

# HIMALAYAN HERITAGE

For lovers of Sanatana Dharma,  
the Eternal Religion,  
kept for all the world by the  
Himalayan sages and  
great masters of India

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ISSUE 50

In our last issue we announced the forming of a unique collaboration between a number of satsang groups in our area that are promoting the high ideals of Sanatana Dharma. We named the organization the Encinitas Sanatana Dharma Alliance. Our stated aim is to organize community-supported celebration of prominent Hindu holy days throughout the year, hold spontaneous special events such as *yajñas* and kirtans, and to support visiting saints and groups who promulgate similar ideals. Our first event was the celebration of Sri Hanuman Jayanti at the Peace House / Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir in Encinitas. It was a wonderful success.

A small group of assembled devotees began at 4A.M. with *arati* conducted by Vineeta, a devotee of Baba Hari Dass and owner of the Peace House. Sundaram from Jyoti Mandir continued the program by leading *shatanamavali*, the 100 names of Sri Hanuman-ji. Then the Chalisas began, 108 of them. Although there were never more than 18 people present at any one time, approximately 35 attend throughout the day. Surya, who has organized the local Maha Shivaratri programs for many years, concluded with mantras, prayers and blessings for all. At 4P.M. everyone enjoyed *prasad and bhog* (feast). Chai was available in the morning and throughout what turned out to be a glorious day. (The photo is of our Hanuman *murti* on the altar during Jayanti. Though not the main temple image, He looks very, very happy indeed!)

Swami Chidanand Saraswati, the well-known saint from the Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, will be visiting Encinitas once again this year on July 16<sup>th</sup>. Although in the past we (Jyoti Mandir) did not endorse the visits of other saints, the existence of the Encinitas Sanatana Dharma Alliance will allow

us as a group to endorse his visit, for we feel Swami Chidanand Muniji is a genuine saint. His life was profiled in Issue #48 of **Himalayan Heritage**. His stunning photo-biography, *By God's Grace*, written by his senior disciple, Sadhvi Bhagawati, is highly recommended. [PARMARTH.ORG](http://PARMARTH.ORG)

Swami Chidanand's visit is sponsored by his disciples Bhava Ram and Laura Plumb, founders of Deep Yoga in San Diego. Bhava Ram's recently published book, *Warrior Pose*, is a well-written testimony to the power of Yoga and Ayurveda to heal and transform one's life – yet even more so to the power of the human spirit. We were guests at Bhava Ram's book release program on May 5<sup>th</sup> at the Joan Kroc Center for Peace and Justice on the campus of the University of San Diego. It was a truly inspiring event and we wish Bhava Ram all success in bringing the uplifting healing and power of Yoga to more and more divinely awakening souls. (Please see Bhava Ram's article, "Welcome Home", in **Himalayan Heritage** issue #41). Bhava Ram's other books include, *Deep Yoga: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Times*, and *The Eight Limbs of Yoga: Pathway to Liberation*. [BHAVARAM.COM](http://BHAVARAM.COM)

In addition to teaching and writing, Bhava is a wonderful songwriter and spiritual musician. His first CD, *Flowing with Shiva*, is one of our favorites. His new recording, *Songs of My Soul*, is produced by world-class musician and producer, Hans Christian (of *Rasa*). We have hosted Bhava Ram on a number of occasions at Jyoti Mandir.

On Sunday, June 9, we attended the all-day Phalaharini Kali Puja Festival at Kali Mandir in Laguna Beach. This is a much anticipated annual event that has taken the place of the larger two-day festival that Kali Mandir sponsored for many years. I don't know when I have had such a wonderful day and felt



such joy! Everything at Kali Mandir is done for Ma. That is why the devotional feeling there is so tangible. My wife, Hilary, and I get such a feeling of joy and purity whenever we visit Kali Mandir. The ashram there is truly a “Deva Loka!” Kali Mandir celebrates daily *pujas* and *aratis*, and an expanded *puja* on Amavasya (new moon night) and other special holy days. Be sure to see their website and plan a visit. [KALIMANDIR.ORG](http://KALIMANDIR.ORG)

One of the Bauls of Bengal, Lakhan Das Baul, will be singing in San Diego this Sunday. We are looking forward to availing ourselves of the opportunity to hear a genuine Baul in our area. We plan to meet with Lakhan Das prior to the concert and discuss with him the status of the Baul sects in Bengal today. If all goes well, a report will be forthcoming.

For more information about the Bauls of Bengal, be sure to read the two-part article by Usha Harding in Issues #36 and #37, as well as our own experiences with the Bauls during our last pilgrimage to India in Issues #45 and #46. (Back issues are available in PDF format).

The Bauls do not build temples. They worship the Divine

Beloved enshrined in the “temple” of every person. It is a wonderful concept, echoed in these words of our divine Gurudeva, Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, from *Journey to Self-Realization*:

In the ultimate sense, as we are all the children of God we must learn to love everyone wholeheartedly and completely and impartially. I remember when my Master asked me, “Do you love everybody equally?” I said, “Yes.” But he said, “Not yet, not yet.” Then my youngest brother came to study in my school at Ranchi, and I had that consciousness that he was mine. I realized then why my Master had said, “Not yet.” Gradually that consciousness wore off, and I realized that my brother was but a part of all humanity which I loved. That is not an insensitive, inhuman attitude. You love all alike, as God does. Then you learn to do for others as you would do for your own. One day, again, Master asked me, “Do you love the whole world?” I just said, “I love.” And he smiled and said, “Your work is finished.”

