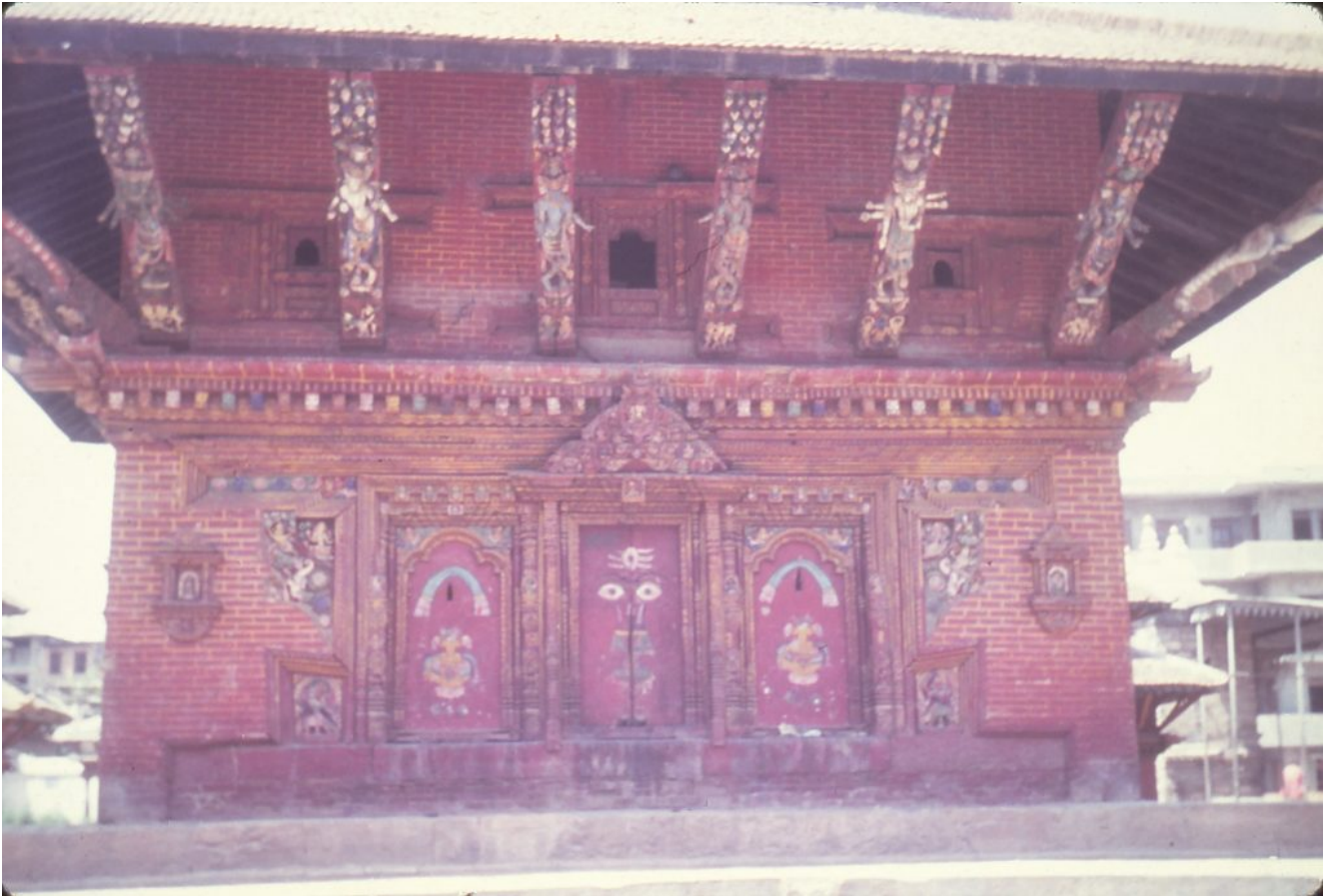


Next Stop – Nepal

Our Zen meditation group left Bodh Gaya on the 25th of March, 1971 headed for Nepal. It turned out to be a full two day ordeal. The first day, we woke at 3 a.m. and piled on two horse carts to travel from Bodh Gaya to Gaya. We caught a train at 5 a.m. for Patna. We arrived in Patna at 8 a.m. just in time to catch horse cart to the ferry to cross the Ganges at 8:30 a.m. On the other side, there was about a mile walk to the train station. The train left there at 11 a.m.. At that time, there was still a section of the route that was narrow gauge. We switched to the narrow gauge at 5 p.m. and arrived in Raxaul at 8 p.m. Whew!

The second travel day, we got bicycle rickshaw to the Nepal border. Some of our group were able to get bus and some trucks at the border, but we were too late. We began to despair at noon when a taxi stopped and offered to take the remaining five of us the 84 miles to Kathmandu for about \$3 apiece. The drive was spectacular, leaving the low-lying plain of the Indian subcontinent, then climbing steadily to an 8,000 feet elevation before descending into the Kathmandu valley at 4,600 feet, We arrived at nightfall and were reunited as a group. An exhausting two days!

