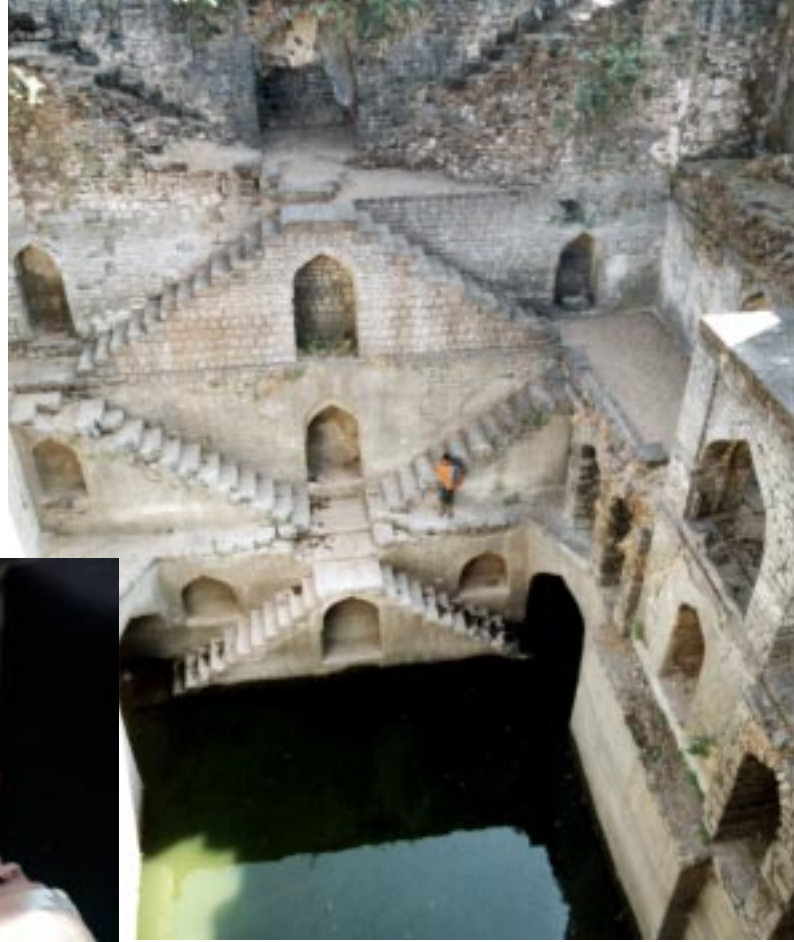


Introduction to India



*a photo essay
by Doug Elbinger*

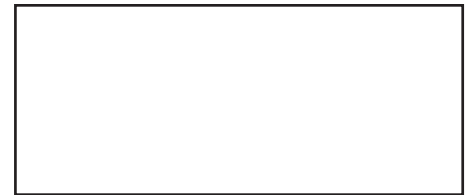


The attraction of the Orient is that especially there one can be frank about one's spiritual life. In the West, people are somewhat ashamed of their spiritual yearnings and overcompensate by denial or exaggeration. In the Orient, especially in India, it is assumed that everyone has a double life: the apparent, outer life of the personality and private, inner life of the soul. Only the inner life is real; the outer life is illusory, transitory, a lesson to be learned or an obstacle to be transcended.



The Hindi language does not distinguish between "history" and "mythology," between "travel" and "pilgrimage." Just as the soul of an individual

(which migrates from body to body in a journey to perfection) is regarded as more real than the personality (which dies), so does the life of the nation transcend the diurnal events of politics. The history of India is found in its mythology, where the happenings at the court of an individual king became, through folkloric tradition, attributed to an archetypal king. LEWIS K. ELBINGER



When the opportunity arose to visit India, I could not refuse. My brother, Lewis, who is a US Department of State officer at the US Embassy in New Delhi, suggested that 'now' was a good time to visit. We both had to rearrange our schedules if we were





to spend quality time together. I quickly planned the entire trip on the web. From booking my tickets to obtaining an Indian tourist visa from the Indian consulate in Chicago. I planned to leave the first week of January (after the millennium catastrophes had been cleaned up) and return the first week of February. Honestly, just the thought of taking a long vacation was as therapeutic as the voyage itself. I chose to stop over in Tel Aviv for a week to see Israel and acclimate myself to travel.



My adventures touring northern Israel on the back of a motorcycle I'll save for another time. When I arrived in New Delhi, I was first treated to a tour of the American Embassy on the day that Clinton announced his impending visit. I was very impressed with the security. The embassy is like a small fortress island of America in the middle of the Indian sub-continent. During my

stay in country, I divided my time between touring the northern state Himachal Pradesh in the foothills of the Himalayas, and visiting one of the largest archaeological sites in the world...the ancient "city of joy" at Mondu. Whenever I travel, one of the toughest decisions I have to make before embarking is what cameras to take. I knew I had to travel light. My photo-journalistic instinct is to be fast and unobtrusive, so in addition to a Nikon N90 and two lenses, I brought

along a Fuji 645zi, an auto focus, 2 1/4, point n' shoot. The

following photos are representative of a few of the remarkable people and places I was able to visit.

