw that it was really a beautiful boat bedecked on its sides with jewelry of various sizes and colours, --all radiating opalescent tints and hues. In it there were a number of oarsmen. On its bow there sat a young lad. I said 'young' to qualify the word 'lad' here to emphasize the fact that he looked so young or youthful. His hair was matted high above his head and also adorned with a diamond-crowned pin. Round his neck were a number of necklaces each being adorned with diamonds all of which sparkled luminously like a cluster of stars in the heavens. He did not wear a coat but clothed himself in pure white lower garment. As the boat was passing before me, I heard the sound of its oars touching the water in slow rhythm and my body was cooled by the vapour drops blown to me by the breeze. Then a soft and gentle voice reached me. It said, "Follow me. Direct your thought towards the fullmoon day of the twelfth lunar month (i.e. November), when the leaf-cups gorgeously adorned with flowers, candles and incense-sticks were floated on the river to symbolise people's homage to the chest-bone Relics of the Blessed One. Paññā Tejo Vuḍḍhinanda." At this moment I was startled but found that all was still quiet and peaceful. I withdrew into meditation and asked my mentor father what the dream should imply. He did not answer but told me to make mind peaceful and prepare myself to pay homage to the Phra Dhat Phanom pagoda the following day.

On Saturday 10th of March B.E. 2522 we got up early so we could arrive at the Phra Dhat Phanom at dawn. I did not tell anybody my dream, not even Acharn

Phorn, but only expressed my concern whether or not we would be able to see Venerable Chao Khun the Lord Abbot since we had not informed him beforehand. Moreover, it was Saturday that day and so I was afraid that, as before, we would be also disappointed this time because it was the Government officials' holiday. On such a day it would be impossible for the Chao Khun to call a meeting of the three men holding the keys opening the caskets, each of them being a Government official. But Acharn Phorn said that, whatever happened, we had to try our best first and by now, so he said, "let us join forces and be of one mind in making a solemn wish to that effect." We arrived at the town market almost 7 o'clock, so Acharn Phorn suggested that since it was still too early we had better not see Venerable Chao Khun by that time, but should wait until he had finished having his morning meal. We all agreed and went together to the Mekhong river in order to see with our own eyes what it looked like on the other side, which was the territory of the People's Republic of Laos our neighbour.

Eerie Weeping and Wailing

Reaching the Mekhong, we found there were on this side of the river at that place so many pebbles all of which were very beautiful. We were all excited and vied with one another in collecting a number of them as souvenirs. Then I felt gradually drawn inside and collected the pebbles somewhat semi-consciously. *During these moments my ears rang with the eerie weeping and wailing of so many people. Even my eyes were not in a better position. They were dazzled and soon reported the sight of a great*

number of people in the river, all asking for help earnestly and in the most piteous manner. I had to stand still and meditate, recollecting the gracious power of the sacred Relics of Phra Dhat Phanom and asking them to radiate their benevolent power to help those beings in distress. Thereafter I felt detached and peaceful and was able to regain my full consciousness. Almost at the same time I heard Mr. Phiphob say to Acharn Phorn, "Look, there's a corpse floating down the river." We all looked towards the same point and saw, about 10 metres away, what we could make out as a human body, half submerged in the water, drifting along with the current. With every puff of the wind there would also drift to us the nauseating smell of a bloated, rotting corpse. Acharn Phorn told everybody to stop collecting pebbles and got up to the higher bank of the river. There we met a villager, who said to us casually that one more had come. Asked what it was that he meant, he said he referred to the corpse we had seen down there. "It's been commonplace to us," he said, "every day we see them, more or less, and nobody cares to pay any attention now." "But isn't there anybody picking it up?" asked Acharn Phorn. "Who cares?" he replied and added that, like other corpses, it would float down the river to the sea. "It's no use picking it up, since we would never know who it was. However, it is sure to be one of those who tried to flee their country and had been shot in the attempts. Should it get stuck anywhere at the bank in front of anybody's house the owner of that house would pole it away and let it float further down the river. That's all." We listened to this account with a heavy heart; I sent up my thought of gratitude to our great Liberator-King Naresuan for his kindness and discernment in having

ordered us to go and see things in various places. This so that we could have the right attitude of mind and act accordingly. His purpose was to lead his country and people to freedom and our mission was to obey his command and enlist our efforts in his service in whatever way was possible for us.

