



KAILASH

IN QUEST OF THE SELF

Swami Vedananda

Chapter 3

The Journey Onward

It was beyond my means to pay the huge amount of money required by the travel agencies that organize Kailash Yatras (pilgrimage). It was only because my spiritual Guru in Hyderabad, Sri Medhanandapuri Swamiji, had told me he had needed little money for his trips to Kailash-Manasarovar that I felt I could make the trip on my own. I had hoped the previous year, to accompany Sri Swamiji, but circumstances had finally not permitted it. This year, it was a strong inner urge that prompted me to make the trip.

I was happy when Sri Medhanandapuri Swamiji sent word to me to meet him in Rishikesh. Apparently a celibate, spiritual aspirant wanted to accompany me to Kailash. But, by the time I reached Rishikesh, he had already left. I stayed on for three days in the Kailash Ashram. Sri Swamiji gave me a letter of recommendation for Sri Harishankaragiri Nagababa who lives in Nepalganj, Nepal. He told me that this Nagababa would take care of my travel arrangements. It was only four days before Gurupoornima, so Sri Swamiji invited me to remain to participate in the festival. I was anxious to proceed without any further delay. Sri Swamiji tried to persuade me to wait. He cautioned, "Don't you think it is better to join some more people next year? It is quite risky going all alone the first time. Just think about it."

I felt no need to hesitate, no need to wait. An inner force was growing stronger and I did not want to listen to reason or make excuses to postpone the inevitable. "It is O.K. Swamiji. Your blessings are always with me. Sri Sainath will somehow guide me in some form or other. I must start now." And just like that I took leave of Sri Swamiji and started off.

Unfortunately, day one of my journey proved to start off a bit rough. I developed a bad case of diarrhea. Fortunately, I did have medicines for such common ailments. I boarded a passenger train at Rishikesh and reached Haridwar in the afternoon. I booked a berth on the Gonda Express leaving at 5:30 p.m. There was a huge crowd on the platform and every one was running here and there. I was given a berth in the S-5 coach. I was barely able to handle my heavy baggage. One of the railway porters approached me and wanted to know which coach I would travel on. Swamiji, he said, pay me just twenty rupees and I will put your luggage in the coach for you.” I was not willing to pay more than ten rupees. He muttered something in disgust, but picked up my luggage anyway. I pushed forward toward S-5 coach with some difficulty. People were rushing and jostling me on all sides. When I looked back for the porter, he was no where in sight. I was shocked. The physical weakness caused by my loose motions added to my distress. I felt totally drained of energy. All the money I had, 16000 rupees and all the things essential for the journey were in that duffel bag. I was left with nothing, but a stick in hand and 200 rupees in my pocket. I felt dejected and in desperation judged and blamed myself for this catastrophe. My very first step toward the Himalayas had been faulty. How could I be so naïve? I should have followed the porter instead of going ahead of him. My mind went blank. I was numb.

The train started to move. Suddenly I heard someone shouting! “Where did you go Swamiji? I was waiting at coach no.5. Now there is no time. Get into any coach.” It was the porter carrying my bag. I was overwhelmed by feelings of relief and joy. The porter physically shoved me into the nearest coach with my bag. I pulled out some money from my pocket. It was a 50- rupee note and I thrust it into his hand. He said he didn’t

have the change. I could scarcely mutter the words, “keep it.” I didn’t require any other proof of Sainath’s Grace.

It was not until the next station that I got into the S-5 coach and settled in my berth. Someone wearing a safari suit was sleeping in the opposite berth. After an hour, he awoke and started talking to me. He had some doubts on spiritual matters and the discussion went on until after midnight. He told me about his personal life and shared some problems he was facing. I gave some suitable suggestions. He was happy and satisfied. He then did pranam (obeisance) and offered me a 100- rupee note, as dakshina (the practice of giving a monetary donation in return for spiritual support) in spite of my protests. My knowledge of Hindi is very limited and I was quite surprised that the few words I have at my command were enough for him to understand. It must have been due to Sainath’s Grace.

The train reached Gonda station in the early hours of the morning, about 5:30 a.m. I had to change trains to reach the Indo-Nepal border. I boarded the Meter gauge train, which arrived in Rupatia at 2 p.m. I had crossed over into Nepal, entering the Nepalgunj area. My baggage and personal belongings were checked thoroughly at the border by the Nepalese police. I was questioned about where I was going and how I planned to get there. Here both Indian currency and Nepalese currency are valid legal tender. I could get sixteen Nepalese rupees for ten Indian rupees. I took a tonga (a horse drawn cart) to explore the village.

I arrived at the Bhageswari temple, just next to the Sri Hanuman temple. It was here that I was to meet Sri Harishankaragiri Nagababa. There was no one in the temple except a sadhu with a long beard sleeping on the floor. I assumed that he was the Nagababa I was supposed to meet. With some

hesitation, I woke him up. He awoke staring at me, his large eyes wide open. He said "I knew you were coming." He then questioned me about my travel plans and other details. I showed him the letter Sri Medhanandapuri Swamiji had given me. He asked me to sit down, while he read the letter. He went away for a while and when he came back he said, "Baba tells me that the situation is very bad in Nepal these days. Maoist rebels are causing a lot of trouble. They are even robbing and killing Swamijis. So Baba advises that you go back. The weather is bad and all air flights are being cancelled. It would be extremely difficult to make the trip to Kailash-Manasarovar." I understood only then that this baba was not Sri Harishankaragiri Nagababa. His advice was indifferent and very discouraging. I was disappointed and confused.

I thought to myself how I had been so certain the Nagababa would give me hope and encouragement. The Nagababa was somewhere inside the temple and began to shout in Hindi, "How can I help it if everyone descends over here? It is not a joke to make a Kailash-Manasarovar yatra. Let him go back the way he came. He can at least remain alive!" I was deeply hurt. Here I was in a totally foreign country and had not eaten a square meal in the past two days. Frustration intensified my physical weakness and my sorrow. I was at a loss !

This is a rare, spiritual adventure story by one dedicated monk who walked on foot over 300 miles through the mountains of India, Nepal and Tibet to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, the abode of the gods on earth.

Swami Vedananda gives us a vivid and honest portrayal of the physical, psychological and spiritual challenges which he had to overcome on this very difficult pilgrimage. He shares with us the insights that guided and prodded him on, and the extraordinary visions, experiences and profound teachings given to him by remarkable yogis, saints and gods, including a 700 hundred year old Siddha.

Swamiji grants us access to his meditations.

Numerous photographs and a map show us his way.

This book can be read on several levels. It is full of blessings.



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