



हर हर महादेव

ॐ ह्रीं नमः शिवाय
ॐ श्री सदुरु तपोवनपरब्रह्मणे नमो नमः
ह्रीं ॐ

KAILASH

Y A T R A D I A R I E S



Dedicated to Param Guru, Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji who scaled the lofty heights of Kailash fearlessly, faithfully, ever abiding in Brahman. May his life of austerity, courage and unbroken abidance in Truth inspire all.

*Reflections by
Brni. Shubhani Chaitanya*

“

.....
the devotee speaks...

I wish to spend to spend my life in austerity
Reveling in the essence of Bhagavān Śiva
For I am wedded to Him
He loves me to no end
And I've loved him before I knew a beginning
We meet in a timeless time and a spaceless space
In a union of Pure Grace

Bhagavān Śiva answers

Meet Me in the mountains surrounded by snow at its utmost peak
Meet Me in the cave of a temple by the icy creek
Meet Me in My lake and take a dip, immerse yourself through and through
Meet Me in the ritual of prayer and chant my name like you always do
Meet Me in the large temple where people are lining up just to glance My way
Meet Me in the saints and sages that are ever awake to My play
Meet Me as the sun rises and spreads its rays to brighten up the whole sky
Meet Me in the full moon as the calmness and stillness pass you by
Meet Me as you close your eyes and sink into eternity
But most of all, meet Me in you! and you as Me
When you have been lost in Me, and I found in you
Then you won't have to meet Me and find Me through and through
How can I just be the form you worship, the sound you hear or the name you speak?
There is only one Reality so why do you seek?

.....”

G L O R Y O F

KAILASH

Mount Kailash is the abode of Lord Śiva. It is located north of the Himalayan barrier in Western Tibet. It is not only sacred to the Hindus but also to the Buddhists who consider it the central peak of the world, Mt. Sumeru. Kailash is also holy for Jains as this is the place where the first Tirthankara (Jain prophet), Ṛṣabhadeva attained Enlightenment. The Bon religion considers Kailash as the abode of the Sky Goddess Sipaimen.

This four-faced holy mountain (North, South, East and West) is the origin of four major rivers of Asia, namely the Indus, Karnali, Brahmaputra, and Sutlej. Mt. Kailash has been regarded as Gang Tise or Gang Rinproche in Tibetan which means: The Snow Mountain. The shape of this magical mountain peak makes it distinguishable from other surrounding peaks. The top of Mount Kailash is curved which makes it resemble Śivaliṅga and it is the only mountain that remains covered with snow throughout the year.

The 52 km parikrama or circumambulation is one of the toughest pilgrimages to pursue due to the high altitudes, multiple ascents and descents and cold temperature. However, trekking all the way up to the peak of Mount Kailash is held to be a forbidden act among Hindus for the fear of trespassing the sanctity of the mountain and disturbing the divine energies residing there. As per a Tibetan lore, a monk named Milarepa once ventured far enough to reach the top of Mount Meru. When he returned, he forewarned everyone to avoid bothering the God resting high up in the peak.



BENEFIT OF

KAILASH

YATRA ACCORDING TO
SWAMI SIVANANDA MAHARAJ

Kailas trip, besides the spiritual benefit, removes many kinds of minor heart-troubles. The heart is invigorated and strengthened. The whole cardiac-vascular, nervous, pulmonary, alimentary, integumentary systems are thoroughly overhauled and purified. There is no necessity for Kuhne's steam bath. You perspire profusely during the march. The whole body is filled with fresh, oxygenated blood. The gentle breeze blowing from the tall pine trees all over, surcharged with natural oil of pine, disinfects the lungs and a consumptive is cured of phthisis when he returns. The excessive fat is reduced. A Kailas trip is the best treatment for reduction of obesity in corpulent persons. Many kinds of stomach troubles, uric acid troubles and various sorts of skin diseases are cured. You will not get any disease for a period of 12 years, as you are charged with new electrons, new atoms, new cells, new molecules and new nuclei with renovated protoplasm. This is no Arthavada (glorification)...The Kailas trip brings spiritual blessings and good health.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08/23/2024*

Day 1
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti

One of the last instructions of Sādhana-pañcakam is 'prārabdham tu iha bhujyatām'.

Prārabdha karma means the results of actions which are fructifying in the present life, here at this very moment. The body and mind have to go through it and there's just no escape. It can come in the form of joy or sorrow. Joyful situations are not so much the issue. What does one do when prārabdha comes in the form of intense pain...how did great people deal with prārabdha?

This thought came to my mind when prārabdha caught the best of me. It was a month before going to a Kailash Yātra that was planned. This yātra was something long awaited and the best part is it just came to me via email and so I felt that now is the right time! One of our sevikas had been to Kailash many times and this year particularly, she wanted to organize a group to go so she sent me the email to see if I was interested. Someone had also kindly offered to sponsor my trip. Another sevika had just been to Kailash so she was cluing me in on the details and she sent me her hiking gear (since we are almost the same size) so I really didn't have to buy much. The group we were going with was going to be small (around 14 people) which I really preferred. I had spent about 6 weeks in the Yuva Veer course and the students there kindly trained me in running and sports. And just some time back, someone gifted me a pair of hiking boots...so I felt all of this was really aligning and now was the time to go.

Then everything else kicked in...When we make plans, God laughs! Almost a month before the yatra, my car got into an accident. Someone had rear ended me on the parkway because his brakes were jammed. Thank God we were both safe and sound. However, I developed a slight muscle ache on the lower back.



results of actions



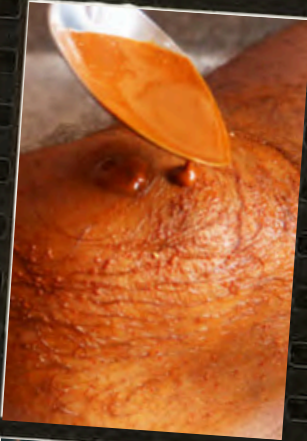
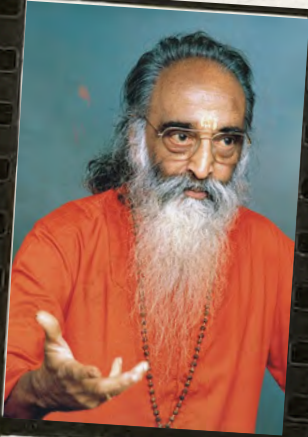
prārabdham tu iha bhujyatām



All set for the trip

Thankfully, someone took me to a healer who helped my back get better. However, about a week later, I was standing in a parking lot and someone called out to me and as I turned to look and move towards them, my foot got scraped in a path that was slightly going downwards. It was painful to walk with any kind of sneakers so I couldn't really test out my hiking boots too much (which we were supposed to do). I managed to do it once or twice but not for a really long period. So I started wearing sandals and putting turmeric on the wound and it's slowly getting better.

When it rains, it pours! I arrived at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Mumbai (as the first part of my trip). It was amazing spending time with Pujya Guruji and Pujya Swami Advayananda ji. And I had the opportunity to reflect loudly on Krtajñatā (a hymn of gratitude to Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda ji). That was the highlight, just thinking about our Guru Paramparā, more love and devotion blossomed in my heart and I felt very blessed by this opportunity. But right after that, a boil started to develop on my left knee and it turned into an abscess. I had never experienced this kind of physical pain in my life. It was like my knee was constantly on fire. It made it hard to walk, sit cross legged, sleep or do anything really but I had to just do what I had to do. I didn't want to really make a big fuss about it but it hurt. I confessed this to one of the brahmacharinis as she saw me take the elevator instead of the stairs (something that I didn't do often as I always sought for an opportunity to exercise!)



STORMS
DON'T
LAST
FOREVER.

I was so blessed that she took such great care of me. I was meant to leave the next morning for Uttarkashi. After we got back from Pujya Guruji's room that night, I was in intense pain and she took out my bags and packed everything with such great love and care - better than I would have done. And the very next morning, she came to my room to see me off and gave me the cutest picture of Bhagavān Krishna, saying that He will take care of me. And He is...after all he is the Lord of sweetness -madhurādhīpaterakhilam.

I managed to somehow get to Uttarkashi - my next destination before Nepal, after traveling for almost 10 hours. As soon as I arrived, I asked the Swamiji there if I could see an āyurvedic doctor. The doctor said that this should heal in about 5 days with the help of medicines and an ointment. So I called the sevikā who is organizing the yatra and told her that I'm not sure what to do because right now it's hard to even walk and we are just barely 10 days away from the yatra! She said not to worry and she will pray for my recovery.

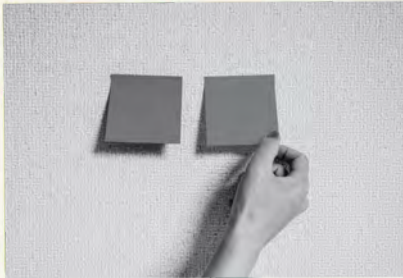
But the question is, what do I pray for? I cannot pray for me to go to Kailash. I can only pray to Bhagavān because it seems odd that I would desire something else more than what He would desire for me. He definitely knows better than me and I just can't argue with His plan. This was a tough surrender. This is something that I really wanted and I knew that if I prayed in the direction of going, it would help. There were things in my mind like - think positive, stay inspired, keep moving. But when I stopped to think about what the great people did during times of intense pain, I couldn't pray for my own welfare.





I just surrendered and filled my mind with Swami Tapovan Maharaj whose very abode was here in Uttarkashi and who climbed the peaks of Kailash. Swamiji here advised me to read his book Kailas Yatra to prepare myself. Everyone here was looking after me really well ensuring that I had whatever I needed to get better.

Will I stay here in Uttarkashi or go to Kailash? Who knows? But I decided from here on, my mind would be filled with God. Pain is there - I cannot deny that. Deep inside, I know it is an appearance and yet at the same time, it hurts. All one can do at this stage is accept that pain is there and learn how to manage it. Luckily now, I've learned how to walk up and down in the least painful manner; down with my left leg to start and up with my right leg to start. I learned how to sit in the least painful manner. One of my greatest fears actually came to life. I didn't ever want to be prevented from sitting cross-legged as that was the most comfortable meditative pose. Now, that too was taken from me! I had to learn how to do it in a chair and I couldn't exercise or walk too much (something quite tough for a New Yorker). Sleeping in the right position which is least painful is a work in progress...but when the mind sinks into Sat (Pure Existence), all disappears.



Will I stay / Will I go?

I was also in pain that I didn't get to see my Bhagavān Śiva at the Kashi Vishwanath temple as I usually would every morning. I figured that I would give myself three days to rest it out and not walk too much or overdo it (which is what I tend to do).

But I suppose Bhagavān heard my prayers, and in a knock on the door, one of the sevaks asked me if I wanted to go on the motorcycle and I was overjoyed to see my Lord!



He came for me!

As I walked over to greet Bhagavān Gaṇeśa in the temple, again my mind stopped. The remover of obstacles, should I ask Him to get me out of this....No! I remembered Kuntī Devī and how she asked for more suffering because this way, she remembered Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa so I thanked him for the pain because it was a way for me to think about God more.