## CALL ON THE LORD

BY SWAMI RAMDAS

Call on the Lord with all the love of your heart. Concentrate all your longing in that call, and you may be sure that God will respond. Thus it was that His great devotees of the past and present entitled themselves to His infinite grace. The language of love is simply irresistible. Just as the child, by its lisp talk, charms and captures the heart of the mother, so the true devotee, by his frank and plaintive words of love, draws towards him the almighty Beloved of his heart. The language of the devotee is the expression of his pure and aspiring heart. Heart is the *Veena*, and devotion the fingers that play upon it to infuse a magic spell in the call for the Beloved. Hence the devotee employs sweet music for his appeals and prayers to God. He cries and weeps for God, extols and glorifies Him, talks and holds communion with Him – in a rhythmic language of love. He sings and dances when he has found his Beloved. This music of Divine symphony thrills his entire frame. Ecstasy, or inexpressible joy, rises in waves in his heart. Love overflows in tears through his eyes. Purity, peace and light permeate his entire being. This is the culmination of his utter devotion and self-surrender. He places his entire life, soul and body at the feet of the Beloved.



How does the devotee attain to this exalted state of perfect union with the Lord of his heart? It is clear that he adopts music as the means by which he tunes his heart with the heart of the Lord. A heart that is filled with love – selfless and radiant – alone raises a human being to the feet of the Almighty. Such a love sings like the nightingale, gives out perfume like the rose, beautifies life in all its aspects, and brings the devotee in intimate touch and eternal fellowship with the Lord.

Therefore, call on the Lord with all your heart and He is sure to respond. Make Him the sole beloved of your life, and He is sure to be yours. Pray to Him, sing of Him, dedicate yourself to Him, and He will grant you absolute peace and bliss – nay, He will reveal Himself in your heart and absorb you into His transcendental being, and thus make you realize that you are the very embodiment of His own cosmic peace and joy. He will then give you the vision of beholding Him everywhere, i.e. you will behold your own supreme Self manifested as the entire universe. Love is your way and love is your goal.



# TEACHING STORIES FROM THE SAINTS

## THE LORD'S COMPASSION

BY SWAMI SIVANANDA

Narayana Prasad's mother passed away. Contrary to expectations, Narayana Prasad was extremely happy! He ran to his worship room, fell prostrate at the feet of his Deity – Jagannatha – and prayed: “Unasked, You showered Your Grace upon me. You have removed the one tie that bound me to this earthly life. I shall now be able to devote my entire life to You and You alone, without any distractions. Lord, grant me pure devotion.”

Narayana Prasad and his mother had both been great devotees of Lord Jagannatha of Puri. Narayana Prasad now wended his way to Puri. All along the way he was singing the Names of the Lord in blissful self-forgetfulness.

In the heart of the devotee dwelt the Lord. Narayana Prasad communed with Him uninterruptedly. He did not think of going into the temple of Jagannatha of Puri. Instead, he went to the seashore and engaged himself in ceaseless repetition of His Name and meditation on His glories.

Three days passed. Narayana Prasad had not taken any food nor did he think of it. He was in a remote place; no pilgrims passed that way. He was starving, but immersed in the bliss of kirtan and meditation. Lord Jagannatha turned to his consort: “Lakshmi, what a pity! My devotee is starving on the seashore. I have neglected my duty; I have been heartless and cruel. He has been intent on the performance of his duty – remembrance of Me. But I have failed mine – the protection of the devotee. How can I face him now? I am burning with shame. You kindly go to him with delicious food and offer it to him.”

Lakshmi agreed. She took on a golden plate the richest articles of the Lord's *prasad*.

Narayana Prasad was oblivious of the world. He was immersed in the Lord's Name. Lakshmi, while approaching him, felt shy to meet him face to face. She too felt unhappy at the thought that a devotee has thus been allowed to starve by the Lord and Herself. Quietly, She placed the gold plate behind Narayana Prasad and swiftly returned to Her abode.

Narayana Prasad heard the sound of anklets; he turned his head towards the direction from which the sound came. He saw the gold plate of food but could not see anyone who could have brought it to him. He felt hungry. He thanked God for the timely shower of Grace and ate the food with great relish as His *prasad*. Three nights of sleeplessness induced him to fall into a slumber after the meal.

He awoke to find four stout Brahmins armed with batons

standing around him. “You wretched thief,” they cried, “How dare you steal the gold plate from the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lord! Come! Get up! You vilest wretch. Follow us to the Rajah's palace and receive your punishment at his hands.”

Nayarana Prasad was perplexed at first. “I have not stolen this plate,” he thought, “but why couldn't the person who brought the food on this plate take it back?” Instantly he composed himself and felt it was useless to waste his thoughts over what was happening and instead went on with his mental bhajan.

The king was greatly enraged. He ordered whipping of the culprit. The heartless servants of the king were overjoyed at this opportunity of giving vent to their power and glory. The whip fell on Narayana Prasad with ever-increasing force. The king's servants felt amazed at the sight. The devotee was laughing and singing His names. After half an hour of whipping, they could not discover any mark of the whip on his body! They gave it up as useless and drove him out of the palace.

Narayana Prasad returned to his seashore residence and was lost in the thought of the Lord. Food arrived at night, but this time the plate was mysteriously taken away after he had eaten.

The Rajah could not sleep that night. He was haunted by a nightmarish feeling that he was being thrown out of bed. Now and again he saw the image of Lord Jagannatha appear before him, and he saw blood oozing from His waist. The Rajah was perplexed. He got up, ran out and reached the temple. He asked the priest to open it at once so that he could have the *Darshan* of the Lord.

The priests and the king were speechless when they discovered a stream of blood trickling from the Lord's waist and running into the *sanctum sanctorum*. The Rajah understood. His heart burned with sorrow, remorse and wretchedness at his crime. He understood in an instant that this strange happening was due to his thrashing of the poor Bhakta that afternoon.

Accompanied by his servants, the Rajah ran to the seashore. He fell prostrate at Narayana Prasad's feet. He begged pardon for his folly and pleaded for the healing of the wound on the Lord's body which Narayana Prasad alone could do.

Narayana Prasad wept bitterly. “My Lord! O Ocean of Mercy! What a thing for You to do! Why should You endure this torture for the sake of Your poor devotee? Why could you not have prevented the Rajah's servants from whipping me instead of taking on cruel punishment on Thy own body?” He cried aloud in anguish. The blood-trickling ceased.