Having had our morning meal we went into the monastery of Phra Dhat Phanom. Fortunately, we met Venerable Chao Khun there and learned that he had just finished his morning meal. It appeared to be a good opportunity for us since there was with him only one person i.e. Navy Lieutenant Commander Somjit Ratanajan of the Navy Chaplain school, who had known Acharn Phorn before. So they were not strangers to each other. Acharn Phorn at once told Venerable Chao Khun our intention; whereupon the Chao Khun said, "Let's see. I will try to help." Then we conversed with one another on various topics. Commander Somjit related to us his experiences in instructing religious knowledge and practices to the Thai marines guarding the Thai border on the Mekhong river. He also told us about those who defected from the other side, who told him how they had been deceived into spending their lives in a miserable manner within the jungles. We listened to him eagerly, sending our hopes and goodwill in support of the heroic deeds of his marines. Recollecting my dream of the previous night, I directed my thoughts in a solemn request asking the gracious power of our Supreme Father the Blessed One, the Dhamma and the Sangha, including all divine celestial beings, to give us their help in whatever way was possible for them.

Seeing the Relics

At 4.35 a.m. there was a man coming to tell Venerable Chao Khun and invite him outside. He went out and told us to follow him to where the sacred Relics had been kept. By that man Venerable Chao Khun was suggested to ask one of the committees holding the keys whether he was willing to cooperate or not. Hearing this we again prayed earnestly that he agree to Chao Khun's request and everything be all right to fulfill our purpose. All was quiet at that moment. Besides our group there were a number of policemen standing guard as a security measure. We saw some officials of the Fine Arts Department and other people who were paying their homage to the sacred Relics. Nobody knew what we went there for, but strange to say, everything became suddenly silent and peaceful. *I withdrew into meditation and saw my mentor father, our great Liberator-King Naresuan and many other celestial beings. My mentor father told me that after the Chao Khun had opened the caskets and urns and we had seen the sacred Relics, Acharn Phorn was to recite the passage invoking the celestial beings to be his witnesses and then go on to say the prayers praising the Triple Gem.*

After some time Venerable Chao Khun walked back to us. There were more than 60 persons altogether waiting for him at that place. He then ordered a piece of white cloth to be spread in front of the place where the holy Relics and other sacred things had been kept. Having put the bundles of candles and joss-sticks* and prostrated

*this is a kind of token joss-sticks and candles. They are not meant to be lighted up like ordinary ones.

himself before the sacred things, he started unlocking the keys. We all joined our hands in token of reverence and held our breath while he was unlocking the keys of the cases one by one, staring in front fascinatedly until he reached the golden urn. Then he gently carried it out and put it on the bundle of token candles and joss-sticks while opening more golden urns one by one until he reached the last one, which was the crystal urn within a golden basket. Inside this urn were the Relics said to be the chest-bone of the Buddha. All present were filled with a rapturous delight so overwhelming that our whole beings seemed to be masses of radiant bliss. Acharn Phorn by now had forgotten to recite the Pali invoking the celestial beings and Venerable Chao Khun had to nudge him in order to remind him of this. Then Acharn Phorn recited the passages with a trembling voice still choked with emotion. We followed him in saying our prayers in praise of the Triple Gem and after that feasted our eyes on them and gently put them on our heads so we could absorb the sacred vibrations emitting therefrom.

It was then that I come to know that the source of the brilliant rays perpetually emitting was none other than these chest-bone Relics within the crystal urn. The celestial rays streaming forth were unobstructible; they could penetrate through all things and their forces had been crystallised into precipitated dewdrops of invisible blessings that sprinkled on the heads of everybody. Nevertheless, all present were able to 'sense' and absorb these blessings which gave them a delightful experience beyond compare, the difference being in degree, which was based on their own receptivity and maturity.

