

The KAILAS, know Him the Śiva.

*Look, stands there the Great Mount Kailas,
Surmounting mountains with unrivalled Grace,
Amidst the alpine that reach the heavens,
The crowned arcane beauty shines Divine.*

*The unsurpassable supremacy, its Divine splendour,
The flashes of lightening and rumbles of thunder,
O! You of rushing air and gushing water,
Of slashing rains and freezing winter.*

*You are the place where time touches eternity,
The abode of peace, love, patience and fraternity,
The refuge of the good, the noble and righteous,
Your loftiness and magnificence is forever marvellous.*

*The glistening crystal palace of the sweetness of snow,
The prodigious mountain gestures for man to know,
The 'Śiva that I am', beyond the obverse and reverse,
The Witness behind all beings and of this universe.*

*Through the labyrinth that encircles the Nature's holds,
Many have travelled through its ceaseless folds,
None but a few could see Śiva in You in truth, and reach,
They are the few pure at heart and act as they preach.*

*Knowing Him in truth is knowing the Eternal,
Knowing Him within us, we become Immortal,
Sincere be the seeking striving, the knowledge dawns anew,
Thus dies the bounty of delusion that is 'I' and 'You'.*

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THE GOAL SUPREME

The sole purpose of all our endeavours must be our Spiritual evolution, for, that is the only thing that can grant us everlasting Peace and eternal Freedom. So, the philosophy we need is the philosophy of life that links life to Eternity, self-reflection to Spiritual evolution and self-culture to live a noble life in the phenomenal world and be of use to others too.

Sri Ramakrishna told : “The only purpose of the human life is to realise God.” This is the philosophy of life that links human life to Eternity.

Swami Vivekannada told : “Each Soul is potentially Divine, the Goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.-----” This is the self-reflection that fosters Spiritual evolution.

The Mother Sarada Devi said : “Love all, serve all and live a life of fulfilment in this world”; “Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own”. This is self-culture that moulds a life of purity, perfection and nobility in the phenomenal world.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PILGRIMAGE

A pious man having a Religious Disposition and a sound healthy mind, standing in front of the Manasarovar beside himself with joy, looks at the lovely KAILAS, the crest jewel among the mountains, he undoubtedly gets transported to an unknown Divine awareness, and the vision shall remain in his heart for ever. In fact he gets a glimpse of Reality in its sublime beauty that is standing as a tribute to Nature’s beauty and Her Creative Sport that transcends all boundaries. And such places are identified as pilgrimage centres, and are called as “*Tīrtha*” (तीर्थ) or “*Tīrthakṣetra*” (तीर्थक्षेत्र) [i.e. “The Sanctifier” or “the sanctifying place”], and going on a pilgrimage to such holy places is called “*Tīrthayātrā*” (तीर्थयात्रा). There are innumerable Holy places in India, they draw pilgrims from far and wide with strong Spiritual vibrations — it can be a Holy river like Ganga or one of the Holy cities like Vāranāsi, Mathura, Ayodhya etc., or Sacred mountain like Kailas or it can be a place sanctified by the life of a great saint or sage. In Hindu context, they are places that celebrate diversity by drawing various cultures, religions and knowledge to come together to exchange views as well as to forge a unique bond which stimulates and strengthens the idea of Oneness — The Oneness of all Life, Oneness of all beings and, One Spiritual Truth viewed differently, each creating its own identity on the world platform. Our visit to such holy places is consecration of our lives to that Supreme Ideal of Universal Oneness on the common platform of Spirituality. This is the inner significance of a pilgrimage. It is the gift of highest love to the world at large. And, it is a part of the life of the Ramakrishna tradition of Sannyasa. Pilgrimages enrich our lives in ways that never rises in our normal life and never have been faced and enjoyed before. Pilgrimage with broad mind, open heart and Spiritual perspective is a commitment and a passion that helps man’s balanced and continuous evolution into an integrated universal personality. Out of this dedication greater

sharing will emerge, helps reaching one's own richer state, ensures a richer future legacy that dares to peep beyond life's daily difficulties and which helps to bring our cultural, religious and spiritual inheritance into another era of striving for Perfection.

