



a fortunate life

The gap in DICK JEFFREY'S "life of many blessings," with his children grown and independent, was easily filled by around 200 children on the other side of the world. Dick, a resident of Tara Institute in Melbourne, Australia for the last six years, is director of the Maitreya Project's Universal Education School in Bodhgaya. He spends about three or four months a year in India.

For 10 years before I became involved with the Maitreya Project (firstly as security manager for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's last teaching in Bodhgaya in December 1999), I was an education and training consultant. Earlier, I spent 12 years in technical education in Melbourne. My original training was in mechanical engineering, which I had practiced for 10 years in the UK and Australia.

As director of the Maitreya Universal Education Project I am responsible for overall management and strategic planning of the Project's educational program in Bodhgaya, and for fundraising. When I'm back in Melbourne I am continually coordinating fundraising in Australia for the Maitreya statue.

I came to Buddhism by learning meditation through Siddha Yoga in the 1980s; later I developed an interest in the nature of the mind and consciousness. Over the last eight years I have found the Tibetan Buddhist teachings to be the most complete system in terms of both theory and practice.

At this stage in my life, I now have the opportunity to give something back and help others who are less fortunate. Working for Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the Maitreya Project has given my life a renewed sense of purpose and direction. I bring Dharma principles into my work by trying to remember the needs of others rather than my own benefit. Working in Bodhgaya needs a lot of patience!

Since 1999, when Maitreya Project took over the former Prajnaparamita School started by Root Institute in Bodhgaya, India, the School has made significant advances. We began the 2001 school year with 195 children enrolled for daytime school, an increase of 30 percent over the previous year. Attendance at

the informal evening school classes has also increased; sometimes it's been as high as 200.

As the school expands, so too have staff numbers. We now have 13 teachers and we are looking at employing specialist music and art teachers, at least on a part-time basis.

Earlier this year Skye Holden, an Australian who has worked for many years in the UK, accepted the position of school principal. Her job is to ensure that day-to-day operations are run-

ning smoothly and effectively, laying the foundation for the development of our Universal Education curriculum in 2002.

Girls at the school are happy to have their own 'girls-only' cricket matches. The boys agreed to vacate the playing area at the front of the school two days a week to let the girls have a go.

Recently, we introduced a small residential unit at the school, starting small with two teachers and five male students coming to live at the

school. This will help children who might not be able to attend school because their families are unable to support them properly, or because they would otherwise be a drain on family resources.

We are getting help with curriculum development from several people around the world. A team of six teachers in Australia is working on various aspects of the program. Former Prajnaparamita School director Debbie Rayfield and Root Institute founder Kabir Saxena will spend time in Bodhgaya next year to develop the program and provide training for the teachers; and we held a curriculum development workshop at Tara Institute in September the results of which will be introduced at the school in 2002. ●



Meditating at the school

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