While the Venerable Chao Khun was opening the caskets and urns one by one, the stillness of the atmosphere was replaced by a breeze which increased in intensity until it became a strong wind. This lasted some time before everything returned to normal once again. *In the invisible world, however, there was a thunderous voice of applause as a token of homage to the Relics on the part of all lives in the river on this auspicious occasion.* My joy was now indescribable, resulting in the feeling of buoyancy and bliss overwhelmingly combined into an inseparable experience. It was then 4.49 a.m. After Venerable Chao Khun had allowed Acharn Phorn to see and touch all the sacred things therein, which included the Relics, the emerald Buddha image and the pure, solid gold image of the Buddha, he put them all back into their former places. For his special kindness we hereby offered our heartfelt gratitude here. It was such a rare opportunity for all of us, who considered it the most auspicious and unexpected occasion in our life. The policemen guarding the shrine also uttered their gratefulness and delight, saying they had been there for over a year but had never been given any blessed occasion like that before.

Venerable Chao Khun led us back to his residence and asked about our feeling. Acharn Phorn had me relate to him what happened but due to the overwhelming sensation still not fading away I managed to falter out the story to him, and that but incoherently. Ven. Chao Khun then expressed his thankfulness and appreciation to the celestial beings and asked Acharn Phorn when the enshrinement ceremony would take place and what

arrangements there would be on the occasion. Acharn Phorn suddenly replied, saying, "I will come back once again to participate in the auspicious occasion on March 20 or 21. "This made me and Mrs. Phongphiew startled, since we knew that it was only ten days ahead and we had not yet prepared ourselves for this purpose since within that period there would be about sixty students and professors from the third year of the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University to stay with us at our Pine Camp, Centre for Religious Development. During this period Acharn Phorn would have to spend most of his time at the Pine Camp. However, he had stressed once again his intention to come and participate in the enshrinement ceremony and we took leave of Venerable Chao Khun Phra Debratanamolee, heading for our place the Freedom Pagoda, in the Pine Camp, in high spirits.

The Royal Ceremonies Raising the Golden Multi-tiered Umbrella (chatr) and Enshrinement of the Relics in the Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda

On Tuesday 20th March, I left Bangkok for the Pine Camp, Centre for Religious Development, to meet Acharn Phorn there so we could go together to proceed to Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda. I arrived at the Camp about 1 p.m. being in time to see Acharn Phorn and the students and professors of the Engineering Faculty milling about hurriedly putting out a fire which was started near the pumping station. Many trees in the area were set ablaze, including a number of small ones we had planted some years ago. It took us quite some time before we

could put out the fire and this made us all exhausted. So Acharn Phorn said we should put off our travel to the Phra Dhat Phanom until the next day since it was already late in the afternoon that day. Should we start out then, we would arrive at our destination late at night and that would give us many inconveniences.

At 6 a.m. on Wednesday 21st March we started out, our group consisting of Acharn Phorn and six other members, totalling eight persons. We assembled at the Freedom Pagoda to pay homage to the monument of our Great Liberator-King Naresuan before leaving. *We were then blessed by the Nāga Chief, who graciously sprinkled vapour drops on us and blazed a trail of light to lead us forward.* "Now that the Nāga Chief has come to greet you himself," said my mentor father, "your path will be cleared and everything safe." I told Acharn Phorn about this welcome on the part of the invisible world and set forth on our journey, with Mr. Kamphol Catuddasri as chauffeur heading for Phra Dhat Phanom.

We were informed by then only that it was the first day of the royal ceremony and that there would be a magnificent parade of the sacred Relics around the town. The parade would consist of those people from 16 North-eastern provinces, who would joyfully take part in the ceremony. Nobody, however, knew what time the procession would start; we only guessed that it should be in the afternoon. I told Acharn Phorn that I was afraid we might not be in time for the procession; but we were all content that it would be all right for us should we arrive

at our destination in time, no matter whether we would be able to witness the procession or not.

We reached the town of Sakol Nakhorn, where from the milestone we learned that we were only 70 kilometres away from Nakhorn Phanom. We decided to bypass this town to hurry forward to our destination. When we approached Nakhorn Phanom, being about 30 kilometres away, *I was overwhelmed by a feeling of buoyancy and energy, like being driven through a curtain of invigorating vapour drops. It was the same feeling as the one we experienced the day we had beheld the sacred Relics a week ago. Looking ahead I discerned a trail of bright light always moving in front of us, being something like a moving beacon light for our group.* We arrived at the monastery of Phra Dhat Phanom at 2.40 p.m. but had to stop at the back gate since the road leading to the entrance of the monastery had been already blocked because the royal procession was about to reach the monastery in a few minutes. We looked at each other in dismay and wondered how we could enter the monastery. Acharn Phorn said to the policemen guarding the road requesting their permission. "Kindly let us in the monnstery," he said, "we are having an urgent business and would like to see the Lord Abbot urgently. We shall park our car nearby here." I didn't know what the policemen had in mind at the time, but our request was granted despite the fact that there were already many other cars waiting outside and many other people crowding the area. We parked our car near that place and hurriedly went into the monastery.