The Lord answered His devotee: “Narayana Prasad! Know that according to your *Prarabdha* (karma), you had to undergo this punishment. Such was your love for Me, such was your devotion to Me, that you had completely surrendered yourself to Me. It was My duty to protect you from all injury. Yet, I could not nullify your *Prarabdha Karma*. It had to be worked out. I had therefore to receive on My own body the whipping which was the preordained lot of your body. The Bhakta gets what is

preordained according to his *Prarabdha*, but he is not affected by it. He does not suffer on account of it because I throw My protecting arms around him.”

In the blazing light of the Lord, Narayana Prasad disappeared!

Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya

## INDIA'S FEMALE YOGIS

### PART 2 OF 3 – CONTINUED FROM ISSUE #49

By LINDA JOHNSEN

Women are still blessing India with the force of their enlightenment today. I spoke with modern-day *yogini* Ma Yoga Shakti about her life as a *sannyasini* and spiritual leader. Ma, now in her 80s, led a full life as a householder before taking formal vows of renunciation. She raised a family, completed a master's degree in political science, fought for women's rights in India, and established a women's college in Bihar. Today Ma Yoga Shakti is the spiritual director of ashrams in Mumbai, New Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai, as well as in New York and Florida.



#### MA YOGA SHAKTI

Ma's interest in spiritual life began early. She learned yoga the way most women in India do: through oral tradition, passed down by one generation of spiritually motivated women to the next. “I learned everything from my grandmother. She was illiterate, but I have not seen anybody as wise as she was. She used to get up at three o'clock and chant.

She was reciting the (Bhagavad) Gita, she was discussing *ayurveda*, she was always making medicines. She was the director of the whole household.”

Ma learned Sanskrit from her father and devotional singing from her grandmother. She imitated the *pujas* her grandmother faithfully performed before the family altar. “As a little girl I thought, what is this; why do I have to clean these utensils (for *puja*) every morning? But later on I understood it is your mind that has to be cleaned.”

I was surprised to see Ma Yoga Shakti in the orange robes of a renunciant because I had not realized that formal vows

of *sannyasa* were available to Hindu women. “In India we have a long tradition of independent women *sannyasinis*. They have always been.” Throughout history a small percentage of women have refused to accept the role assigned to traditional Hindu girls and have left their homes to go on pilgrimage or settle into forest shacks or mountain recesses and take up the full-time practice of meditation.

After the 1974 Kumbha Mela in Hardwar, Ma Yoga Shakti was given the title *Maha Mandaleshvar*. She is the only woman I am aware of who has been granted this honorific in recent times. It literally means, “Lord of the great *mandala*,” but its connotations are very complex. A common practice of Indian yogis and yoginis is to worship a *mandala* or *yantra*, a geometric design whose every line, angle, circle, and petal represents a particular goddess. Each goddess in turn is the symbol of a specific divine power or quality such as creation or destruction, heat or cold, love or wisdom, hatred or jealousy, (Yes, negative qualities and emotions are also seen as part of the divine play in the Indian tradition). Through intense concentration on the goddesses of the *mandala* and repetition of the mantras associated with them, the worshipper unites with and finally masters the powers they represent. Therefore, to call a woman a *Mandaleshvar* is a poetic way to acknowledge that she has mastered the *mandala* of her own mind and body, that she has mastered herself.

Ma's teachings are very direct: “You have to plan your life yourself. Be responsible. It is your life. You can make it or mar it. To make yourself happy, first solve your own personal

problems. Then get out and help others. Yoga is the best tool to help people. Practice *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *raja yoga*, and *jñana yoga*. We have all enjoyed the facilities of society. Then in return it is our duty to give something back, to leave a better world behind. I ate the mangoes grown by others. Now I must grow fruit trees so that others can enjoy.

“The world is one family. We have to feel that we are all one. We have to share the sorrows and the joys, both. We are all responsible for the sorrows and joys of the world. Yes, I am also responsible for the sorrows. Therefore, I do more chanting, more penance. May all be happy!”

\* \* \*

Maya Amma is a very different type of yogini. She is an *avadhut*, a radically unconventional sage who has completely renounced the world. I mean completely. She does not bother about any of the material concerns that absorb the attention of the rest of us, including clothing, and wanders the jungle near Cape Comorin clad only in the sky. She doesn't teach; in fact, she rarely speaks any language people can understand. No one knows where she came from, only that she travels capriciously across the southern tip of India surrounded by a pack of half-wild dogs. Some of the greatest saints of India have made pilgrimages to sit at her feet.

A devotee of Ammachi, the great woman saint from Kerala in southeast India, related this true story about Maya Amma. Residents at Ammachi's ashram near Trivandrum gratefully accept the gifts of food brought by visitors, who don't always realize that the residents are vegetarian. One disciple, however, adamantly refused to take a bit of cooked fish even when Ammachi offered it to him herself. A few days later, Ammachi sent the devotee deep into the jungle to request the blessing of Maya Amma. When he stepped into the tiny hut in which the aged yogini was staying, Maya Amma grabbed his head, forced open his mouth, slipped in a bit of fish, and held his mouth closed till he swallowed it! Then she sat down and resumed her meditation.

Maya Amma is what the *Tripura Rahasya* (“Mystery of the Triune Goddess,” a yoga classic) classifies as a *madhya* type of yogini. This is a soul who has gone so far beyond body awareness that only the thinnest thread of consciousness maintains a connection with the physical form. Thus the last few vestiges of karma are played out through the body while the soul's awareness remains merged in the Absolute. (Swami Muktananda's guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, was this type of yogi). How is one to distinguish a *madhya yogini* from a flat-out psychotic? By the extraordinary aura of peace and sanctity that pervades the atmosphere like a force field around a soul like Maya Amma, uplifting and stilling the minds of all who come near her, and by the miracles that seem to chase her feet like puppies.