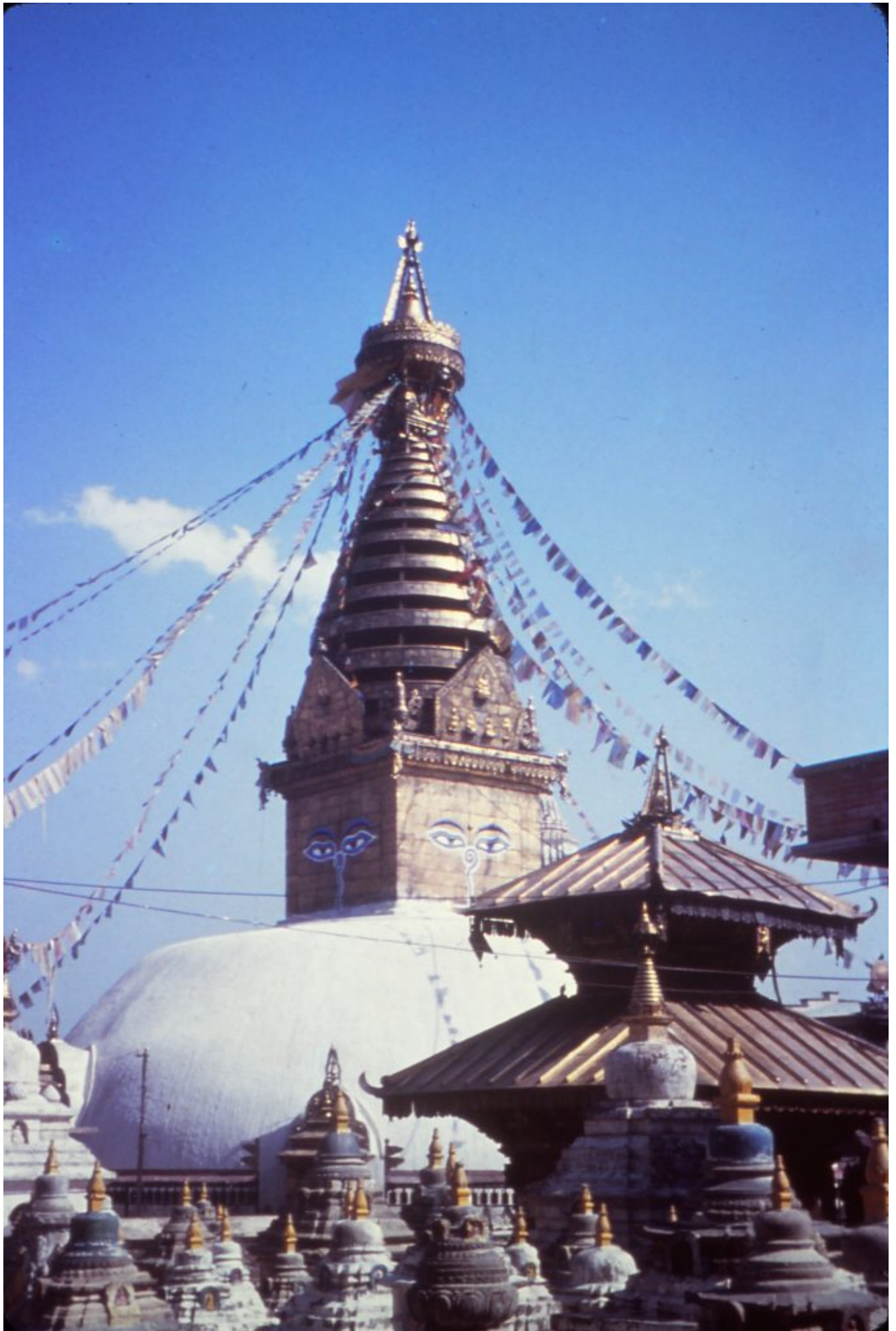


Kathmandu was an amazing city 50 years ago. There were and are a host of Hindu temples like the Jagannath Temple in Durbar Square (above), most of them with their own fantastically painted and adorned resident sadhus (holy men). Yet, it was also one of the most “Western” cities that I had experienced in the East. There were a great number of Westerners, both hippies and straight. Many restaurants served typical Indian and Nepali dishes. Others catered to Westerners, serving steak (Buffalo) and French Fries, pork chops, and pasteurized milk.

A favorite with many of us was an establishment named Vishnu’s Pie ‘n’ Chai Palace on Pig Street, where we could get a slice of a great variety of pies along with a cup of chai (tea). Walking down the main tourist street (nicknamed Freak Street at the time), music of the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and other rock bands came blaring out of tea shops, along with the ubiquitous smell of cheap, legal hashish. In

the midst of all the hedonism being catered to on Freak Street, I heard Mike Jagger's voice shouting, "No Satisfaction!" Ironic?!?

There were (and are) also many Buddhist temples and shrines, of particular interest to our little group of Zen Buddhists. The most famous of these is Swayambhunath, an ancient temple complex on a hill to the west of Kathmandu, which sported hundreds of the traditional Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags. It is also known as the Monkey Temple because of the hundreds of monkeys that inhabit the site and are considered holy to Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists. The monkeys had the run of the temple complex, especially at night.



While in Nepal, I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream by trekking in the foothills of the Himalaya mountain range. Fortunately, my British friend Richard, with whom I'd been meditating, also had a desire to do the same. We set out on the 31st of March 50 years ago on a trek into the mountains northeast of Kathmandu. That trek deserves a post all of its own.