

Tryst with the Almighty- Part-2

(Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra) by Aparna Sharma



It was time to move from the enchanting Mansarovar Lake towards the penultimate yatra- **“Parikrama of Mount Kailash”**.

Next morning, we left from Mansarovar towards Darchen which was our base camp for the Parikrama. Beautiful mountaineous terrain inching towards the magnificent Mount Kailash.

We went straight to “Yama Dwaar” since it was agreed the previous evening that not all could go for the Parikrama owing to ill health, senior citizens(Above 60 yrs) or unsure if they could deal with all the challenges enroute. Most people did a parikrama in the form of “figure of 8” through the Yama dwaar. It is believed among the Buddhists that this parikrama is equivalent to that of parikrama around Mount Kailash as not everyone can make it for one reason or another.

So, finally it was only 50% of the group that was eligible to proceed & the much awaited yatra began. Most people had hired ponies and a porter. I along with 3 others decided to undertake this journey on foot & had a porter each besides a mountain walking stick. In hindsight, it was a wise decision since 4 people fell off the horse & had to return during the first lap of the Yatra.

The entire Parikrama is for 3 days starting from the base at Darchen through Yama Dwaar, 1st night halt at Derapuk (see picture above), 2nd day crossing Dolma Pass & night halt at Zuthulpuk & the 3rd day completing the parikrama & returning back to the base camp at Darchen.

The first day trek is 12 kms...I started with the faith & belief that the Lord was incharge & will see me through one of the most challenging spiritual yatras in this world. My mind was blank....all I did was to constantly chant "Om Namah Shivay" all through the way. It was quite a trek....however, all the more difficult since we encountered bad weather around 4 kms from the starting point.

First, it was the hailstorm...hailstones—the size I have never seen or heard before. The constant downpour of hailstones...injured me especially on the head & also the upper body since they were falling with force. My raincoat was of no use to protect me. There was no shelter to hide under either. I had the huge Mount on one side & a river stream on the other....beautiful yet very dangerous.

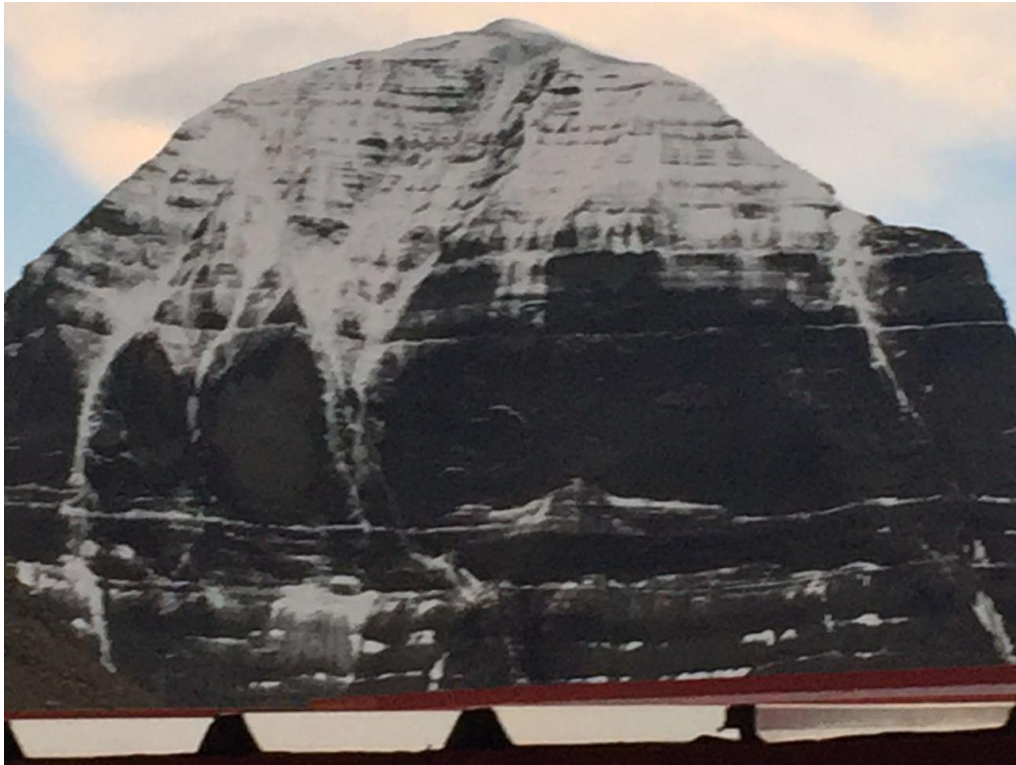
Once the intensity of the hailstorm reduced after about 45 minutes, it started to rain heavily. All of us got fully drenched. For me, my inner thermal wear too was fully wet including shoes & socks. I was wearing 3 layers of socks inside the shoes. To top it all, my bag that the porter was carrying which had extra clothes including woollens also got fully wet. It was really hard to continue walking in the heavy rain & stormy winds.