Sri Ma was a *madhya yogini* – until her guru ordered her to return to ordinary awareness to serve humanity. Traveling through northern India, I was amazed at the stories I heard about her. She had been born into one of the most extraordinary families in India, which included both multimillionaire businessmen and highly advanced yogis. From her earliest years her only desire was to meditate, merging her own being in the universal Being the Hindus call Brahman. Her spiritual radiance was so effulgent that as a young child, when the local fisherman saw her walking along the beach, they would leap out of their boats and race up the sand to ask for her blessing.

At the age of 16, Sri Ma wandered into the forest and, despite a nation-wide search by her family, never returned to worldly life. About those years of wandering in *samadhi*, Ma has little to say except, “My devotees can tell you what happened. They saw me on this road, by that tree. I don't remember anything. I was ‘crazy’. I went beyond all time.”

Her devotees relate that she spent many of these years near the Kamakhya temple in Assam, the most sacred Goddess shrine in India. She ate only *tulsi* leaves and sandal water. (She weighed 60 pounds at that time). The devotees had the utmost difficulty recalling her awareness to her physical body, though they would try their best with the chanting of mantras and devotional songs.

I had the extraordinary privilege of traveling with Sri Ma through Bengal and Bihar, just after she emerged from seven years of seclusion...

For more information about Sri Maya Amma, be sure to read the *Saints & Sages* feature of this issue.

Linda Johnsen, M.S., is the author of the highly acclaimed book, *Daughters of the Goddess: Women Saints of India*, and *The Living Goddess*, among others. Her article on “*India's Female Yogis*” will conclude in our next issue.

*Whatever one's religious orientation, whether he or she is a devotee of Rama, of the more recent Semitic avatar Jesus, of Shiva, or the formless being the Vedas call Brahman, at the core of their beings Hindus know they are children of the Divine Mother. The greatest of India's women saints know this in every breath they take, and express it in their every action.*

– Linda Johnsen,  
*Daughters of the Goddess:  
Women Saints of India*

# INDIA DREAMING

*Stories from or about India and Her endlessly unfolding expressions of spirituality.*

## HIMALAYAN YATRA

BY SWAMI AMBIKANANDA SARASWATI

**The following article is based on a letter written by Swami Ambikananda to the devotees at Kali Mandir in Laguna Beach, California. The *yatra* took place February 25<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup> of this year.**

Greetings to everyone... by Mother's grace, Guruji Swami Bhajananda and I are in good health and are now in Delhi at the Ramakrishna Mission. We've returned here after having a wondrous adventure in the Himalayas!

After a pleasant morning train ride to Haridwar on the 22nd, we spent some days at the Kankhal Ashram. A day trip to Rishikesh was very nice – complete with Ganga bath and even my favorite street-vendor fresh butter cookies!

A chance pre-destined encounter with our friend Victoria was fortuitous. Among other things she introduced us to lemon-ginger-mint-honey tea at a tiny makeshift cafe on the footpath on the *swarg ashram* side. We sipped tea with an

eccentric westerner with an unplaceable accent. He's been in Rishikesh since 1974, and has seen a lot. The world needs more storytellers and shamans. We returned to Haridwar. The next morning I inquired about a car to Ukhimath, not far from our beloved Kedarnath. Within ten minutes it was all arranged, and we had the best driver we've had in the Himalayas, a young, sweet devotee named Harish. We left Kankhal a little after 6A.M., and before 8A.M. we were having hot *aloo parathas* and chai for breakfast in the little village of Byasi (which, you'd be surprised, boasts one of the cleanest public bathrooms I've seen – even in America!).

We continued on, and I was struck by how clear the weather was. I've never seen the air so clean. Even from Haridwar you could see the snow peaks. There were some low clouds snaking through some of the valleys, far from us on the road. Very beautiful.

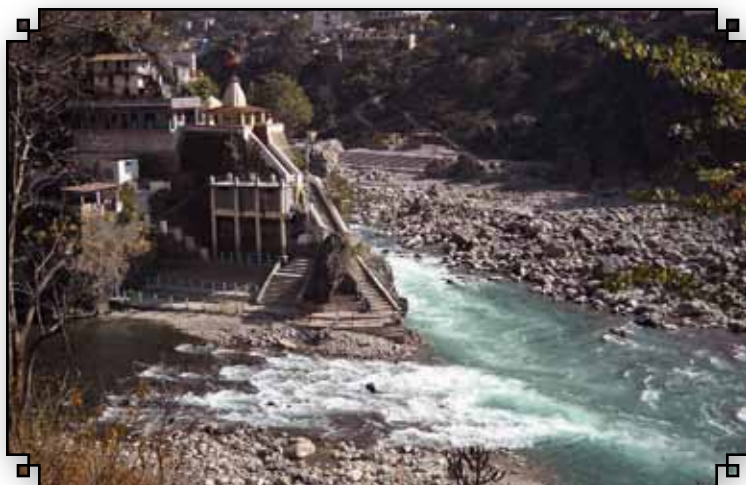
Around 9A.M. Harish pulled over and we got out to look at the vast canyon—actually three canyons meet here. They call it “*Tin Dhara*”... and right at this moment, at 9A.M. the clouds and fog were burning off and being driven by the wind. The effect was like nothing I've ever witnessed: in the valley below, the Ganga snaked its way along, but above that was this river of clouds swirling, swelling, rising and falling - like a time-lapse film, only happening in real time. All the clouds were glowing white in the morning sun, and when they would dance their way apart and reveal the Ganga below, she was catching the sun like a sunlit ribbon of silver and gold. Absolutely breath-taking! I took some pictures and video. Hopefully they will convey something of what we witnessed. So rare are these moments... to be there at that point, at that time. Such grace!