Strange to say, it could be something of an accident, one might say, that the spired platform on which to instal the Relics and the gold multi-tiered umbrella (*chatr*) before raising up for mounting on top of the pagoda and for enshrinement in the niche respectively (see diagram) happened to be situated on the North-western side of the Pagoda, and that was at the back of the monastery gate, where we entered. So we were able to view it closely and to our hearts' content. It was clothed in white, its four sides being covered with fluttering, delicate lace edged with gleaming gold and silver braids. At the centre of the spired platform was a stand or a small pavillion on which to rest the golden urn wherein the Relics were kept. The golden multi-tiered umbrella or *Chatr* (the original one) crowned with diamond was also installed on another white platform by the side of the spired platform. It was then almost 3 p.m.; the glow from the glittering of gold and diamond on top of this *Chatr* was so dazzling that we could hardly look at it.

Ethereal Light

Just then, before I could realise it, I found myself soaring heavenwards, feeling buoyant on the sea of clouds, with a beam of light something like that of a spotlight leading me ahead. I might have been half-conscious at that time, walking straight ahead and leading others to find a location to welcome the royal procession which was approaching. This was part of the parade in which the Buddha's chest-bone Relics were mounted on a great spired pavillion, giving the people of the town one last opportunity to pay

homage to them before they were enshrined within the pagoda high up above. *Suddenly the long beam of that leading spotlight became shortened and disappeared and I found myself and other members of our group had passed through a large crowd of people most of whom were dressed in white and who were seated joining their hands in token of worship to the sacred Relics. We arrived just in time to see the last part of the procession i.e. that of the town of Jaiyabhum (Land of Victory) which was passing in front of us. Next to this was the royal part connected with the Relics pavillion itself. There is no need for me to describe it here. Those who were there or used to view it through the nationwide telecast program could know how beautifully it was decorated. During these moments I had not been fully conscious of what was going on around me. Often I felt myself being drawn inwards and seeing only the Phra Dhat Phanom pagoda standing out in an aura of brilliant lights with various hues silhouetted against the background of limitless, star-spangled space. Around the Pagoda I discerned five great Serpents (Nāga) each with a body of a lustrous colour beyond my knowledge to describe which was which. They entwined their bodies around the Pagoda until the radiant lights emitting from those lustrous colours blended and merged into one another and looked more like a rainbow ribbon when viewed from a distance. There were also vapour drops gushing forth in all directions, creating thereby a halo of intense and wonderful colours. Above all these was a luminous jewel radiating its diamond light into the celestial skies, looking like the light of the midday sun, possibly brighter yet cooler, without any burning effect at all. All these lent to it an air so ethereal that I was held spellbound by the wonderful, awe-inspiring*

sight. During this time there was heard a thunderous voice of *Sādhu*, expressing deep appreciation and reverence, permeating every atom of the ethereal atmosphere. Such voices came from the figures of beautifully dressed men and women sprinkling flowers and popped rice all over the area. This was followed by the refrain of the hymn praising the Triple Gem, which I thought should come from so many celestial beings dressed in raiment of silver and gold colours who arranged themselves in distinctive groups. The sound of *Sādhu* alternated by the choral hymn in praise of the Triple Gem followed each other repeatedly like the sound of ocean waves following each other and crashing on the shore. It was when almost all parts of the procession had passed that I regained my full consciousness. Acharn Phorn suggested we go in front of the monastery, but having reached there we saw nothing but a tremendous crowd of people. Being still drawn inside at times I suggested Acharn Phorn we go back to see the spired platform once again. Reaching there we saw that the Relics had been already installed there. Possibly Acharn Phorn did not know what was happening to me and was following my suggestion just to please me.