Dealing with Pain and Suffering by great mahātmās. I then started to think of all the great mahātmās and how they dealt with pain and suffering.

Swami Chinmayananda

When his heart was only functioning 20%, he still roared, sharing the highest Vedantic Truths so people could benefit. He didn't stop because his body was stopping. He truly felt that Nārāyaṇa was functioning through Him and just let it happen.

When he was asked, why do we have to go through this suffering, he answered: "It is all structured according to the blueprint that you have given your Creator by your own past actions. The past actions are sinful and therefore I must suffer and I can't suffer with a healthy body, healthy mind, healthy intellect..."

*Swami Chinmayananda, "Cause of our Suffering!" Chinmaya Channel, Youtube, 5.18., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3opUSu6OgI>

"When God gives pain, God again gives us the power to suffer and provides people to look after us. Never worry. Everything will in the end serve only in taking your mind nearer to Him. Be assured of this. Pain is the Lord's kindest means to wake us up the quickest."

*Swami Chinmayananda, Facebook article on 14 September 2020.

Anandamayi Ma

Ma says that the real disease is bhava roga - the sense of individuality. That was a bigger disease! And when she was further asked about recovering from a disease that came to her, she uttered:

"Sometimes it seems that the images of diseases have their target on this body and they enter into this body, play for some days and go away. The way of this body is not to invite or drive away anyone. As you all exist, so are the diseases.

As this body does not drive you away, why should it drive them away?"

*Anandamayi Ma, "Ma In Her Words," 121,

<https://www.anandamayi.org/books/Mawords.pdf>

She just let disease come and go whenever it pleases. And when asked about the best cure, she replied: "The best cure for any situation is - God. Trust in him. Depend on him. Give all your worries and cares into his hands. He will definitely look after you and your cares, if you really and completely hand yourself over to him. Then you can feel light and carefree."

*Life Positive, "Devotee of Maa," <https://www.lifepositive.com/ma-s-devotee/>

Swamini Saradapriyananda

During her last three months, when Swamini Saradapriyananda ji was undergoing treatment for a traumatic disease, she visited the āśrama despite her bodily ailments. "All are saying that Amma has fallen sick due to some disease. Where is the disease? It exists in our thinking. If you think that you are sick, you will be sick. If you think otherwise, you won't be sick. But, we all have one common disease. It is the disease of forgetting GOD! Everybody has one sickness - bhavaroga - the disease of believing the unreal as the Real! When we see the invisible GOD and listen to the inaudible GOD every waking moment of our lives, all our diseases and our becoming will be annihilated!"

*This message is an excerpt from the last video recording of Pūjya Amma (in Telugu) when she visited Chinmayaranyam during her illness to address devotees and inmates of the āśrama for the last time. Swaminiji actually spent a good amount of those months when she was sick, translating the Bhagavad Gita in Telugu!

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08/24-25/2024*

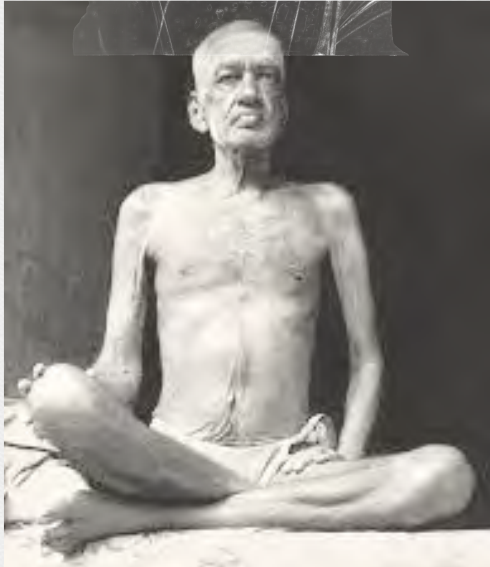
Day 2-3
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti

I officially started my maunam (silence). I woke up each morning thinking - would the pain go away? But each time, it was still there. Was it less or did I just learn how to manage it? I had no clue. One thing was for sure, when I was sleeping, it was pain free and then minute I started to wake up, take the first step, the body was very heavy and when I started to walk a bit, the body became lighter. This reminded me of something I heard that when we are asleep, our body is very heavy because the ego is dormant from the body but the minute we wake up, and start to identify with the body, the ego carries its weight and thus it is lighter. Ask someone to carry a sleeping child and a child that's awake and you will see the difference.

So the pain really belonged to the ego. Joy belongs to the ego and pain belongs to the ego. Was I healing? What are the signs of one who heals? I tried to look up to see if this abscess is actually healing. In the truest sense, I think a sign of one who is healing is one who stops thinking about the pain that they are going through and starts to think about the pain-giver. Not only thinks about the pain-giver but starts to thank the pain giver. Don't we thank the joy-giver?

Then how come we don't thank Him for giving us pain? Every discomfort and pain is sent because we have to grow and we should be grateful that Bhagavān is actually thinking of us and thinking, how will she grow more? How will she evolve more? How will she become a better seeker? I know, let me give her an abscess on her left knee. Ha ha ha! Let me give it right before she plans to go to Kailash. Let us see what she does....let us see how she deals with it and if she loses faith in me.





Swami Tapovan Maharaj

Well, I have news for Bhagavān. As I read Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji's Kailash Yatra, he had an indomitable will. No matter how much people dissuade him from going to Kailash, he goes and he just goes through thick forests, wild animals, occasionally losing his way and sometimes finding himself being questioned brutally, he still goes, he still walks keeping only the Lord in His heart full of faith.

When one sādhu found out that he was going to Tibet on foot, he uttered to Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji: "Swamiji! You are going to do a very reckless thing. With this delicate body, how are you going to reach Tibet on foot? Please give up this determination which will lead to sorrow..."

To which Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji replied:

"Bhagavān, anyone's will has only that much strength till it is discarded. But one can live in the holy Himalayas staying here and there doing the mental worship of Paramātmā. If the Lord's will is there, gradually one might reach the bank of Manasa Lake. Therefore, without giving up my determination to reach my destination, I shall travel upward. All I can say is everything is the will of the Lord."

-Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Kailas Yatra, 84.

My question for my Lord is, if I dare ask, how much do You love me? Now, I have done whatever I had to do to come to You. I had completed all my dharma, all my responsibilities. My mind is at ease and it is at peace and is thoroughly enjoying being in this wonderful land of Uttarkashi and reflecting, contemplating deeply on the great Truths of the scriptures. I left all to come to You. And this is all I can do.... tyāga or renunciation.



Uttarkashi

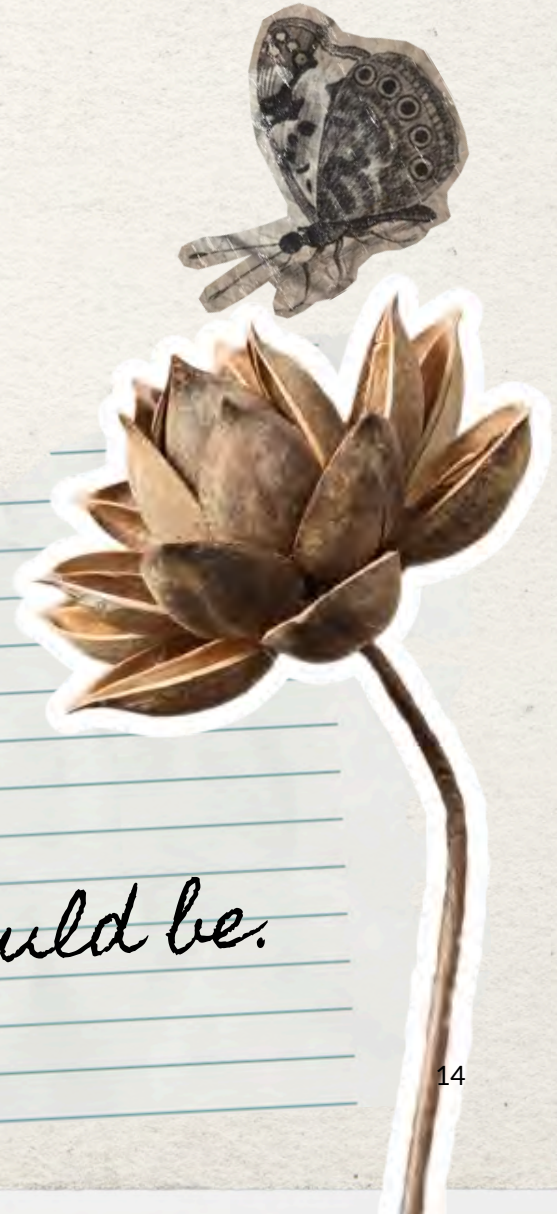
Now what you do with me, I leave it up to You! I know You will take care of me as you always have. You have never left me - not for one single moment. And even when you gave me intense pain, I know you were taking care of me and making me better! So, You figure this one out;) This is beyond my dharma. My dharma is only to think about You. And Yours is...well, to take care of our yoga and kṣema -our needs and security. I have faith in You.

"If the Lord has given us teeth to chew, it is His duty to also give us the food that is to be chewed."

-Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Kailas Yatra, 21.



Pain was also a wonderful teacher of slowing down. When we have to take care of some pain in our bodies or minds for that matter, we tend to do things slower. We tend to be more conscious of where we are walking, how we are moving, what our activity is, what our lifestyle is. We tend to pay more attention to our lives and start to think that we should make some changes for the better. This is a lesson I need to learn.




Sthāne Hṛiṣīkeśa

Everything is as it should be.

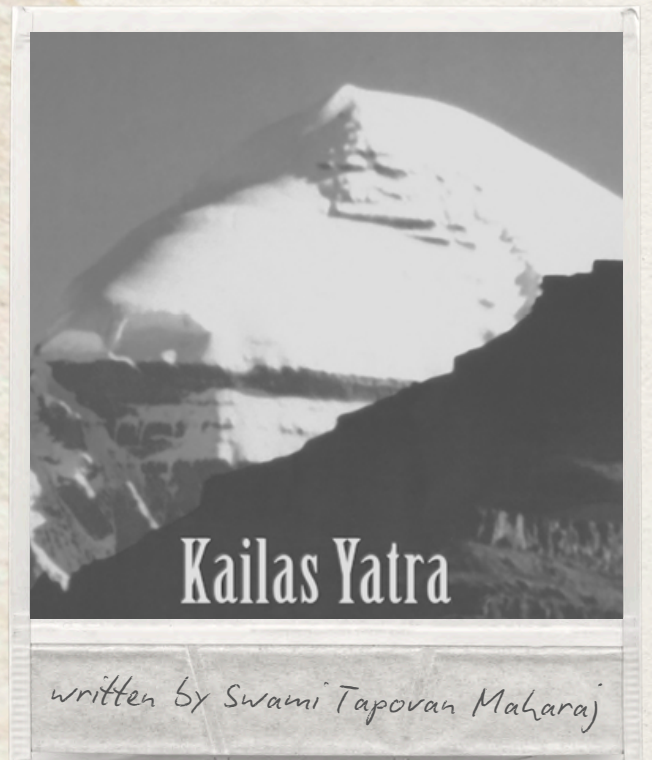
To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08/26/2024*

Day 4
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti



I've been reading Kailash Yatra by Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji and have been so inspired by his resolve of not giving up to reach Kailash. He did the best that he could to keep going and the rest, he left up to Mahādeva, Kailasha Pati. I had taken the resolve to walk today to Kashi Vishwanath Mandir (about a 25 minute walk). I wasn't sure if I could do it...but thankfully it happened. I walked slowly, a little in pain much less than before. I usually go down and take Gaṅgā jal with me to offer to Bhagavān Viśvanātha but this time, I thought I would just focus on getting there. With Bhagavān's grace, He took me there. I couldn't stand up for long for the āratī so I sat down on a chair. The temple was very crowded so I decided not to go into the garbha graha (sanctum sanctorum) today. I closed my eyes and worshiped the Lord in my heart. I thought that I needed two more days rest for the knee before I undertake another walk to Kashi Vishwanath Mandir since my left foot now started swelling. When it rains it pours:) Let us try once more on Thursday.