Such 'Natural Temples' are universal beyond racial, religious, cultural, social and even political barriers. Kailas and Manasarovar has existed as a testament of universal love, peace and freedom of the soul to worship God in the way it likes. A national of any country on visiting Kailas will surely feel proud, elated and feels of himself as reflecting his nation possessing a healthy and liberal vision in the context of world culture. He understands himself to have evolved to international standards of being able to love all. This is what a true 'Hindu' is and wants the world to be. And is the message of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi too.

In places like Kailas, if mind is free from secular pre-occupations, and is tranquil, then the heart, intellect, mind and senses beautifully synchronise to reveal Nature's transcendental beauty which even poets and lovers of Nature miss; and if endowed with spiritual insight, the person gets some metaphysical revelations or some valid Spiritual experience. Man undergoes metamorphosis getting himself transformed into a true devotee. This is the unique unintelligible power of Natural pilgrimage centres like the Kailas-Manasarovar.

Pilgrimage to sacred places radiating Divinity is extolled, encouraged as a part of spiritual discipline by saints and sages. It is a sacred commission enjoyed by the scriptures on all devout Hindus to accumulate religious merits as well as for expiation of sins. Most of the Hindus go with this intention. If observed with faith, dedication and devotion, the devotees does experience the presence of Lord and His Grace during the entire course of the pilgrimage, and feel that all his/her sins and wrong doings are pardoned and destroyed and he/she is closer to Him than ever. The modern man travel to such a far off places for the sake of adventure, education and pleasure. Such a journey is not considered as pilgrimage. A journey undertaken as a part of religious observance to a holy place, with a spiritual frame of mind and with a delightful goal alone is classified as a pilgrimage. The intension behind and the element of austerity differentiates pilgrimage from sightseeing. Sticking to his resolution the pilgrim unmindful of his comforts, moves on to fulfil his purpose with one-pointed devotion. All odds, discomforts, difficulties and problems he endures with joy, for him it is Tapas (austerity). It strengthens his faith, dependence on God, self-confidence and will power, with which he overcomes major obstacles in his spiritual path and gains strength and power for the inner conquest (of the lust, greed etc.,) gradually leading to spiritual attainments. It is a break from the mundane life of the world to devote oneself and one's all possession (body, mind, earnings, time etc.,) to the Lotus Feet of the Lord and to remain entirely at His disposal. The pilgrimage sanctifies the body and mind and the pilgrim returns refreshed and spiritually strengthened. He also gets an opportunity to see the ephemerality of this world and fast fleeing nature of time.

A devout Hindu at his sixty is supposed to give up the worldly pursuits, handover all material possession, his duties and responsibilities to the youngsters in the family and giving

up the house-holdership become a recluse with his wife [the station of life is called *Vānaprastha* (वानप्रस्थ)]. They are then supposed to devote themselves entirely to Spiritual pursuits. As a supporting factor to their spiritual life, they may undertake pilgrimage and seek Holy company (*Satsaṅga*). To these *Vānaprasthins* pilgrimage provides a channel to convert their residual rajasic tendencies giving a spiritual direction. It helps them wean away from their attachment to the home and the children.