Poignant Grief

In front of the spired platform we saw that the troupe of dancing girls, about three hundred in all, were going to stage their performance in paying their homage to the Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda. *Then my consciousness was drawn to function inside and I discerned the brilliant rays of the chest-bone Relics being transmitted from all sides. The air that used to be oppressively hot to me and could*

*hardly be made comfortable by occasional breezes became suddenly cool and invigorating. It appeared as if the vapour in the air had precipitated by means of the gracious power of the Relics and thus showered a sensation of refreshment to those who were able to absorb it. This was a heavenly blessing to the devotees who came to pay homage to the Relics. Then there came a gentle voice which said, "Do direct your mind to be receptive to the gracious power of the Blessed one and extend the force of your loving-kindness strengthened thereby to those who are being engulfed in the wrong views and who are struggling in the abyss of suffering. Do wish that they be free from danger and suffering, that they see the Light and hold to the principles of virtuous conducts." Following this instruction there came a faint sound of lamentation signifying the poignant grief of those beings who were experiencing untold misery due to their own evils. The sound came faintly as if to just let me know and then fade away, to be replaced by the sound of joy in an atmosphere of delight and happiness. I regained my consciousness and was aware of the environment when the dancing performance came to an end. It was evening by now and the air was cooler and more comfortable. None of us wanted to leave the area since we were still overwhelmed with a feeling of piety and devotion to the sanctified atmosphere around us. But we had no resting place in the town and were therefore compelled to leave and find a place where we could retire for the night. But we had decided to come back again in the morning to partipate in the ceremony for the raising of the golden *Chatr*.*

On Thursday 22nd March at 8 a.m. we went to the Pagoda and paid homage to the Relics at the spired platform so we could absorb the rays emanating therefrom. We also placed the souvenirs we got of the Pagoda near the Relics so they could also absorb those rays. The atmosphere was still comfortable and refreshing, stimulating the wholesome thoughts of all who were there. We seated ourselves there since I preferred to be as near the Relics as possible. At the suggestion of Acharn Phorn I accompanied him to see various places in the monastery half-heartedly. At 9 a.m. there was a procession taking the *Chatr* from its former place to the pavillion where the ceremony was to be performed at 2.19 to 2.49 p.m., when the Supreme Patriarch was to perform the rites for raising it to the top of the Pagoda. Yet I was still seated under the banyan tree near the spired platform where the Relics were installed.

A Tale of Two Sides of a River

The wafts of the gentle breeze and the occasional chirping of birds served to be something of a lullaby. I drank in their melodious and magnetic rhythm which drew my consciousness inside. In front of me was the silver ribbon of a meandering river stretching as far as the eyes could see. Although both banks appeared to be equally fertile, forested lands, yet I could not help wondering why there should on one side be seen so many human corpses littering the areas. I also discerned on this side people dressed in rags, looking like wretched beggars. Even the dogs were lean and thin-bellied, looking more like bags of bones than living animals. They also suffered from some skin diseases that covered their bodies with festering wounds. Men and dogs would be

seen walking listlessly along the roads in the misty atmosphere. After a few moments the scene disappeared and in its place was an ominous stillness such as one could sense in a graveyard of the Christians. Within such a place there might be shady trees giving a cool shelter and beautiful flowers adorning the graves of the deceased, but there would be no one wishing to stay or make a home in it. Then the sound of religious gongs and bells was wafted to me from somewhere. This was embellished by the melodious notes of the tinkling bells hanging from the eaves of our Uposathas or chapels which, like those of an aeolian harp, were sounded by the wind and tuned in unison. With the fading away of the graveyard stillness there appeared before me the silvery ribbon of the former river. Now its both banks were teeming with people, men and women, all beautifully dressed and looking as if they were preparing for a festive occasion of boat-racing. Everybody appeared to be happy and in high spirits. In the midst of the stream loomed the sacred Pagoda of Phra Dhat Phanom joining the people of both sides of the river in a friendly and brotherly bond. I also discerned such aquatic animals as fishes, shrimps and tortoises surfacing around the Pagoda as if to join the people in paying homage to the sacred Relics. Farther up the banks could be seen lovely houses comfortably nestled in the lush green surrounding. Glancing at their graceful roofs I could guess how comfortable those houses must be and how happy their owners and occupants.