Today, let the mind focus on the highest teachings. It is Śri Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī and I wish to keep my mind and heart on the sacred hymn of the Bhagavad-gītā. I sat in front of Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji and poured out the verses of the gītā with gratitude in my heart and when it came to this verse, I chanted it three times. I know He will not leave me for I have given Him my life!

**ananyāścintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣāṁ nityābhiyuktānām yogakṣemaṁ vahāmyaham
-Bhagavad-gītā 9.22**

“To those who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever self-controlled, I secure for them whatever they need (yoga), and preserve for them what they already have (kṣema).”

“When Bhagavān says that He will take care of the yoga kṣema of his devotee who has single-pointed devotion towards Him, it means that whatever śraddha (faith) a devotee has, to that extent his anxiety and sorrow about his yoga kṣema will be less. He never takes refuge in anything other than the Lord who is his object of devotion. All the time he contemplates on the Lord and becomes blissful in Him. All afflictions like hunger, thirst, heat, cold etc are dissolved in that contemplation.”

- Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Kailas Yatra, 20.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08/27/2024*

Day 5
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti

I could walk now for about twenty five minutes pain free. From 25 minutes to having to walk 9 hours with uphill and downhill, how will that happen? Only through the grace of the Lord. As I sat quietly thinking, this whole situation was very funny. This jīva flew across this jagat (world) to meet Īśvara and all of this takes place in Brahman, all of it is nothing but Brahman - Pure Consciousness. Brahman alone is – and we are in essence That. This can be the only saving Knowledge. This can be the only permanent relief. Anything else is just keeping the mind cheerful for some time, keeping a positive attitude for a while but the only refuge where I can totally rest is this Truth. The only way I can truly surrender is this Truth because in this, there is no loss nor is there a gain.

What is Kailash after all without the beaming of Pure Consciousness?

Kailash would be just ash! Then why go there instead of go IN?

This is what Pujya Guruji constantly tells me – just revel in svātmā tīrtha. Your own Self is the place of pilgrimage. As I write this, I remember Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's invocation verse in Vākya-vṛtti...

sargasthitipralayahetum acinyaśaktiṃ
viśveśvaraṃ viditaviśvaṃ anantamūrtim
nirmuktabandhanam apārasukhāmburāśim
śrīvallabhaṃ vimalabodhaghanaṃ namāmi

He knows that this Truth is absolutely pure and non-dual and yet at the same time he feels like bowing down to It. What can he do?

He explains that with the power of Māyā, Brahman assumes the role of the creator, sustainer and dissolver of this universe. Brahman appears as the all-knowing, all powerful Īśvara and has the ability to manifest in an infinite variety of names and forms.

Is Brahman bound? Not at all! It's a play! Brahman is an endless ocean of bliss. And what if one wants to bow down to Brahman? Then Brahman comes as the dear husband of Śrī who is Nārāyaṇa, so that one can truly bow their heads at His feet! This is the beauty of the sport.

It's much like even if you know you are one, when you go to a carnival with magical mirrors, you laugh at how you can appear fat, thin, tall, short all at one and the same time and yet you truly are one. Why pay money and go to this house of magic mirrors then? It's just for fun! In this world, when seekers close their eyes, the mirror of the mind ceases and they are rooted in One and when they open their eyes, the mirror of the mind appears, and they play with two - all the while knowing it is One!

From the highest sense, it is not even One. It alone IS. Whenever we say 'one', we automatically take it as a number. And when we add anything to a number, it increases (one plus one makes two). When we subtract anything from it, it decreases (one minus one is zero).

However,
there's nothing that can be added to or
subtracted from Brahman. It neither
increases nor decreases. It is INFINITE. Thus our
scriptures roar:

**om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam
pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya
pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate**

We are ever complete...already!
I love the stillness of those who can
revel in Brahman, eyes closed
and completely within
themselves.

But I
also love those
who revel in movement.
For I would have never gotten
this teaching in silence. As much as
I bow down to those who silently abide in
That, my heart explodes with gratitude to
those who, abiding in That, play in the forms of
teacher and taught, mentor and seeker, worshipper
and worshipped. Had they not uttered such profound
words, I never would have known there is something
beyond all words. Had they not shared their thoughts
out loud, I would have never attempted to go beyond
thought. Had they not lived a dynamic life of action
extending to all far corners of the earth, I would
have never dared to explore the actionless
Self within. Salutations again and
again to all these Masters!

A poem written a few years ago...

Kailash Yatra

I've always wanted to go to Kailash the holy place
To prostrate around the mountain and attain your grace
To dip myself in the holy river and come out pure as Thee
To bring myself closer to You, as close as we can be

I couldn't go to the yatra, but You brought it to me
The heart travelled instead of this human body
It chanted Your name, sang Your praise and felt Divine
It was lost in the song, in the words and even in time

As every yatra requires a guide to show them where to go
Your silence was my ultimate guide and things just flowed
And one requires will to succeed to keep going until the end
You are my strength, my fortitude and my best friend

Only with your grace, I was able to depart and arrive
I couldn't go to the yatra, but in my heart, it came alive
Having dipped my heart in the holy river through and through
I went in as me, but came out as only You



So will I go this time or will I have this yātra in my heart? I remember listening to Swamiji's talks and he said that a devotee may fall but they will fall in the right place. Bhagavān gave me a beautiful place to fall – the land of Uttarkashi where I am surrounded by the Himalayan ranges and the sound of the majestic Mother Gaṅgā. A place where I am away from speaking, replying to emails or being on the phone except for urgent messages. A place where I am not trying to distract myself from this pain but actually paying attention to it. That's a beautiful opportunity. Had this happened in New York City, I would have just busied myself and made myself forget about this pain in the midst of all the work that had to be done. But here, it was all undoing. There was no work to do – or at least I had left it behind for the moment. There was nothing to distract me from my thoughts. It was just me, alone and I chose to remain in silence. I had to stare this pain straight and find healing in the name of Bhagavān, in the teachings of Śruti and in the inspiration of Swami Tapovan Maharāj. I had to 'feel' the pain and if I 'felt' it and experienced it then it was surely something apart from me because the experiencer is different from the experienced, the seer is different from the seen.

The body had to fall...now the question is, will it rise? With every fall, there is a rise and with every rise, there is a fall. It's just a matter of time and how time plays, we never know – those realms are unknown to us. We can only do one thing which is bow in surrender. For taking care of one's body, we must put forth proper effort in taking the right medicines, giving it enough rest, exercising the right amount but for the healing to actually take place, one must just let go, the effort must be in letting go because that is beyond our capacity. That belongs to the great all-knowing, all-powerful, all-capable Lord – that's his Majesty, that's his department. We treat, but He cures! And, He knows best. He always knows best, better than you and me.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08/28/2024*

Day 6
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti

I had a feeling to go to the doctor maybe tomorrow just to check on this wound. I was feeling better but this thing looked gross! I will save the readers from an elaboration of the description. I could now climb up with my left foot slowly. At lunch time, Swamiji came to the annakṣetra and asked me if I wanted to see the doctor. I nodded in silence and he said that Jeet would take me at 5pm. Somehow Bhagavān always finds a way to take care of us. The doctor saw the wound and said that puss is now coming out so they had to remove it and I had taken a vow not to speak. I supposed that included not screaming in pain. So all I did was utter Bhagavān's name and had that as my release, my antidote. After his assistant dressed the wound, he said that I should come back for the next three days since I wouldn't be able to do this dressing on my own. I was leaving in 3 days or at least I thought I was. I communicated with him through typing on the phone and he said, it didn't matter. Just come!

When I kept reading about Anandamayi Ma and how she faced disease, there was always a calmness and serenity in her face. Was it there in mine? I'm pretty sure I showed pain, that's probably because I felt it...but I think I should now change. A true devotee of the Lord, will show peace amidst all unease. A true devotee will just let things come when they come and let things go when they go. Was I wishing this wound away? Yes I was! That's not how it should be. I decided from here on, that I will do what I can, do the best that I can to treat this wound. However, no more of this up or down feeling of am I going to Kailash or staying because that is taking away from the depth of my sādhanā. To start any sādhanā deeply, it requires tyāga or letting go.



Anandamayi Ma

My antidote

- ✦ Sure, I have let go of communicating with the world but have I let go of 'desire'? Have I let go of this 'ego'? These are subtle layers that still need tyāga. I suppose the puss that is oozing out of my knee represents the ego puss that is oozing out of my heart.
- ✦ What a massive explosion! Only the doctor, the Lord can take this kind puss away. It's too difficult to do on our own!

So it all comes down to one word, which I love, which I think is the hardest to do and I have already mentioned, it is surrender.

People have this wrong notion that surrender means doing nothing. Actually, surrender is a lot of effort! Surrendering means doing whatever we absolutely can and then letting go of what is to come. It only comes after effort because we realize that there's a point in time and space where effort cannot do anything anymore. At that point, where 'effort' stops working, the only thing we can do is place all our worries, troubles, thoughts in the hands of the Effortless Sustainer of this world and let Him take over. His realm is that which lies beyond human effort. And, He knows what he is doing. We are all being pushed to evolve to realize our true Selves. Sometimes, we require support, love, camaraderie and sometimes we require solitude, body pain, illness and disease!

Hara Hara Mahādeva!

I salute Mahādeva who removes sorrow but who also removes joy. May he remove both joy and sorrow so that we remain established in the realm behind this duality.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *08 | 29-30 | 2024*

Day 7-8
Uttarkashi Tapovan Kuti

Today I was able to walk to Kashi Vishwanath temple and back almost pain free carrying Gaṅgā jal! I was also able to stand for the āraṭi with Bhagavān's grace. The swelling on the left foot has gone down. I decided that each day, I will sit by Gaṅgā Maiyya and let her take care of reducing the swelling. She is the best healer. The best healer is sitting at the feet of one's Guru, praying and taking a dip in the Holy River, visiting the temple of Bhagavān, chanting His name and reveling in the scriptures. There cannot be a better antidote than this! I stayed with this thought in my mind.