The entire group got dispersed during this & quite a few people started to have severe breathing problems. We were already at 15,000 feet above sea level. I was injured, tired, wet & breathless too.

As if the rains were not enough that, once it stopped...soonafter, it started to snow. The temperature dropped to -7.0 deg celcius- I was cold & shivering. It took about 9 hours to reach the camp at Derapuk- caught a chill & was turning blue. It was late evening by the time I reached the camp....I could see that quite a few fellow passengers were already serious. Their oxygen levels had dropped & were being given first aid, oxygen etc.

Then, it was my turn....I passed out...I am told that my oxygen level had dropped below 40....they tied the camphor cloth bag around my nose.....I was serious, in a semi-coma stage ! I regained consciousness only early morning the next day....Lord Shiva's miracle I believe.

The moment I opened my eyes..I could see the huge Mount Kailash through my window staring at me (pic below). Its difficult to explain the feeling in words...I had surrendered. If the Lord wished to take me in his care right there, I was prepared---was fearless....tears rolling down my cheeks. I was re-born that morning...Aparna version 2.0. I had transcended the fear of death !



It had snowed all evening until early morning...so, the Sherpas were unsure if we could continue with the journey or had to go back down to the base camp. The snow was loose & it could be fatal if we tried going further in that kind of weather. So, it was decided that a few people who were serious will be airlifted or sent back in an ambulance...while others who wanted to continue, will stay at Derapuk one more night & wait for the weather to improve.

I was asked to go back due to severe injury & pulmonary oedema...however, I was determined & persisted. Finally, I had to give an undertaking to the Sherpas that if anything happened to me thereon, it would be entirely at my risk & responsibility. I rested & prayed....preparing myself mentally to go further once the weather cleared up & complete the Parikrama.

So, finally we started for the 2nd day Parikrama on the following day once the weather improved....most people from my group were sent back. This was the most difficult path- 20 kms of challenging trek. Climbing up to cross Dolma Pass...with soft snow beneath & then a sharp climb down...as if almost slipping down into the Gauri Kund....Even the horses have difficulty walking through this, so all those who had horses also had to walk. The trek is dangerous & scary. Interestingly, you do not see Mount Kailash at all on Day 2.

Exhausted & cold, we halted at Zuthulpuk at the end of the day to rest & recoup. Given my condition in the first lap & considering that I was still blue...walking & crossing the most difficult pass is an absolute proof of Divine presence & blessing.

The next day is the final lap of 12 kms trek which is fairly easy & you once again see Mount Kailash from the other side....pure, pristine, vast, immovable, infinite. Unbelievably, I spotted the Shiva's Trinetra image inside the mountain & also Sheshanag (visible in the first picture above).


As I was coming down during the final trek, I began to breathe better. I get goose bumps each time I reminisce the parikrama....I finally did it...inspite of passing out, injuries....!

I was welcomed with open arms by my fellow colleagues who had known of my conditio(Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra) by Aparna Sharman & saw me first hand....I collapsed again. Needed to rest & was given lots of fluids to get my energy back.

Finally, we started on our journey back from Darchen to Mansarovar to Taklakot. As I moved away from Mount Kailash the next day, I could feel that I left a part of my "being" there. In the worldly parlance, I had just got a new lease of life. I felt different- may be renewed. I was detached.

Whoa! What an experience-I have tried putting it into words and share it "just as it was".

In summary, am sharing the "Lessons for Life" for anyone to internalize. "OM NAMAH SHIVAAY"

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- Unwavering Determination
 - Focus, Focus, Focus
 - Listen to the Heart too
 - Conserve Energy
 - The Power of Silence
 - Help Selflessly
 - Self-Discipline
 - Introspect & Internalize
 - Magnanimity
 - Let-go
 - Keep the dream bigger than the limitations
 - Crisis creates Leaders too
 - Make failure your stepping stone to succeed
 - Practise Gratitude
 - Worship the Divinity in self
 - Plan yet ability to deal with ambiguity

Lessons for life