

# Discover India

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# Discover India

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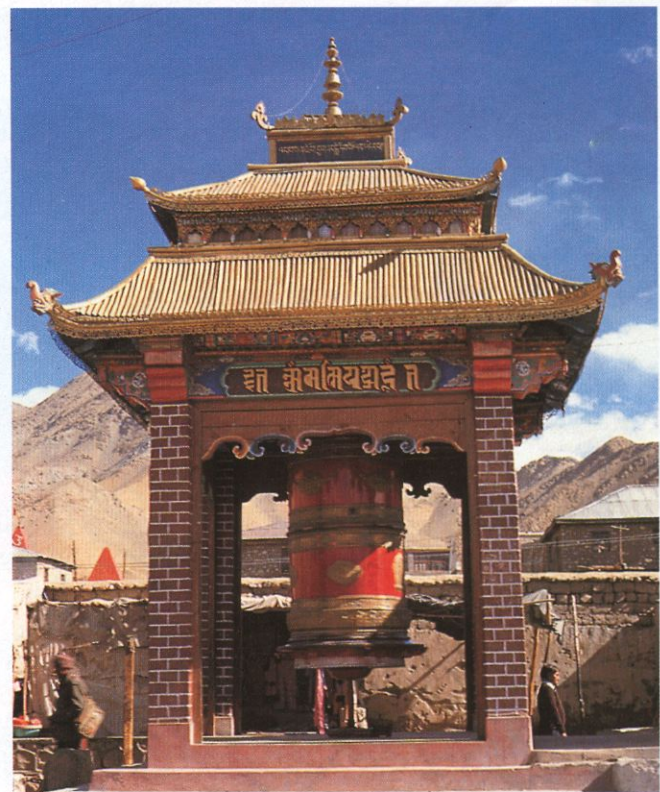
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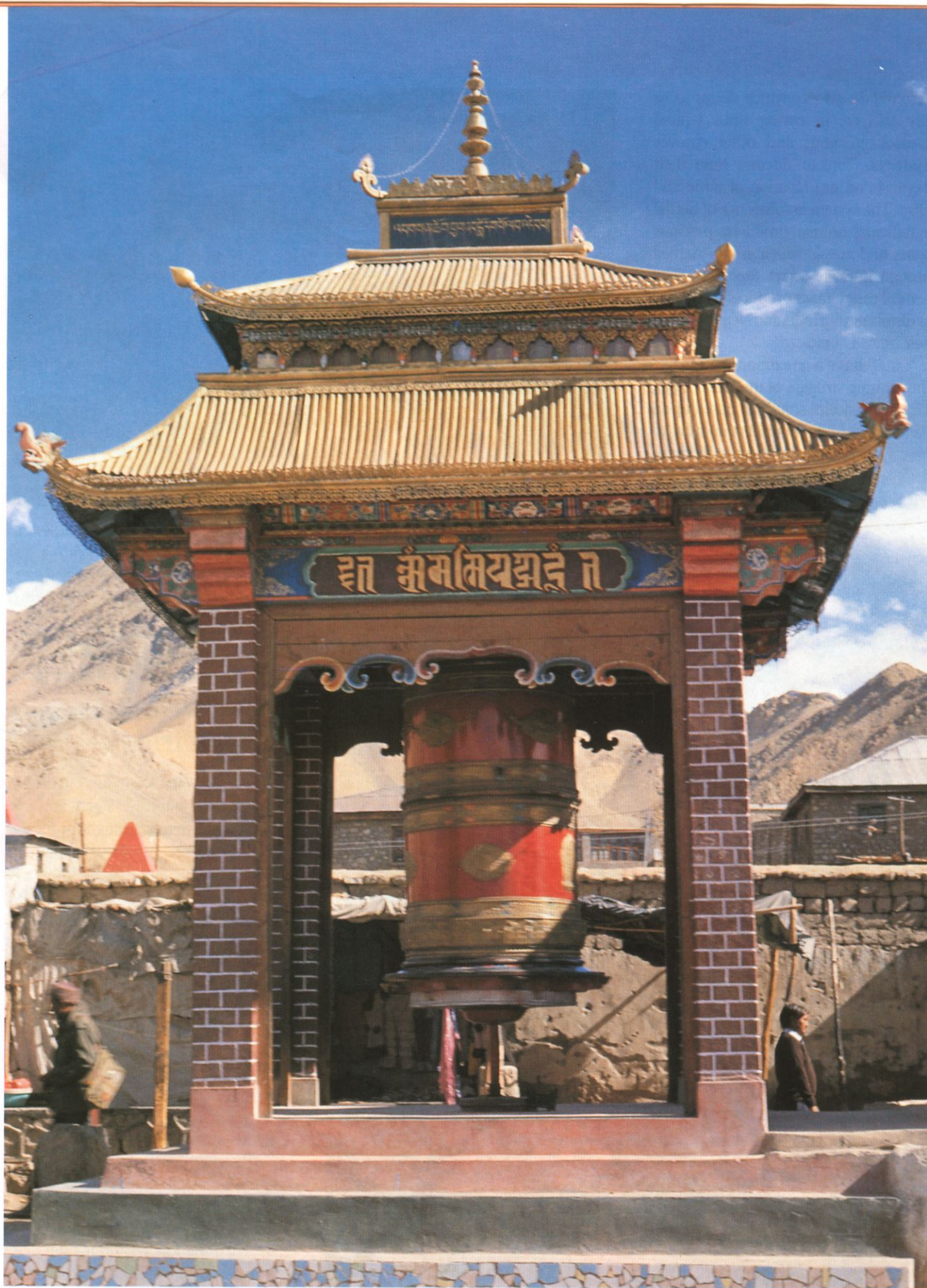
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PRINTO GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