I emerged from silence on August 30th right after lunch. A new development started, a sty in my eye. I was also feeling quite bloated and not hungry at all. Again the craziness in the body kicked in, and I started feeling warm in temperature. I wasn't sure what was going on exactly but I felt incredibly tired. The first person I spoke with was Swamiji in the ashram. I told him that all these things are going on and I wasn't sure what to do and I would go to the doctor to see if I can take up this yatra. He said don't let such a small thing stop you! This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Go! He was so kind, he gave me whatever else I required: a walking stick, head lights, āyurvedic medicine, even his own pair of scissors for cutting my bandage. I felt so blessed to have someone so encouraging. I guess this meant I was going.

And that afternoon, I also met someone I knew who had come for a camp at Uttarkashi. He asked me what I was up to and I told him. I told him I was off to go see the doctor. He said nobody can decide who goes to Kailash. This is between you and Bhagavān. Just go with faith!





He told me how the first time he had gone to Kailash was when he had a tear on his knee and he was limping!!! And yet he did it. He also told me how so many people who thought they couldn't go, went and they made it. He said that Bhagavān gives you a new body when you're there in Kailash and after that he takes it away. His words nourished my heart with faith.

I still did go to the doctor as I told him I would see him and I wanted to follow the proper protocol. When he saw me, I told him that I'm leaving for Kailash yatra tomorrow and he said you can go! My heart was relieved! But he said change your bandage everyday and he gave me even more medicines to take for the wound to close and heal. That evening Swami Abhedananda ji came to the ashram as he was going to start a camp about the Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. It was so wonderful seeing him. I spent the evening with him and he asked if I was surely going considering the condition of my knee and I said yes. He said that it was going to be difficult. I knew his concern but I felt that I had to go.

That night, my temperature became warmer, I didn't feel like eating at all. I had no idea what was happening in my tummy. I had a thought of whether I should stay or go ...but the next day, I made myself get up. I had to go. I took the blessings of Swami Tapovan Maharaj ji, Ganga Maiyya, Bhagavā Viśvanātha and the Swamijis and I left for Rishikesh.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/01/2024*

Day 9-10
Divine Life Society,
Rishikesh & New Delhi Airport

I arrived at Rishikesh, the Divine Life Society after a few hours of driving from Uttarkashi. Swamiji had arranged for our lunch on the way so the driver and I were pleasantly fed. It was peak afternoon and it was incredibly hot. I suppose this is exactly what the body needed. All that happened in Rishikesh was the body was sweating intensely, and it felt like this was a way for all the toxins to be released. Instead of taking an afternoon nap, I decided to wash my clothes, take a shower and visit Pujya Swami Sivananda ji's mahasamādhi and kuṭīr. I was thinking of going to do an āyurvedic massage to help get rid of this bloating and gas that this stomach had. After sitting in the kuṭīr for some time, I went out and walked to see if there was any āyurvedic place nearby but it was too hot and too noisy so I went back to the kuṭīr and just stayed there. I was happy because I got to attend the beautiful ārati in Swami Sivananda ji's room and by the Gaṅgā. I then sat outside and just enjoyed the silence and the calmness of the river – how she kept flowing no matter what. She doesn't stop and she won't until she makes her way to the ocean and loses herself in it.

After the ārati, when everyone was heading to the annakṣetra (dining hall), I saw the āyurvedic place – it was right outside the kuṭīr! I totally missed it! By that time, it was already closed. I thanked God that I didn't find it earlier otherwise I would have missed this opportunity to be in the kuṭīr. I remembered the greatness of Bhagavān Gaṇeśa and how he gives us obstacles when we're about to do something at the wrong time or at the wrong place because He wants us to always remain on the path of dharma and be protected by it. Salutations Unto Him for keeping me in dharma!



P5 PLUS



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20A

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19A

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P5 PLUS



18A

18



17A

17

After dinner, everyone was in the mahāsamādhi shrine for evening bhajans and chanting. It was a beautiful feeling to be there and witness how Swami Sivananda ji still has such a profound presence and his radiance continues to shine through devotees from all over, even long after his physical body has passed. I sat in a chair beside one of the Swaminijis (women monks). I was so happy to see many of them around! I always like to meet them and see how their lives are. As I looked around, the chairs on the women’s side were getting filled up quickly and an elderly lady walked in, indicating that she couldn’t sit on the floor. I decided to get up. I didn’t know if I could really do this yet – sit on the floor cross-legged with the condition of the knee. I did it for a few minutes during dinner time but I decided that it’s worth a try.

Sometimes, or I should say a lot of times, we are our own limitations and these circumstances specifically come to us to help us break them. It turns out that with Bhagavān’s grace, I was able to sit for about an hour cross-legged on the floor! I felt a semblance of normalcy coming back slowly. Who would have thought that sitting, walking, standing would be such a rarity!

After the satsaṅga, one of the Swaminijis spoke to me and asked me how I was and what I was doing and where I was going. I told her that I was going to Kailash. And right across us was a picture of Swami Sivananda ji with Kailash mountain in the background. She told me to come the next day and offer abhiṣeka at the mahasamādhi shrine and take the blessings of Swami Sivananda ji. I bowed down to her, took her blessings and did what she said the next day.

The next morning, my body was back to normal, the stye in my eye was gone, the warmth of the body was gone. Seeing Swami Sivananda ji has healed me. I read some of the most beautiful quotations while staying in the ashram:

Insure your life with God. All other insurance companies may fail but the Divine Insurance Company will never fail!

God tries most severely whom He wishes to bless.

You are a lion cub and not a weak lamb.
You should roar like a lion and not bleat like a lamb.

The degree of grace is in direct proportion to the degree of surrender.

I have reached Delhi airport... boarding the plane to Kathmandu...insured by the Divine.

Will roar like a lion, surrender and let grace shine through. Nepal, here I come!



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/02/2024*

Day 11
Kathmandu, Nepal



I arrived safely last night to Kathmandu, Nepal. What a beautiful country! I now joined a new group of people. We are fourteen in total. All of them are Gujarati except me and I am the youngest one in the group. They are mostly all in their 60-70s, the oldest one being 84! He is a real gem:) At first it feels a little bit odd to be the youngest here, but I know there's no defect in Bhagavān's planning so there is a reason for me going to Kailash with this group. We were met in the morning by our official tour guide dressed in a maroon suit. His name is Kedar and he overflowed with love and reverence for Bharat.

Pashupatinath Temple

We began the morning with a long pūjā at Pashupatinath temple, located on the banks of the Bagmati River, for our safe journey to Kailash. The pūjā concluded with a havan (fire ceremony) where it felt like all impurities were being burned away from each and every one of us as we offered the grains into the flame. Again, it was exactly what the body and mind needed. Apart from purifying the atmosphere, the vibrations created by the chanting and the energy generated during havan remove any negative energies and harmonize the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of an individual. I hadn't realized this but I must have sat cross-legged for almost two-hours. Progress. The knee is healing.

After the havan, we all had darśan of Pashupatinath. The name "Pashupatinath" translates to "lord of all the animals". He is the Lord that helps us govern all of our animalistic tendencies whenever we choose to follow our mind and senses instead of our dhārmic intellect.





The story behind the temple goes like this: Once there was a cowherd boy who noticed that everyday, his cow would just automatically pour milk in a certain place so he told the king about it. The king said to dig under to see what was there. They found flames rising up and underneath it a Śivaliṅga. Hence, he decided to build a temple which is now Pashupatinath. This is one of the holiest temples of Bhagavān Śiva and is regarded as the thirteenth jyotirliṅga. The Śivaliṅga inside has four faces on four sides representing four aspects of Bhagavān – Sadyojāta - the one facing West, Vāmadeva - the one facing North, Aghora - the one facing South, Tatpuruṣa - the one facing East and Īśāna - this one is on top.

Sadyojāta (West) literally means just born. This means that Bhagavān makes his presence felt to every being that is just born. This is the creative aspect of Bhagavān so this is what we pray to first.

The essence of the Sadyojāta mantra is: “O! Lord! Sadyojāta, never give me desires which are the reason for this countless births and deaths. Please bless me with the passion for liberation. My prayers to Sadyojāta”.

This corresponds to the Śi in the Pañcākṣara mantra.

Vāmadeva (North). Vāma actually means left but it is to be understood that if we are facing East, North is to our left. This part represents the Śakti. Here he is worshipped as the Ardhanārīśvara aspect.

This corresponds to Va in the Pañcākṣara mantra.

Aghora (South). This is also known as Dakṣiṇamūrti. Those who worshipped the Aghora form of Śiva were called “Aghoris”. Their main belief is that there is no such thing called “inauspicious” in this world because all that exists in Śiva himself. *This corresponds to Ma in the Pañcākṣara mantra.* Tatpuruṣa (East). The word Tat represents Paramātmā. Tatpuruṣa is that Śiva which is behind every puruṣa (being). This is the form of Śiva that is in meditation, urging us to look behind this body, mind and intellect to discover who we truly are. *This corresponds to Na in the Pañcākṣara mantra.* Īśāna (The one on top). This is on top of the other four faces which face the four directions. This indicates the total encompassing energy of Lord Śiva. Īśāna means the ruler of the fourteen worlds. *This corresponds to Ya in the Pañcākṣara mantra.*

What a beautiful opportunity this was! However, I soon remembered the words of Swami Tapovan Maharaj:



“Ha! Ha! I went near and had the darshan of the five-faced Pashupatinath with horripilation all over my body and with my eyes flooding with tears! From the point of view of Reality, who is the Seer, who is the Seen and what is Seeing? That Parameśvara who is staying in everyone’s heart controls everything – is He anyone else other than me?” How can Pashupatinath be different from me? If He is not different from me, then how can I see Pashupatinath?

- Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Kailas Yatra, 44.

This whole world is indeed a play of the seer looking at the seen thinking the seen to be the seer when actually everything is just Seeing. Everything is just Being.

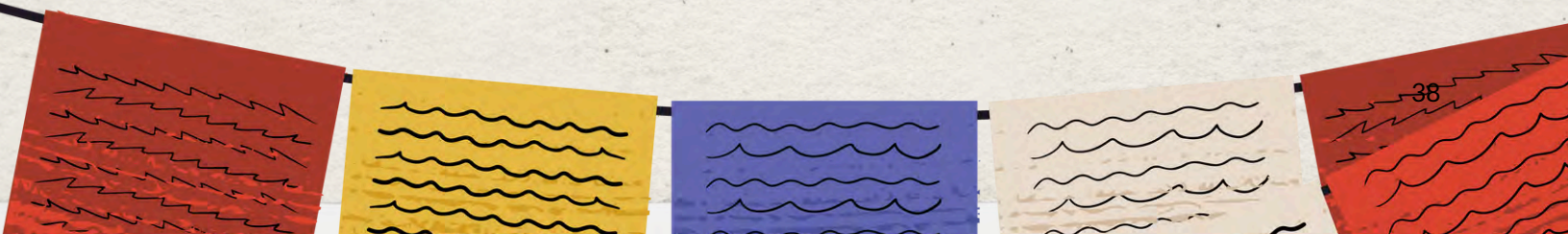


Boudhanath and Swayambunath

After having this blissful darśan, we proceeded to Boudhanath. It's a very famous buddhist stūpa (structure) that was built in memory of a king. This is the story given by the tour guide:

Once there was a king named Dharmadeva and his kingdom was having a great big drought and so he called the astrologers and they said that someone with 32 virtuous qualities has to be sacrificed and then water will start coming to the kingdom. So he called his son and told him about the predicament. He said, "We will have to find someone who has the 32 virtuous qualities and sacrifice him for the sake of the kingdom. So tomorrow, I will have the man brought to you in a sheet. Do not lift the sheet, do not look at him. Just offer him as a sacrifice and rain will start pouring in." The next day, the son did as he was told. After he sacrificed the man under the sheet, rain started pouring and water was flowing very freely. The prince lifted the sheet, and to his own sadness, he found his father lying dead! His father offered himself as a sacrifice to relieve the kingdom of its drought. The king knew that only two people had those 32 qualities - himself and his son and so he chose to be that sacrifice. In reverence and love for his father, the prince built this stūpa. This story was really touching. The things that people did for the sake of dharma was unparalleled. I wondered how many people would do this nowadays.