We got back in the car and within ten minutes had our first glimpse of the Kedarnath peak! I've never seen Him below Devprayag. That's how clear it was! We didn't stop at



UKHIMATH MANDIR





### RUDRAPRAYAG

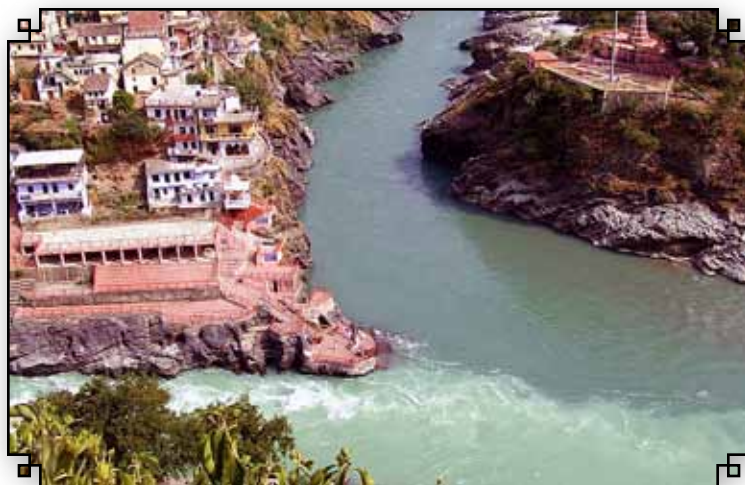
CONFLUENCE OF ALAKANANDA AND MANDAKINI RIVERS

Devprayag. We decided to stop at Rudraprayag on the way up and Devprayag on the way down. We had a wonderful bath at Rudraprayag before noon, and thought of everyone with each dip. By 2:30P.M. we had reached Ukhimath and were eating lunch at the government guest house.

Our cottage, number 3, had its own little porch, and an open space next to it – and right there, framed perfectly in the hills was our Kedarnath Mountain! Such a stunning view! That was our television: the moods of the holy mountain at morning, afternoon, in evening alpine glow... even by the light of the full moon (our first night). I took I don't know how many pictures, but mostly we sat and did japa and drank in the darshan! After eight years, I cannot describe what it was like to see this mountain. My eyes were tearing up just thinking about it. From our cottage, He looked so close! So clear... the play of shadows on snow and rock... and a form that has nothing to do with shadows or snow or rock. Truly amazing. Such grace!

On the second evening, Guruji and I put a cloth down on the lawn. With cymbals and a mini *dholak* drum, we sang kirtan to Lord Kedar, and to the mountain. The manager of the guest house sat nearby and joined in. It was so incredibly lovely. At some point during the kirtan, a flock of emerald-green birds flew up and over.

Although the mornings and nights were cold, the days were quite warm. The food was simple, lovingly prepared and the best



### DEVPRAYAG

CONFLUENCE OF THE ALAKANANDA AND BHAGIRATHI RIVERS

chai we've had in India... and many interesting people. That morning, a young Bengali man approached, and after some talking, he said that he knew Guruji Haradhanji! "Oh Haru-da! Yes... I knew him. There was no *pujari* like him!" He was a very sweet man whose name was Ashim. We gave him pictures of Ma Dakshineswari, and took down his contact information.



KEDARNATH SEEN FROM UKHIMATH



In the morning we visited the Ukhimath temple and had a *puja* performed on behalf of all the Kali Mandir devotees. Very nice *darshan*!

That night after dinner, Ashim introduced us to the man he and a lady friend were traveling with: Dr. Sen, a Bengali doctor who has spent the last forty years walking the paths of *Garhwal* (a division of the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand known for its many pilgrimage sites – *editor*), and is considered one of the main experts on the *Panch Kedar*, the five Himalayan shrines dedicated to Shiva. Dr. Sen has written many books on the region, and published books of his photographs. One of them is being sent to Kali Mandir. Dr. Sen is quite an amazing individual. He connects on a mystical level with nature and spirits of this region. He says this place is like the crucible used

by alchemists to turn base metals into gold, i.e. those who come here are changed and transformed. The same person does not return.

Dr. Sen has seen these peaks from every angle at all times of the year. He has walked to the Panch Kedar shrines many times. He also gave some good points about traveling, and encouraged us to one day visit all five Panch Kedar shrines. He was a very unique person. He quoted a Baul song: “Those who have seen Radha and Krishna in a red hibiscus have seen Them. Those who haven’t, haven’t!”

The next morning, the mountain was hidden in clouds and the sky dark. Yet another mood! After breakfast we left Ukhimath.

At noon we took our bath at Devprayag, where the Bhagirathi and Alakananda rivers meet, and Ganga officially begins. We walked up to the Raghuvir temple and attended arati.

We were thinking of you all and missing you. With every holy dip and every temple *darshan*, you are there with us!

**JAI JAI MA!**

**JAI KEDAR!**

Yours in Mother,  
Baba Ambikananda



**Swami Ambikananda Saraswati** is a disciple of the late Sri Haradhan Chakraborti (head *pujari* of the Dakshineswar Kali temple), and Swami Aparananda Puri (senior monk of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission). On *Vashant Panchami*, 2011, he was initiated as a *dasnami sanniyasi* in the *naga baba* tradition of the Juna Akara by Swami Bhajanananda Saraswati and Swami Omananda Saraswati at the juncture of the holy Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers at Prayag Raj (Allahabad).

While in India he is based in Allahabad at the Yoga-Vedanta Kutir. In the United States, he lives and serves at Kali Mandir, Laguna Beach, California.

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“The ultimate end of spiritual endeavor is not only to merge oneself in the supreme Consciousness, but also to retain in a mysterious way a personal existence. How these contradictions can be reconciled is a mystery. Perhaps our poor intellect, which moves only in a limited sphere, cannot grasp this truth. The best thing is to realize that supreme state by performing the needed Sadhana and know for oneself by experience what that supreme attainment is.”

– Swami Ramdas



# SAINTS & SAGES

*This feature profiles the life of one of the great masters of India, creating an endless mandala of sanctity which is a prominent feature of Indian culture.*

## MAYA AMMA



On the holy shore of Kanyakumari, where the three oceans meet, lived a great soul. Some called her Amma, others called her Devi; sages called her, “Mother of the World.”

