



The Pilgrimage

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Excerpt: Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sarnath — the young monks travel to the places they have been reading about, and find them to be real fields, real hills, real brick.

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DAILY RHYTHMS

MONASTERY

Read original article at: <https://dzongplum.netlify.app/en/living-monastery/daily-rhythms/04-the-pilgrimage>



They set out with name badges on yellow lanyards, which is what a monastery does when it takes a great many children a long way from home.

For several weeks the younger monks of Dzongkar Choede had been doing what they always do: classes, prayers, the ordinary rhythm of the monastery. Then they boarded a coach, and the places they had been reading about since they could read began to

arrive one after another.

At Bodh Gaya they walked to the Mahabodhi Temple, where the Buddha is traditionally understood to have attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree more than 2,500 years ago. There were prayers and circumambulation, flower offerings held carefully in both hands during the wait. There were also prayer flags overhead in every colour, and a great deal of standing about in the heat.

At Rajgir they climbed Gridhakuta, the Vulture's Peak, following the paved path up through dry hills with a Buddhist flag out in front. At the top there were prayers, a banner, and the discovery that the summit is mostly warm rock to sit on. They saw the ruins at Nalanda, where monks studied for seven hundred years.

At Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first teaching, they walked the gardens in the early morning while the mist was still on the grass, and gathered at the foot of the Chaukhandi Stupa — a great terraced mound of brick that a person has to stand back some distance to photograph.

Between all of this there was the travelling itself, which is its own part of the story. Rickshaws in convoy with three monks to a bench. A queue for the coach. Someone asleep against a rail in the middle of the afternoon. Snacks acquired at a roadside stop and defended.

For a child who has recited these place names in prayers for years, arriving is a particular kind of surprise. The sites turn out to be real: real fields, real hills, real brick, warm underfoot. Something that had been a story becomes somewhere you have been.

A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey. For young monks it is also a long way from home with your friends, and both things are true at once.

Gallery



At the Chaukhandi Stupa, Sarnath.



Filing through a monastery courtyard at Sarnath in the early morning.



Under the prayer flags at Bodh Gaya.



Waiting with flower offerings.



Between sites by rickshaw.



Walking the gardens at Sarnath.