This represents the three beliefs of Buddhism - purity in mind, speech and body. As long as we are pure in these three aspects, this will help one attain nirvāṇa or Enlightenment. We also visited another stūpa known as Swayambhunath after this.



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/03/2024*

Day 12
Nepal

Kailashnath Mahadev Statue

This morning, we started our day at the Dholeshwor temple in Kathmandu. Unlike Pashupatinath temple, there was very less crowd so it was a pleasant darśan. After this, we visited the Kailashnath Mahadev Statue, the second tallest Shiva statue in the world, standing at 143 feet made of shining copper metal on the outside. Gazing at this form of Bhagavān, it reminded me how big Bhagavān actually is. Sometimes we think that we can do so much, but actually we are so tiny in the eyes of God. This reminded me of the first verse of Rudrāṣṭakam:

namāmīśamīśāna nirvāṇarūpaṃ
vibhuṃ vyāpakaṃ brahmavedasvarūpaṃ |
nijaṃ nirguṇaṃ nirvikalpaṃ nirīhaṃ
cidākāśamākāśavāsaṃ bhaje'ham | |



I salute the Lord Īśāna whose form represents the state of the highest nirvāṇa (extinction of all desires and passions leading to the highest bliss),

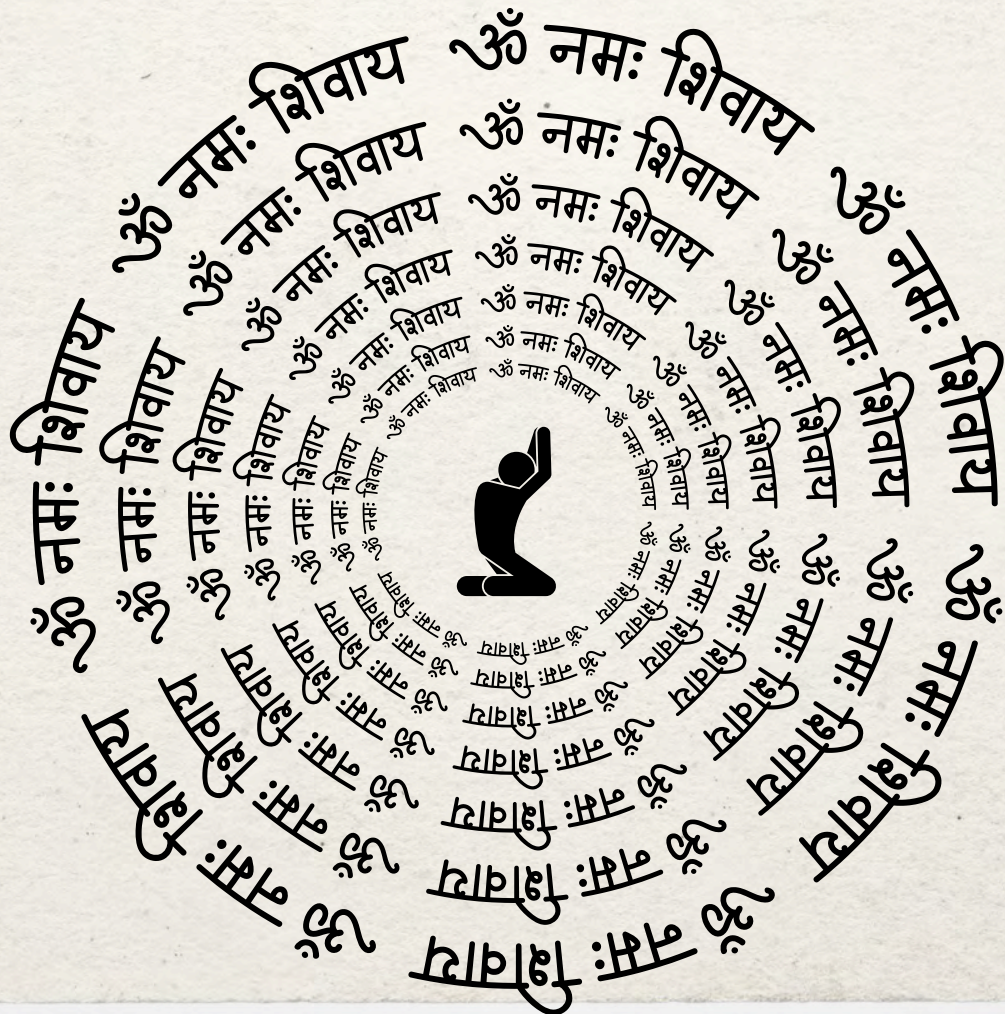
Who manifests taking a form though in essence He is pervading everywhere; and His form embodies the highest knowledge of Brahman present in the core of the Vedas.

Who remains absorbed in His own Self which is beyond the three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas), which is beyond any vikalpas (change), and which is free from any movement (due to desires etc),

Who abides in the sky of the Self; I worship that Īśāna.

He looked huge, marvelous as though He was touching the sky. He ruled everything. It reminded me of how we tell children: Don't tell God how big your problems are, tell your problems how big your God is! He is definitely the ruler, sustainer, preserver, controller of this universe. Who are we to say anything? I just couldn't stop looking at how beautiful He was. In my heart of hearts, I was so glad that I made Him mine. I felt that He was looking straight at me. As we went down the steps, we could even see Him more clearly. This reminded me that as we go down, climb down in humility, it becomes easier to see God. Who are we compared to Him? Everything is His glory alone.

The fact that we can see is because He was given us eyes. The fact that we can hear, smell, taste, touch, is because He has given us this capacity. The fact that we are inspired to do something - that also comes from Him. The inspiration, the thought, the words, the actions - everything comes from Him alone. We are just literally a tool, an instrument and when we offer ourselves unto His hands, these instruments make beautiful music for the world - not of their own accord. It is because He plays them. The only effort that we can make as human beings is an effort to rid ourselves of this ego - this suicide is the effort that must be made. After that, everything just flows effortlessly. There's no more difference between human or God. God alone is. The smaller we get, the bigger He gets until we disappear into Him, leaving no trace at all.



Guhyeshwari Temple

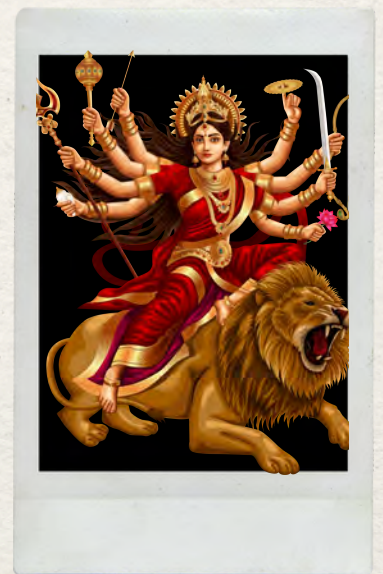
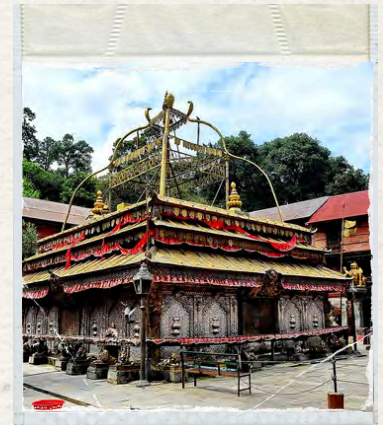
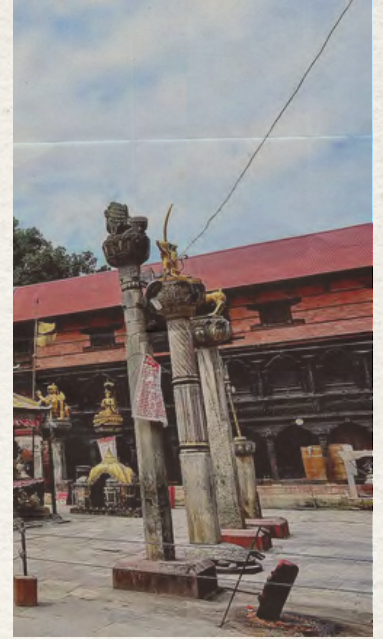
We then decided to visit Guhyeshwari temple, of the Śaktipīṭhas. When Bhagavān Śiva and Sati were insulted by Dakṣa (her father in law), she couldn't take it and she immolated herself in fire. Śiva was angry and grief stricken. He picked up her corpse and wandered around the earth and performed his dance of destruction. The devatas went to Bhagavān Viṣṇu to stop this so Bhagavān Viṣṇu sent his sudarśan chakra and cut off her body parts in 51 pieces. The numbers may vary based on different Purāṇas. These pieces fell all over the earth and are known as Śaktipīṭhas. They are sacred shrines of Goddess Durgā worshipped as Ādiśakti. They are an immense source of strength.

Guhyeshwari is the part where Sati's rectum is believed to have fallen. As we went into the temple, there was no one else there but us. My heart began to sing this bhajan to Mā.

Jagadodhāriṇī Mātā Durgā Jagadodhāriṇī Mā
Jāgo Jāgo Mā Jāgo Jāgo Mā Jāgo Jāgo Mā Jananī
Hey Gaurī Devī Raṇa Chaṇḍī Devī
Hey Śiva Ramaṇī Jāgo Mā
Jāgo Jagadodhāriṇī Mā

Oh Universal Mother Durgā! Awaken us from the slumber of ignorance. You are Mother Gaurī and the valiant Chaṇḍī Devī. Awaken us to the inherent Ātmic reality, the charmer of Lord Śiva.

We are walking from temple to temple looking for You and yet you are already inside of us! I suppose the beauty of these temples is for us to keep turning within, keep turning with until we are so completely turned within, that we just no longer go out. Rather, there is no within, there is no without. There is only You oh Mā! I pray that we realize this and abide in this soon. Wake us up and keep us ever awakened!