Devi Maya Amma was one of the greatest *avadhuts* of modern times. No one knows for sure when Maya Amma first appeared by the seashore, or where she came from. She walked on the burning sand unaware of either heat or hunger. She was often seen swimming in the ocean, or sitting on the rocks among the waves. Devotees who flocked to her would wait for hours for her till she returned laughing to the shore. On shore she was always surrounded by an adoring pack of wild dogs. She would feed them whatever scraps she found with great joy, and she would feed those that came to her in the same adoring manner.

Amma would collect whatever trash she could find along the beach, including cigarette butts, wet seaweed and soaking plantain leaves and miraculously set them ablaze in a crackling fire at night. Amma never claimed to be anyone special, yet whoever came in contact with her was enveloped in the mysterious waves

of kindness and compassion that flowed from her loving gaze.

Many claim to have been freed from incurable diseases through Amma’s grace. Many others were blessed with prosperity and happiness by her boons. Often she would stop into local seaside tea shops, grabbing a tray of *idlis* and

throwing them into the street for her dog friends. Contrary to expectation, the shopkeepers would pray that she come to their shop first, as whenever she came, business was sure to be a roaring success that day.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Mata Amritanandamayi (Ammachi), Shankaracharya Sri Chandrashekarendra Swamigal of Kanchi Math, Mouna Guru of Northern India, Jaggi Vasudev, and many other respected holy persons have visited Maya Amma and received her grace, and have encouraged their devotees to visit her. Renowned *avadhuts*, including Sri Koti Swamigal and Sri Poondi Mahan have praised her as “Mother of the Universe.” She was also venerated by President Zail Singh and other dignitaries.

One day in 1986 Amma disappeared from Kanyakumari. Where did she go? Maya Amma left with her long-time attendant and disciple, whose name was Rajendran. He always looked after her as a loving son would his mother. She went to his home in the city of Salem where she lived the remaining six years of her life with Sri Rajendran and his wife and three children. She lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of the beautiful hill station, of Yercaud until taking Maha Jiva Samadhi on February 9, 1992.

A beautiful Maha Jiva Samadhi Mandir has been built on this location, and devotees still visit it to this day to receive her blessings and her grace. Each year on February 9<sup>th</sup>, her Mahasamadhi day is celebrated. Sri Rajendran, her devoted disciple, still cares for her shrine in Salem. The peaceful and silent beauty of Maya Amma’s Samadhi Mandir is an ideal environment for meditation and *japa*, which are the surest way to attain the grace of the Divine. [MAYAAMMA.ORG](http://MAYAAMMA.ORG)



MAYA AMMA WITH  
AMMACHI

# THE PANCH KEDAR SHRINES OF THE HIGH HIMALAYAS

Kedarnath, Tungnath, Rudranath, Madhyamaheshwar and Kalpeshwar are collectively known as Panch Kedar. Lord Shiva is worshipped at the five Kedars in different forms. The first and foremost is the famous temple of Kedarnath, which is so widely known for its extraordinary sanctity. Here Shiva is worshipped in the form of a buffalo hump. The other parts of Shiva's body – arms, face, navel and hair – appeared at Tungnath, Rudranath, Madhyamaheshwar and Kalpeshwar. These four places, along with Sri Kedarnathji, are known as the *Panch Kedar*.

According to the *Puranas*, while the front portion of the Lord appeared at Pashupatinath, Kathmandu, the other four parts are worshipped at:

1. Tungnath for the Arms (*bahu*)
2. Rudranath for the Face (*mukh*)
3. Madhyamaheshwar for the Stomach (*nabhi*)
4. Kalpeshwar for the Hair (*jata*)

Kedarnath is the main temple, which is part of the four famous *Chota Char Dhams* (literally “the small four abodes”), the primary pilgrimage centers in the Garhwal Himalayas. The other three *dhams* are Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri. Kedarnath is also one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas*.

The Garhwal region is called the “*Kedar-Khanda*” after Kedar, the local name for Lord Shiva. The region abounds in emblems of Lord Shiva. Ukhimath Temple is where the Kedarnath and the Madhyamaheshwar deities are kept during the winter months.

The most famous folk legend regarding the origin of Panch Kedar relates to the Pandavas, the heroes of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The Pandavas defeated and killed their cousins, the Kauravas, in the epic Kurukshetra war. Wishing to atone for the sins of committing fratricide (*gotra hatya*) and Brāhmanahatya (killing of Brahmins), they handed over the reins of their kingdom to their kin and left in search of Bhagavan Shiva to seek His blessings. First, they went to the holy city of Varanasi (Kashi, Shiva's city), famous for the Kashi Vishwanath temple (Shiva as Lord of the Universe).

Not finding Shiva in Varanasi, the Pandavas went on pilgrimage to the Garhwal Himalayas. Bhima, the second of the five Pandava brothers, saw a bull grazing near Guptakashi and immediately recognized it to be Shiva in His form as Nandi. Bhima caught hold of the bull by its tail and hind legs. Shiva in the form of the bull disappeared into the ground to later reappear in parts, with the hump raising in Kedarnath, the arms appearing in Tungnath, the nabhi (navel) and stomach surfacing in Madhyamaheshwar, the face showing up at Rudranath and the hair and the head appearing in Kalpeshwar. The Pandavas, pleased with Shiva's reappearance in five forms, built temples

at five places to venerate and worship Lord Shiva, thus freeing themselves from their accumulated karmas. It is also believed that the head of Shiva emerged at Pashupatinath in Nepal.

After building the Panch Kedar temples, the Pandavas meditated at Kedarnath for salvation, performed *yajña* and attained the heavenly abode through the astral path called *Mahapanth*.

After completing the pilgrimage of Lord Shiva's *darshan* at the Panch Kedar temples, it is an unwritten tradition to then visit Lord Vishnu at the Badrinath Temple.