**Erratum:** In our March 1998 issue the article on Nilgiri railway (*Hundred Years of Blue Mountain Railway*, pp.14-18) carries photographs of toy train in Gujarat. The oversight is regretted. *Editor*





# *Buddhist Prayer*

Text and Photographs: Nihal Mathur





The prayer wheel is an important symbol in Buddhism as it signifies the Dharma Chakra or the eternal movement of the teachings of Buddha which are enshrined in the scriptures as *mantras*. There are thousands of *mantras* addressed to Buddha as Avalokiteshvara or the Compassionate One. These *mantras* are written on paper and put inside cylinders of the prayer wheels. Buddhists believe that by turning the wheel, the power of the *mantra* is being released into the environment. There are hand held personal prayer wheels as well as those that are fixed in public places for passersby to turn them as they go along. In addition to these there are huge prayer wheels which are moved by the force of water as it is harnessed as it rushes on its way down from higher catchment areas.

*Prayer is intrinsic in the lives of Buddhists.*

*Whether it is morning or evening, at work or leisure, there is always a prayer in their heart....*



It is always an incredible sight when one sees hundreds and thousands of small white flags fluttering in the wind. Tibetan Buddhists put up these flags on which *mantras* or passages from Buddhist scriptures are hand block printed. It is believed that the message of the *mantras* — whether it is of compassion, preservation of *dharma*, alleviation of suffering or warding off of evil spirits — are carried far and wide by the winds. Like streamers on a string, these prayer flags are put out by ordinary Buddhist folks atop high hills where the wind is always strong, to carry their message of goodwill for one and all. In the misty mountainside one cannot help but be touched by the mystic message of the prayer flags.



Whether it is at one's home or in the temple or at the monastery, it is customary to light an oil lamp at prayer time. It is symbolic of "illumination of the mind". If one wants to "see" one must have the "eye." If one has the "eye" then one needs the "light". So one offers the "light" of the oil lamp to the Lord so that His grace makes the "inner eye" see the "way".

It is not the vain but the humble who pray. In prayer to the Almighty, a devotee prostrates as a gesture of his humbleness. A Tibetan Buddhist often prostrates before the Buddha innumerable times while chanting the mantras during prayers. Isn't once enough? What does a Buddhist gain by prostrating hundreds of times? "By doing this one improves one's lot in the next life. Prostrating before Buddha is one way of accumulating merit in the life after this."