Budhanilkantha Temple or Jal Narayana Temple

After that, we visited the Budhanilakantha or Jal Narayana Temple. The name of this temple comes from two Sanskrit words. 'Budha' means ancient, and 'nilakanṭha' means blue throat. Thus, the name 'Budhanilkantha' means 'Ancient Blue Throat'. It is a form of reclining Bhagavān Viṣṇu on a serpent with a serpent on his neck which symbolizes Bhagavān Śiva. The Deity is over thousands of years old. Lord Viṣṇu is about 5m (17 ft) long and is lying in a 13m (43 ft) long tank, as if floating, with His legs crossed. His four hands hold the four symbols of Viṣṇu: the chakra (disc), club, and conch-shell and lotus flower. The deity is carved from a single block of black basalt stone.

The story goes that once farmers were digging in an area and as they were digging, blood came out from the ground and they slowly uncovered this form of Bhagavān and the waterbody around it so the king decided to build this temple.

When Bhagavān Śiva drank the poison from the churning of the milky ocean, it is believed that he quenched his burning throat with the waters of Lake Gosaikunda. The waters surrounding this statue of Bhagavān is believed to be from Lake Gosaikunda.

The beauty of this temple is that you can see the reflection of Bhagavān's face in the water (even though he is facing up!) This is actually scientifically impossible but clearly seen when you visit the temple. This is Bhagavān's glory!

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/04/2024*

Day 13
Janakpur, Nepal

Janakpur

On this day, we had the wonderful fortune of going to Janakpur, the birthplace of Sītā Devī. The town is a short flight away from Kathmandu. As we landed, I was overfilled with joy to be able to set foot on the great land of Sītā Mā. This feeling was indescribable. I couldn't believe I was walking where she lived, where she grew, where she loved. I thanked God for this beautiful land of Bharat where every place is holy because so many saints, sages, Gods and Goddesses have blessed this land. They have reconstructed a palace in the very place where Sītā Devī was born. They also have a museum which highlights the different aspects of her life. We made it just in time for the morning āratī that resounded with Divine chants. We also visited the maṇḍapa where they relived the wedding of Śrī Rāma and Sītā Devī. And finally, we visited Danuṣ Talāb where Bhagavān Rāma broke the Śiva Danuṣ.

I prayed to Sītā Devī for strength. Another small boil appeared on my left knee. Mahādeva's tests weren't ending. So I prayed to Her - the epitome of strength.

Keeping Sītā Devī in my heart, I returned and called the doctor in Uttarkashi who told me to take antibiotics (which I avoided) as I've never been fond of taking them due to their side effects. Luckily, we had a retired doctor and some retired pharmacists who also advised me what to do. I started taking antibiotics and dressing and cleaning the wound regularly. Again for some reason, the eye started swelling and then finally it calmed down.





Mā Sītā

The Great Woman who emerged from Earth to bless this
land with peace and purity

Mā Lakṣmī Herself, the one full of virtues of Divinity

The joy of King Janaka and Queen Sunayanā; the one
who played with Lord Śiva's bow

The Great Woman who bloomed like a flower
and made everyone around her grow and glow

The one who captured the heart of God Himself and
wedded Him hand in hand

The one who of her own choice decided to go to the
forest and leave the royal land

She left comforts to be beside the Lord of Her heart
She left worries, concerns & draped herself in tree bark

Though the Rishis themselves felt that she on her own
right could rule and be Queen

She chose a future which was full of uncertainty -
unheard and unseen

While it is true that for a moment she was drawn to the
golden deer, this was just part of Her play

This is the Divine Goddess teaching us what happens
when we go astray



When Rāvaṇa took her, she never gave in to his
constant pleading and supplication.

Unafraid, she stuck to her Lord and stood up
to all of Rāvaṇas interrogations

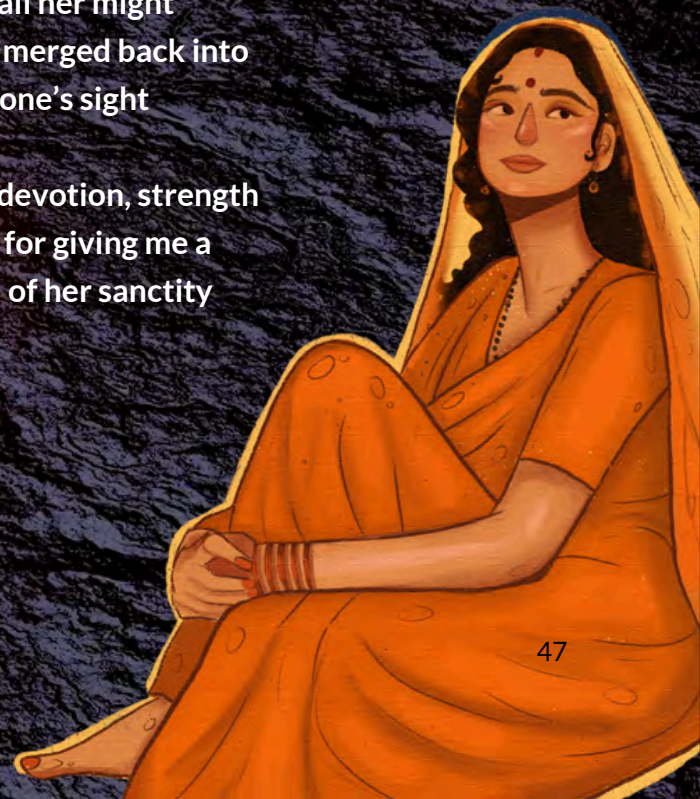
She didn't even deem it worth looking into Rāvaṇa's
eye to speak, To her Rāvaṇa was a glow worm while
her Lord was the sun at its peak

When the messenger Hanumān ji came to her, she
finally found a ray of hope. While he burned the
whole Lanka, It was her austerity that kept his tail
cold. And when she walked through fire, not a single
bit of heat could scathe her skin. She gleamed with
purity; even the Gods declared her win

And then she returned to Ayodhya and took her
place as Queen of the royal land. Yet some of those
around her, didn't let her stay nor stand

She was sent to live in the forest, yet once again and
raised her two children with all her might
And when she felt it was time, she merged back into
earth and away from everyone's sight

She came to teach us the power of devotion, strength
and purity. I am grateful to God for giving me a
chance to set foot on to the land of her sanctity



To: *Myself* ♥

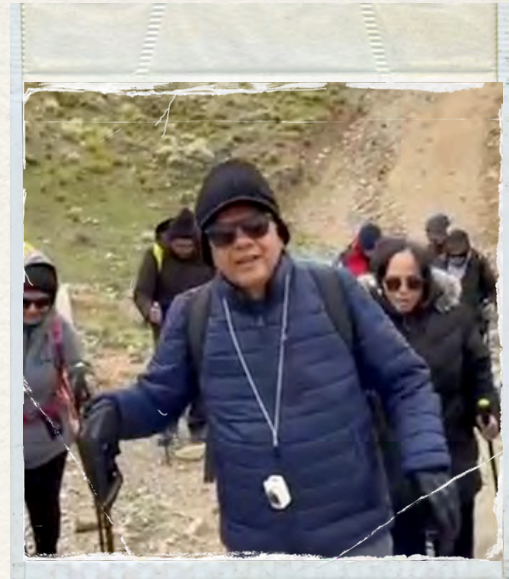
DATE: *09/5-6/2024*

Day 14-15
Kerung, Tibet - 2800m - 9186 feet
and then to Saga

I felt that now all the obstacles have been cleared health wise. There may be one or two on the hike but not too big. Now, Mahādeva has to take care from here on and it's His dharma to move me. I will just rest myself at His feet where I belong.

We started early in the morning and headed to the airport to take a helicopter to the Nepal border. There was a long delay because helicopters are very sensitive to weather conditions and they have to be just right for take off. We then went through Chinese immigration and arrived at Kerung, Tibet. The next day we drove for about 6 hours to Saga.

It's very inspiring to see how the group of elderly were so eager to go to Kailash. They were even doing walks to go around and acclimatize themselves to the increasing altitudes. Even 84 year old dada is so enthusiastic. It felt so beautiful to be in the midst of mountains.



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/7/2024*

Day 16

Saga 4450m -14,599 feet



We started the morning with prāṇāyāma and yoga. We have been doing these exercises whenever we can to open up our lungs and to help acclimatise to the higher altitudes. We concluded the morning with Gaṇapati Atharvaśīrṣa in honor of Gaṇeśa Caturthī.

We were accompanied by really great people. One is Dawa ji who has been to Kailash about 80 times. Since early 2000, he goes between 3-7 times every year so he is very much aware of what is required. He also has a great kitchen team so all of our meals breakfast, lunch and dinner was cooked and served by them fresh and hot. The other one is Abhishek, the son-in-law of Dipak ji, the main organizer of our trip. And of course, everyone is so lovely and warm. How amazing it is that everyone wants to see Kailash! But, before that, they took us on a test hike to see how we would do. With Bhagavān's grace, I was able to make it up to the mountain and back. It is Gaṇeśa Caturthī after all and I know His blessings are upon us. I can feel it. During the evening, we reflected on the beautiful symbolism of Gaṇeśa, a true leader.

Gaṇapati Bappa Moryā!

Victory to Bhagavān Gaṇeśa, the controller of obstacles and the ideal leader who dwells in our hearts!

Trunk - flexibility and adaptability. Just as the trunk can bring down a large oak tree and at the same time, lift a needle from the haystack. A great leader should be able to deal with all kinds of people: young, old, experienced, new etc.

Big head - a large vision. Before, with his normal head, he couldn't recognize Divinity (Lord Śiva). Hence, Bhagavān gave him a new head so that now, He didn't just have sight but insight and he could see divinity everywhere through and through.

Big ears, small mouth - He listens twice as much as he speaks. And when he speaks, it's really valuable and important.

Single Tusk - He has gone beyond the realm of duality: heat and cold (physical level), joy and sorrow (mental level), honor and dishonor (intellectual level).

Rope - He is constantly pulling us to attach to Bhagavān, Guru and Śāstra. Attach to them because they can help us detach from the world.

Rides on the mouse - He has control over desires and only pursues that which is for loka sangraha or that which is for the benefit of the world.

Belly - He has the ability to digest everything. His wisdom is not just heard but digested.

One leg up and one down - His mind has surrendered to the intellect.

Modaka - His ultimate blessing is absolute bliss or mokṣa.

Hand of blessings - When we attach to the higher and detach from the lower, Bhagavān blesses us. He takes care of our yoga and kṣema and paves the way for Self-realization.

Four arms:
Axe - He has cut off attachments. For us, this doesn't mean not being with the person. It means not depending on that person for our source of joy.

Eyes - intense focus. He is focused on whatever has to be done.

To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/8/2024*

Day 17
Manasarovar 4600m - 15,091 feet

Manasarovar

We drove for about 8 hours and finally reached the beautiful Manasarovar. We were fortunate that it was such a beautiful day outside. The water was dark blue, turquoise and then light blue. We did a whole parikrama of the lake while riding on the bus just chanting the name of Bhagavān - Om Namah Śivāya. How blessed were we to see this lake that was created by Brahmā ji for the Devatās to dance and bathe in! According to the Purāṇas, this is the lake where Lord Naṭarāja does his Ānanda Tāṇḍava dance.