The priests and *pandits* who worship in the Panch Kedar temples are from South India, except in Tungnath. *Namboodiri Brahmins* hailing from Malabar in Kerala officiate as pujaris at the Kedarnath temple and also at Badrinath. They are known by the name “*Rawals*”. *Jangamas*, who are pure *Lingayatists* from Chitralak in Mysore, are the chief priests at the Madhyamaheshwar temple. The *Dasnami Gosain* order founded by Adi Shankaracharya are the priests in the Rudranath and Kalpeshwar temples. The Tungnath temple is served by *Khasi Brahmins*. In the case of Tungnath, the local *brahmins* from Mokumath officiate as *pujaris*.

The five temples lie ensconced in the region of the upper Himalayas with the high snow-covered hill ranges of the Nanda Devi, Chaukhamba, Kedarnath and Neelakanth peaks forming their backdrop. Kedarnath is located in the Mandakini River valley while the other shrines are situated in the highlands between the Mandakini valley and the Alakananda gorge. They are so remotely located that except for Rudranath, they are still not accessible by motorable roads, but are reached by trekking from late April or early May until early October. For the rest of the year (the winter season), the shrines are closed due to heavy snowfall. Rudranath is accessible throughout the year by a short trek of about two miles from the nearest roadhead.

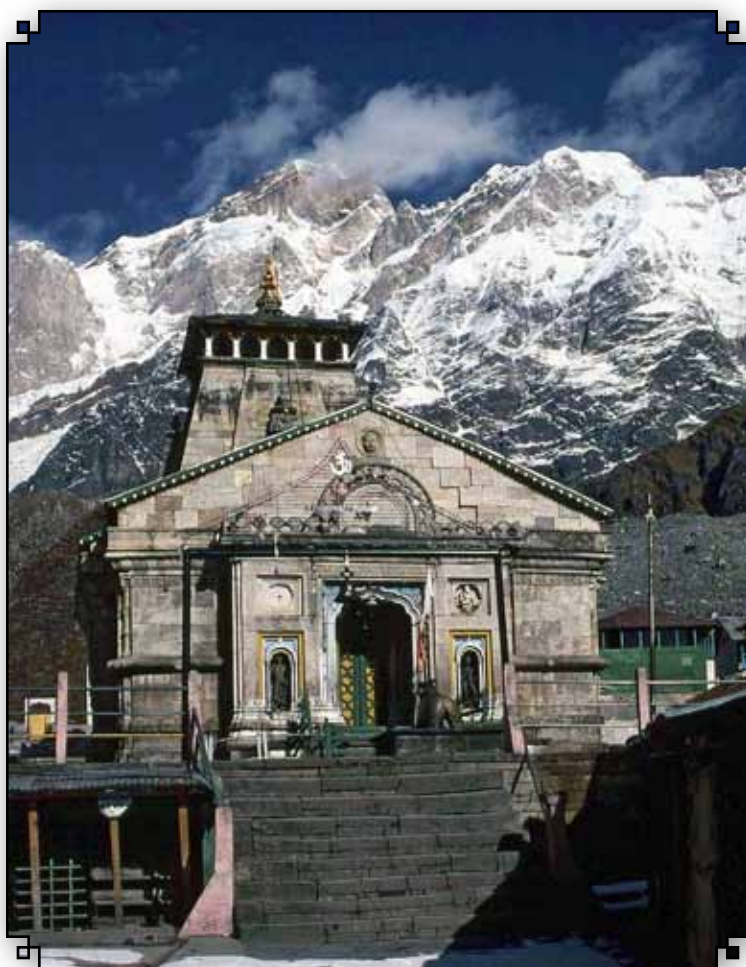
The Panch Kedar temples are accessible from the nearest roadheads. The trek routes located in the Garhwal region provide a dazzling and enchanting display of the high snow peaks of Nanda Devi (25,646 ft), Trishul (23,360 ft) and Chaukhamba (23,419 ft). The Garhwal region includes the origin and course of the revered Ganga River and its many tributaries and *prayags*, adding to the reverence of the Panch Kedar temples.

The total trek length to cover all the five temples of Panch Kedar is about 170 km (110 mi), including road travel up to Gaurikund. The trek starts from Gaurikund, a very picturesque location, providing spectacular views of the Himalayan range of hills in the entire Garhwal Himalayas. This *yatra* is undertaken during the three months during summer, and two months after

the monsoon. During the rest of the year, the Panch Kedar temples are inaccessible due to snow cover with the exception of Rudranath.

The road from Rishikesh is the first entry point to Garhwal from the plains of Uttarakhand. The nearest airport is Jolly Grant in Dehradun. The nearest railway station is Rishikesh.

During the winter period, when the temples are inaccessible due to snowfall, the sanctified symbolic Shiva *murti* of Kedarnath is worshipped at the Omkareshwar temple at Ukhimath; that of Tungnath is worshipped at Mokumath; the Rudranath symbolic image is brought to Gopeshwar; and the Madhyamaheshwar symbolic *murti* is also venerated at Ukhimath.



(Please see the *India Dreaming* feature in this issue to read Swami Ambikananda's description of his and Swami Bhajanananda's recent *yatra* to Ukhimath.)

Colin Kenney, our graphic designer, webmaster, and long-time friend, visited Tungnath, one of the Panch Kedar shrines, in 2004. He writes:

The temple at Tungnath is beyond description. I don't really mean the way it looks, for its appearance is similar to many other temples in India. It is the feeling that is there that cannot be put into words. I could actually feel the peaceful joy of the saints who have been visiting this remote shrine for thousands of years. I imagined I could feel the presence of the Pandava brothers who built this temple with their own hands. And best of all, I could feel the living presence of the Lord permeating the very stones from which it is built.

The elevation of Tungnath is about 12,000 feet, making it one of the highest temples in the Himalayas, and the highest Shiva temple in all of India. We could not enter the temple with our shoes on, so we had to leave them in a room across the courtyard and walk barefoot to the entrance through the snow. Entering the temple, we stepped into another world and another time. The vibration in the inner sanctum felt as though it had remained unchanged for eternity. It could have been a thousand years ago... or a thousand years from now. The feeling would have been the same. The small room which houses the ancient *lingam* seemed to be a pocket which was somehow removed from the flow of time. The local *pandit* chanted the appropriate mantras, blessed us and gave us *prasad*... our spirits were soaring. When we finally reached our waiting taxi... we were cold, we were soaked... and we were very, very happy.