My consciousness was drawn outside when I was nudged by Acharn Phorn, who reminded me to have our midday meal. Nevertheless, during these moments I still felt myself belonging, as it were, to the two worlds. After

the meal we hurried back to the former place. When the time came for the Supreme Patriarch to perform the ceremony raising the golden *Chatr* to the top of the Pagoda, Acharn Phorn suggested we go to observe the ceremony closely so we could witness how it was done. But, finding me unwilling to do so, he went with Mrs. Phongphiew, leaving me there with my lingering thoughts near the spired platform where the Relics urn was installed. What had happened in the ceremony must have been witnessed by all who were present there and who watched the nationwide telecast program. I need not describe it here again.

At 2.19 p.m. the Royal Household officials started drumming on the ceremonial gong of victory, blowing the conch-shells and sounding the trumpets. It could be this moment that the Supreme Patriarch started to sprinkle the holy water and anoint the golden *Chatr*. After that he would take hold of the thread or cord by means of which the *Chatr* would be raised, electrically, along the groove to the top of the Pagoda. Seated in my former place, I was able to see it rise slowly towards its destination high above. How small and light it appeared against the background of the vault of limitless space! Finally it reached the place where it was destined to be, where the officials waiting thereon would fix it permanently to its place. What happened in the invisible, astral world was the same as the previous day. The ceremony came to an end well over 3 p.m. After that we left the monastery to find a place where we could spend the night. Before leaving we sent our thoughts of reverence to the sacred Relics, asking for their blessings. *Somehow there came to*

me a low, gentle voice which said, "Do come and greet the dawn here tomorrow." Then all was silent.

On Friday 23rd March at 6.05 a.m. we arrived at the former place and prostrated ourselves in front of the spired platform where the chest-bone Relics of the Blessed One were kept. *The force of cool and bliss was still prevalent in the atmosphere, permeating its every molecule and atom.* There were already a great number of people, some chanting, whereas others meditating nearby.

So tremendous was the crowd of people this day, which was far greater than the day before. There was practically no room available within the monastery that was not occupied by anybody. The cars in the whole area must be many thousands in number, while the people thousands of thousands in all. That they were all devoted to one and the same thing i.e. the Relics of the Pagoda had been a powerful magnet drawing them here, making them come willingly and joyfully—men and women, young and old, mingling and rubbing shoulders with happy and smiling faces. Moreover, this day was made more significant to all by the fact that Their Majesties the King and Queen, together with Their Royal Highnesses the two princesses would also come to preside over the royal ceremony raising the Relics to be enshrined in the Pagoda. All knew it was the last day when they would have the opportunity to see the Relics urn closely before it was to be enshrined permanently high above. Here the Thai nation had both of their most sacred institutions i.e. the Religion and the King come together on the same day. In their minds, and especially on this day, "*All roads lead to*

Phra Dhat Phanom.” Without any urge or coercion they thronged to the sanctified area,—wave after wave of eager people in the sea of smiling faces. Despite the heat of the blazing summer sun they took pains to wait patiently, and that since early in the morning. It was evident how the minds of the Thai people were still focussed on, and devoted to, their sacred institutions with the same force of confidence as ever before. I was especially happy and cheerful, mingling with the crowd, watching them throng from various directions and finally meeting in the midst of the crowd numbering thousands of thousands my own mother and elder sister who travelled from the town of Roi-ed. This was our accidental meeting since we had not made any appointment before. I also came across several other people I had not met for a long time. But due to the fact that we cherished the same things in our minds, it was something of a miracle that we should have come across one another in the midst of so great a crowd of this day. I could not help thinking that it should augur well for the existence and security of our nation as a free people for a long time to come.

A Celestial Light-house

At 2 p.m. the glare of the sun somehow softened and its oppressive heat reduced. The cool wind from the river also helped to mitigate the intensity, both of the light and the heat. Soon the royal procession came to the monastery of the Phra Dhat Phanom. *Just then my consciousness started to function on another frequency and there came to my mental ears the outburst of the sound of*