That evening we met the Paṇḍit ji who told us the story of Kailash. Parvatī jī wanted a golden city and hence, Bhagavān Śiva made her a palace in Lanka. But they needed someone to do the gṛha praveśa so they asked Rāvaṇa since he was a brāhmaṇa. He did the pūjā so well. Bhagavān Śiva was pleased and asked him what he wanted for dakṣiṇā and Rāvaṇa said he wanted Lanka! So Bhagavān gave it to him.

Then Bhagavān Śiva and Parvatī Devī went back to Kailash and Rāvaṇa being the greedy person that he is, tried to lift Kailash so his thumb got hurt and it bled. Quickly, he realized his mistake and began to sing a stotram to Bhagavān called the Śiva Tāṇḍava Stotram. When Bhagavān was pleased, once again, he asked Rāvaṇa what we wanted. Rāvaṇa wanted a lake where the rākṣasas could also bathe and then Bhagavān said that the blood that is flowing out from his thumb will become the lake known as Rakshastal. This literally means 'lake of the rākṣasa' and is a saltwater lake in the west of Maṅsarovar. However, there are no plants or wildlife around it and no one goes to bathe there.



We enjoyed staying at a beautiful guesthouse right by the Manasarovar and as the clouds slowly vanished, we had the very first darśan of Kailash! How fortunate. I couldn't believe my eyes! The sliver of snow on the beautiful mountain on which Bhagavān Himself resides. How fortunate are these eyes to behold this sight.

Everyone was getting ready for the evening and the second wound was now stinging. Mahādeva tests me yet again. I told our guides and they literally made me lie down and squeezed out the boil. It was quite a painful process but all that came was Om Namah Śivāya. Thank God it's all over. After that, we concluded the evening with Om chanting and prāṇāyama followed by a fresh, hot meal.

Amita ji had told us about sitting in front of the Manasarovar lake particularly between 2-4am. It was already midnight by the time we got to bed and I was thinking if I should wake up or not. We thought maybe 3am but Bhagavān works wonders. At exactly 2am, He woke me up. I had to go for nature's call and we had to bundle up and go outside the room since there were only shared bathrooms outdoors. We took a blanket and went to sit by Manasarovar. What a beautiful sight! At first, I closed my eyes and kept thinking about the the Nirvāṇa Ṣaṭkam.



As much as this was all so beautiful, I knew our real nature was Śiva. We are coming to see Bhagavān but He is really inside of us. He is the essence of us. Yet, this silly devotee enjoys this folly of ups and downs. As I opened my eyes, we saw such delightful stars glistening in front of us. Their reflection appeared in the water. They appeared and disappeared, moved from one place to the other as though they were dancing. Bhagavān was dancing...dancing through the stars. The whole sky was filled with stars like I've never seen...Śivoham Śivoham. I closed my eyes again and brought the Knowledge back to my heart.

manobuddhyahañkāra cittāni nāhaṃ
na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre .
na ca vyoma bhūmirna tejo na vāyuḥ
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham || 1 ||

I am not the mind nor intelligence or ego,
I am not the organs of hearing (ears), nor that of tasting (tongue),
smelling (nose) or seeing (eyes),
I am not space, nor the earth, neither the fire nor the air,
I am Shiva, the supreme auspiciousness of the *nature of consciousness-bliss*.
I am (Shiva) auspiciousness.

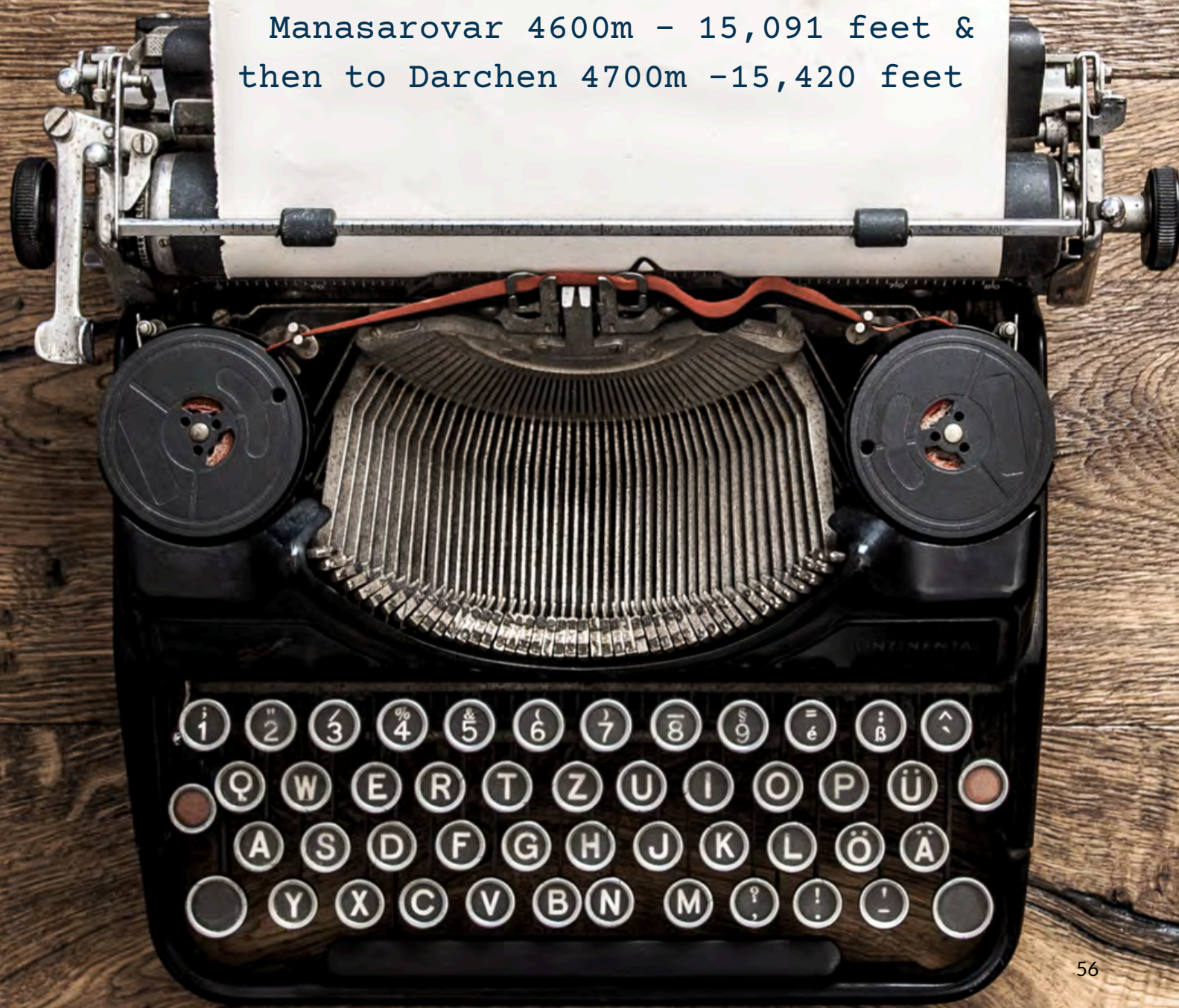


To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/9/2024*

Day 18

Manasarovar 4600m - 15,091 feet &
then to Darchen 4700m -15,420 feet



The next day, we were woken up at 6am. We washed our face and went for a rudra abhiṣekam and maha mrtyuñjaya mantra havan. What a treat. We sat there and prayed for everyone's well-being. This journey wasn't an easy one - high altitudes, cold temperatures, constantly moving from place to place. It required a lot of physical and mental strength. We completed the havan and I went to the Manasarovar lake to offer arghyam (water offering) to Sūrya and thanked him for always being there and providing us with warmth. After breakfast, I took the last dose of antibiotics. Thank God! The sun was glistening at Mansarovar. We walked by the lake and sang Śiva stotrams. Tomorrow was the big day - the start of our parikrama. We set out for Darchen and spent the night there. I was hoping for a peaceful, sound, sleep so that I could be ready for the next day. However, Mahādeva tests yet again. I got diarrhea that night. I must've woken up at least 3x to go to the bathroom. I pulled myself together and tried to sleep. Mahādeva has to get me through this. I have to walk tomorrow morning. He will make it happen.



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/10/2024*

Day 19
Dirapuk 5000m - 16,404 feet

I cannot believe that I am actually here. We started at Yama Dvara - the door of Death! We circled him 3x and sought his blessings and after that, there was no looking back. We were each assigned a porter to carry our backpacks. My porter's name was Gobu. We started to walk. It was going to be about 7-8 hours. I walked slowly...chanting the name of Bhagavān. Gobu was mostly ahead of me and at one point during the hike, I couldn't find him! He had all my supplies - water, food, raincoat and now I was completely on my own. I was tired and hungry after walking for some time but I thought to myself that I shouldn't think about food. I should think about Bhagavān...keep chanting His name...just keep going and the hunger will subside. After a few moments, one Tibetan man called out to me and he gave me some sugary treats! Just what I needed - yogakśemam vahāmyaham. It was Bhagavān who was always going to be beside me no matter what. It is Bhagavān who will come in any form to take care of His devotee. I felt His love and care.

Gobu found me after some time. It turns out that he stopped at a tea house for food. He said 'pani' and offered me water and I drank it. We walked together...and after some time, we had a darśana of Kailash!!! I bowed my head to the ground and was in awe. I took 8 steps and then put my hands together on my forehead and heart....Oh Namah Śivāya. Salutations to the one who is beyond this 8-fold prakṛti. I took 8 steps and then put my hands together in my forehead and heart...Taking my own time to do this parikrama, walking slowly and just feeling His presence the entire way. Then Kailash was once again covered by clouds. Bhagavān was playing hide and seek! I walked and once again, Kailash became visible and I started my 8 steps with my hands on my head and heart. We reached the place where we were staying and I just sat outside on a rock...right in front of Kailash. I couldn't believe I was here. I closed my eyes and just contemplated on Bhagavān.

Later that evening, the guides had asked us if we wanted to go to the second leg of the parikrama tomorrow or the day after. The weather was going to be slightly worse the day after but we chose to just stay in Diraphuk for a day to bask in Mt. Kailash.