Reprinted from *Where Souls Dream God: Westerners' Perceptions of Spiritual India*, by Sundaram La Pierre, Himalayan Heritage, 2009, available thru our website: [HIMALAYANHERITAGE.ORG](http://HIMALAYANHERITAGE.ORG)

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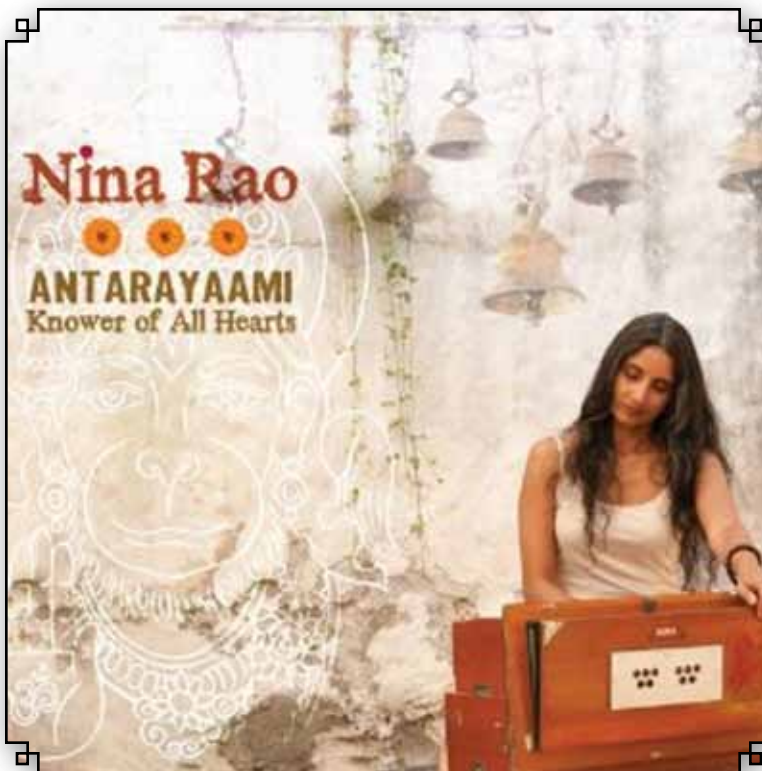
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# ANTARAYAAMI

By NINA RAO

Nina Rao is best known as Krishna Das' agent of many years. She often accompanies him in concert on *kartals* (hand cymbals). On Krishna Das' Hanuman Chalisa CD, *Flow of Grace*, one of the most beautiful Chalisa renditions is sung by her and aptly named the *Nina Chalisa*. Those who have attended Bhakti Fest the last two years may have sung with Nina in her morning Chalisa sessions as she effortlessly flows from one melody to the next with deep concentration, intention and devotion. She is a deep and sincere devotee of Maharaj-ji Neem Karoli Baba. We were excited when she told us last year that she was working on a CD of her own – yet we were more excited when we actually heard the results.



*Antarayaami* is a jewel! First of all, it is a double CD set. The first disc includes lovely kirtans: *Bhajagovindam Narayana*, *Brindavan Mahamantra*, *Saraswati Shaarade Devi*, *Pati Hare*, *Antarayaami*, and *Bhajagovindam*. Disc two features five Hanuman Chalisas in various expressions and flavors. The first one, entitled *Ocean of Ram Hanuman Chalisa*, is sung as a duet with Krishna Das. Another version is led by Nina's daughter, Uma. The second disc closes with a delightful surprise: *Vinayaka Always*. As Nina wrote to us: "*Vinayaka Always* is my grandfather leading with me, sisters, and cousins singing with him when we were children; and then it moves into current day with me leading and my sisters, kids, parents all singing along."

We wrote to Nina to offer our appreciation and congratulations on her beautiful CD. We love its traditional flavor while being easily accessible. The production and instrumentation are artful and wonderful. Every time we hear Benjy Wertheimer's first note on the *esraj* it just pulls at the heart! My wife and I have been playing the CD a lot, and it's difficult to decide which are our favorite tracks. Each one is so uniquely beautiful. Hilary is set on *Pati Hare*. For myself, I find *Bhajagovindam Narayana* absolutely thrilling – the way she weaves "Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya" into it. That's my favorite mantra.

Of course, there can never be too many Chalisa melodies!

In a review in LA Yoga Magazine, Amy V. Dewhurst writes: "If you've listened to Krishna Das, or seen the kirtan history-making 2013 Grammy pre-Award telecast, then you have been touched by Nina Rao. Since 1996, Nina Rao has served as Krishna Das' assistant, response singer, and kartal player. Additionally, she organizes the annual 108 Hanuman Chalisas on New Year's Day, assists in planning the yearly charity Bhajan Boat that circles the isle of Manhattan, and leads chants at the Broome Street Temple and the Brooklyn Yoga School. Did I mention she is a fantastic mom, too?"

In the CD liner notes, Nina writes:

*Offered with pranams and gratitude to the Knower of my Heart, Sri Siddhi Ma, who embodies the Love that is Baba Neem Karoli Maharaj.*

*Deepest love, respect and thanks to:*

*Krishna Das for paving the way and being the searchlight and guide for so many of us, and for being my Friend.*

*Anasuya and Taranath for raising me (and putting up with me!) with care and love only parents can give. Daddy, I pray that you can hear our voices now and forever.*

*My sisters, Sarina and Shamini, for supporting me in all ways practical and impractical.*

*Uma, for coming to me and Devadas.*

*My satsang and friends who very often are my refuge.*

*Musicians, chanters, artists, and producers of this CD.*

**We are looking forward to hosting Nina Rao at Jyoti Mandir in the near future.**

**RAM RAM!**