waves crashing violently against the shore. A few moments after that the Mekhong river appeared in front of me. In it there were a number of fishes and other aquatic animals emerging and swimming and sometimes springing above the water as if they were expressing their joy and delight. The chief Nāga spouting out the stream of water that became drops of vapour floating in all directions as if to sprinkle holy water to all that came to participate in the royal ceremony. These vapour drops reflected a series of rainbow-like glistening haloes while the brilliant rays were seen emitting from the chest-bone Relics inside the golden urn still on the spired platform. It was at this moment that Their Majesties and Their Royal Highnesses were holding the cord by means of which the spired platform would be raised along the groove to be permanently installed within the niche of the Pagoda. All this time the emitted rays, which seemed to be more intense in their brilliancy, shot its beam straight into the bright summer sky. This was accompanied by the chanting of victory passages and the sounds of gongs, conch-shells and trumpets, — all combined to make a rumbling thunder of various musical sounds, both of the visible and invisible worlds. After the Relics had been enshrined within the niche in the middle of the Pagoda, I noticed that the rays of intense brilliancy emitting from the Relics that used to shoot high up into space now went straight up to under the golden five-tiered Chatr on top of the Pagoda. Then, and there, they scattered themselves into all directions, looking something like a celestial light-house amidst the sea of air that blanketed the Earth. At this moment the chorus of recitation in praise of the Triple Gem was still heard in tuneful rhythm, interspersed at times by the voice that said, "The Grace of the Blessed One has become an unobstructible

ray permeating the atmosphere to bring peace and bliss to those blind and bewildered people. They will be able to catch a glimpse of the Light. Henceforth there shall be peace and bliss on both sides of the river-bank." After some time I started to function on the visible world again and heard Acharn Phorn say "The Relics have already been enshrined within the Pagoda. Perhaps we should start going back, since it is 3 p.m. now. We have to go quite a long way from here to our place the Freedom Pagoda, at Pine Camp, Religious Development Centre." To his suggestion I agreed despite the fact that I felt myself still hovering between the two worlds and with a lingering desire to stay there as near as possible to the Relics as long as possible. Thus we were on our way back at that moment, without waiting to see Their Majesties and Their Royal Highnesses.

Leaving the sanctified area, we all looked back with a feeling that something was missing from us and that our hearts would remain there for quite some time. *The brilliant rays emanating from the top of the Pagoda were still seen illuminating the evening skies of Nakhorn Phanom, serving as a beacon light for those who sought the Way and Peace beyond compare. It would shine forth like that, so I knew, for a long time to come, and I prayed it be so for ever, coeval with heaven and earth. On our way we were consoled by a gentle, soothing voice which said, "Do not worry about the journey. You shall be back home safe and sound. **The night may be dark, as well it should be, yet the path is illuminated with the Light of Dhamma.**"* At this I sent my thoughts of reverence and gratitude to whoever

the voice was and told everybody of us to do the same thing. All faces were by this time lit by an ecstatic delight that would never be forgotten. We reached our Pine Camp that night at 10.50 p.m. blessed with all the convenience and security.

And so end our journeys and my narration associated with the sacred Phra Dhat Phanom Pagoda.

Printed at VINYARN Printing Press, Tel. 2822025

49/3 Samsen Road, Banglamphoo

Bangkok-2, THAILAND

Phorn Ratanasuwan : Printer and Publisher

**Kindly correct the important
printing mistakes as follows**

(from TO THE LAND OF THE LORD BUDDHA)

PAGE	LINE	WRONG WORDS	RIGHT WORDS
8	(last)	solemn with	solemn wish
10	2	wish then	wish that
	3	and that	and then
32	15	having reaching	having reached
38	15	at is	as it
42	9	drizzie	drizzle
74	18	of then	of them
78	12	there was sculptured	there was a sculptured

TILL DEATH DO US PART ?

Gazing at the Taj Mahal, I came to realise the feeling of one who had been blessed with the nectar of love and then would like to have others share the same immortal flavour of that ambrosia—so delicate and fragrant yet so serene and lofty it was. To him it was what he cherished with the most tender and loving care. While I was drinking in the lovely wonder of the Taj Mahal in front, the couple I had seen the previous day appeared to me once again. As before, they strolled hand in hand with all the appearance of those blessed now with the ambrosia of their eternal love being fulfilled. How illusory was the passage I used to think was the most beautiful when it said, “.....till death do us part.” Here and now I was witnessing the immortal couple, smiling the smile of those who had reached the zenith of their blessed love, walking happily together after what most of us had concluded, naively, that they must have been parted for ever through their ‘deaths’. Obviously they were enjoying each other’s company and would be drinking the ambrosial nectar of their love for nobody knew how long. Now no ‘death’ could part them as long as they did not want to part company with each other.



Phenomena at
the PHRA Dhat
Phanom Pagoda

(WHERE TWO WORLDS MEET)