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/11/2024*

Day 20
Dirapuk 5000m - 16,404 feet



We spent the entire day just right in front of Mt. Kailash. We could see Kailash from our window! We spent some time standing outside in front of the mountain calling out to Bhagavān with different stotrams (divine hymns). We started gazing at the mountain and found different forms which appeared - Gaṇapati, Hanumān, Om. We wanted to do the charaṇa sparśa where we actually go touch Mt. Kailash but the authorities just sent a group back from there so we weren't allowed to go. We sat down and did our prāṇāyama, yoga and meditation. As we concluded the meditation, I chanted this portion of Śiva mānasa pūja:

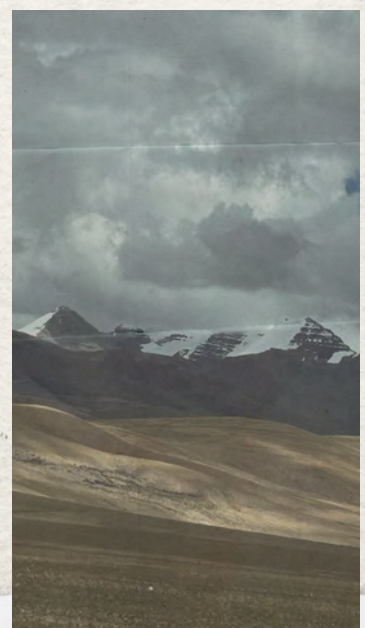
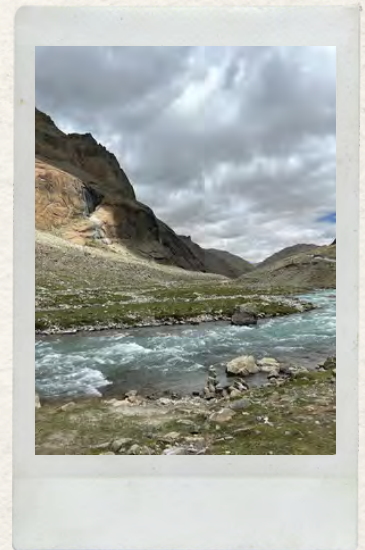
ātmā tvam girijā matiḥ sahaचारāḥ prāṇāḥ śarīram ḡḡham
pūjā tē viṣayōpabhōga-rachana nidrā samādhistithiḥ |
sañchārah padayōḥ pradakṣiṇavidhiḥ stōtrāṇi sarvā girō
yadyatkarma karōmi tattadakhilam śambhō tavārādhanaḥ || 4 ||

You are my Self, my intellect is Your consort, Girijā, my vital airs are Your companions, My body is Your abode, my enjoyment of objects is Your worship, my sleep is samādhī, all my moving around is Your pradakṣiṇa (circumambulation) and all my words are Your praises. O Śambhu! Whatever actions I do is Your worship alone.



The real caraṇa sparśa is not when we touch the feet of Bhagavān but when we offer our life to Him. When we offer everything that we see, hear, smell, taste, touch towards Him, that is the real caraṇa sparśa. I couldn't think of anyone else I would have given my life to. I was glad that it belonged to Him.

As the guides were discussing the rest of the parikrama, they decided that we would all take horses to go up to the Dolma La pass. I had been saying that I wanted to walk up even if it was going to be hard. I wanted to offer this to Bhagavān. But they said no, because if I walked, I would slow everyone down. When we're in a group setting, the only thing we can do is surrender...Not only that, but they decided that after we come down, we would take a car back to Darchen. We would no longer walk the last leg of the parikrama! I couldn't sleep that night. I wanted to complete the parikrama walking - on foot. I was trying to figure out how to do this...how to fulfill this sankalpa. What can I do?



To: *Myself* ♥

DATE: *09/12/2024*

Day 21

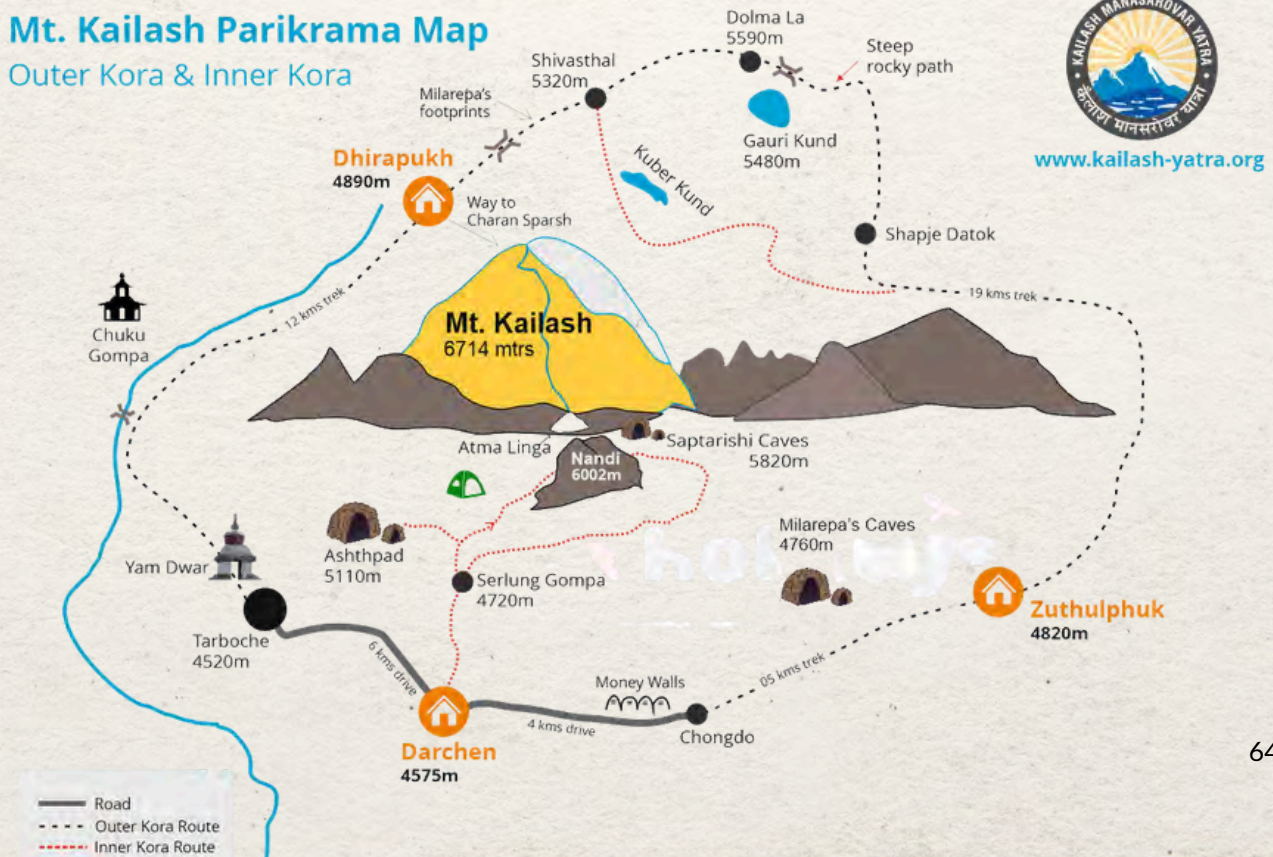
Dolma La Pass 5650m - 18,536 feet



We woke up in the morning and the weather was terrible. It couldn't have been worse. Our guide was pretty mad. He said we should have gone yesterday! We didn't know that the weather would turn out like this. It had said snow in the morning for an hour and then one hour in the evening but it was constantly snowing. The temperature was below freezing. The roads were slippery, full of snow, sleet, ice...The guide got us on our horses and we went. It was so cold and I hadn't seen anything like this before. We just kept going higher and higher up. I just kept chanting Bhagavān's name. Once we were close to the highest point of 18,000 feet, we got off the horses and now we would walk our way down. It was getting harder to breathe.

The guide said that the conditions are bad. People can fall 100 times. The downhill was steep, slippery, cold and rough. I had my walking sticks with me and the same porter from yesterday, Gobu was beside me carrying my backpack. I tried to climb a few steps down and it was too slippery. Gobu looked at me. I looked at him thinking in my head that if the path was going to be like this the whole way, I don't know how I'm going to last. He took my hand. We held hands on the inside and on the outside, we held one walking stick each. He was sakṣāt Bhagavān. He just took me and we climbed down. When I was about to fall, he held me and when he was about to fall, I held him. We both fell a few times and many others did too. It was really slippery and steep. In my mind, I was thinking about the others. I hoped that everyone would make it through this. This part wasn't easy at all. I think this was the hardest. I paused a few times while going down just to catch my breath. And when I was about to fall once again, someone else caught me and guided me. We finally made it to the tea stall.

Mt. Kailash Parikrama Map Outer Kora & Inner Kora





After I sat down, I was so grateful to see everyone else make it! Bhagavān kept us safe. Our guide was also now calm and peaceful. We just had to walk a little bit more to get to the car.

After this climb down, I still had it in me. I still wanted to walk but the guide said no, we have to stay together. He said that we will go the same route as the parikrama in the car. He said to me, "You have done it on foot, with a horse and by car."




I thanked Bhagavān for fulfilling the saṅkalpa of the parikrama though it was not exactly how I intended, who am I to argue with Lord of the Universe? He just gave me His darśana! In my heart, I thanked all of the people who made this possible. So many people had come together to help me in this journey...all of them forms of Bhagavān Himself!

We went back to Darchen, warmed ourselves under the blankets of our beds, ate a hearty meal and bowed our heads in reverence to the Almighty who made this mighty possible and brought all of us back safely.



After our beloved darśana, we made our way back to Kathmandu and the first place that we wanted to see was our Lord Pashupatinath. We wanted to offer Him our gratitude for taking us on this wild parikrama, going around in circles...when actually He is the very stillness amidst each movement. We went to the temple early, closing our eyes and singing our Śiva stotrams by the temple doors while waiting in line. Many in the crowd joined us as we sang ...Om Namah Śivāya...Om Namah Śivāya...Hara Hara Bole Namah Śivāya...

We then visited various temples in Darbar square to offer our deepest gratitude.




I don't know how He did it but he brought me to Him,
closer to Him, yet again. My heart bows in devotion to
the Lord of my heart, the breath of my life...thank You for
fulfilling this wish...and yet my heart stops...

You're so beautiful...

I open my eyes only to see You and You're so beautiful
I close my eyes only to see You again and You're so
beautiful
I can't explain what it is but I am so drawn to You
You draw me closer and closer and when we meet,
We become one

My mind just wants to bask in Your name
My mind just wants to see Your form
My mind just wants to sing Your tunes
My mind just wants to be with You
How did God make God so beautiful?
I can't even go beyond Your face
But I know that You are formless beyond space
You're so beautiful, too beautiful
Can't take my eyes off You
Can't take my breath of Your rhythm

You're so beautiful, too beautiful
I love everything about You
I feel like You made You just for me
There couldn't have been a more perfect fit
I found the love of my life, the beat of my heart
the breath of my breath, the eye of my eye
And I have nowhere else to go
Let me rest in You
Let me go beyond You
Let me find You in Me
and me in you
Let us become One



And in that oneness, I will still say
You're so beautiful, too beautiful
We are one and yet, let duality play
Does it matter?
I know the inner secret - there's no me, no You
But when names and forms express, You're so beautiful,
too beautiful
Even if it isn't true

And thus, this seeker once again went around in circles
to settle in the stillness within. Some call it craziness.
Others call it madness.

I call it love.

Final Message by Swami Tapovan Maharaj

"Śiva, Śiva! Śiva, Śiva! Thus, chant the name of the Lord day and night without interruption... To do great japa, to take sannyāsa, to contemplate on Brahman and to know Brahman are all the results of the grace of the Lord attained by the worship of the Lord. Knowing it as the only sādhanā to attain fulfillment of all desires, practice it with great śraddha (faith) constantly! And Brahmajñāna shall culminate in Brahmabhāva - surely and steadily."

-Swami Tapovan Maharaj, Kailas Yatra, 190.