Most of the devotees wilfully choose and take up most difficult path, to bear pains for the sake of God. When an extremely old lady was persuaded to refrain from impossible task of treading an extremely difficult uphill path, which she was crossing at snail's pace, she said "this body has enjoyed a lot in this world, let it take some pains for the sake of God too". This attitude converts pilgrimage into a *Sādhanā*, and gives a meaning to their hardship and efforts. Often the course is very difficult. Say the circumambulation (*Pradakṣiṇā*, *Parikrama*) around a Holy hill or a venerable city or a sacred river is very difficult, dangerous and challenging. For example :- three days of Kailas Parikrama of fifty six kilometres at an altitude of seventeen thousand feet through a tough terrain and extreme weather condition is challenging at every step. *Parikrama* of Benaras of about seventy kilometres takes six days. The foot yatra from Alandi to Pandarpur (in Maharashtra) takes about twenty days and lakhs of people participate every year. *Parikrama* of Narmada river takes three years, three months and thirteen days. The *Parikrama* of Ganga (from Gangotri to Gangasagar and back) needs nearly six years! Sometimes a pilgrimage is preceded by a preparatory phase of austerities. For example :- prior to visit to Sabarimalai in Kerala, the vowed devotees observe forty days of purificatory observances. They wear black dhoti, without upper garments and footwear, observe strict celibacy, eat simple food once a day, live under thatched roof away from home, sleep on bare floor etc.,. These measures of self-restraint prepare the body to face extreme conditions, and mind to remain calm and collected, and the intellect to search for the transcendental Truth. Every pilgrimage is deemed complete and blessed only when the pilgrim is able to get some *Satsaṅg*, company of Holy men who frequent or inhabit such Holy places. Some Spiritual organisations offer the blessed and rare opportunity of going for pilgrimage in the company of Sadhus with continual *Satsaṅg* throughout the way to and fro, which gently and imperceptibly direct and mould the minds to perceive the Divine everywhere and to develop unbroken remembrance of God, and be able to make full use of the pilgrimage.

Apart from effecting a Spiritual transformation, pilgrimage help people to grow closer to Nature and to one another, and become aware of the Divine Principle governing this universe. For a man of the present age with wide range of transport – Airways, Railways and Road ways – and with modern comforts and facilities, it is difficult to understand how in olden days, dreadful and awe inspiring a pilgrimage was. Through dark and deep terrifying forests filled wild life, or through spine-chilling lonely meadows or through grim and ghostly deserts or through the sight capturing yet distressing and horrifying mountains with meagre or no food at all man had to travel alone or in small groups to an unknown destination mostly on foot. Returning from pilgrimage was a new birth, if at all one returns. Only the rare ones endowed with grit and determination, with tremendous faith in God and in oneself could dare

to take such risks. Every pilgrim should maintain the same spirit, same trend of austerity and continuous remembrance of the Lord with unflinching devotion, dependence and faith in Him and in His mercy and compassion that makes man really humble, pure, wise, egoless, loving and compassionate which are manifestations of his inner Divinity.

Most of the places of pilgrimage of Hindus are held sacred for the richness of the marvellous spiritual vibrations pervading those places. They elevate and enrich the physical, psychic and spiritual planes of spiritual aspirants, and infuse faith in God in the common man. These cannot be achieved by a man during the normal course of his life in the world. Thus, in spite of various difficulties, dangers and inconveniences, they pledge the life and take the risk of going for a pilgrimage.

The Hindu pilgrimage centres are invaluable treasures of spiritual aura that have been bequeathed to posterity by the Aryan sages, seers and saints of the hoary past, and the tradition is continuing with new additions. For example :- in our Ramakrishna tradition we see how the Kamapukur, Jayarambati, Dakshineswar, Belur Math etc., have become inspiring spiritual centres of pilgrimage the *Tīthakṣtras*. But now-a-days people at large rush with terrific speed to *Tīrthas*, pay a flying visit and return in a day or two, without taking proper and full advantage of the spiritual fountain existing in those places by staying there calmly and silently for sometime engaging oneself in spiritual disciplines. With a view to make man avail these rare benefits that sanctify his very birth and life, there is the scriptural injunction that the pilgrims to the *Tīrthas* should stay there for at least three nights. However, an extremely worldly person devoid of spiritual tendencies cannot perceive or feel the effect of the throbbing spiritual vibrations existing in a Holy place.

PREPARATION FOR THE YĀTRA (PILGRIMAGE)

Now we are aware of the purpose and significance of pilgrimage. To fulfil that purpose which is but an important mission in man's life, imagine if you can, how much of preparation and conscious efforts might be required! We have to dissolve and remould our personality and our life — and that shall be the final one in our life-stream to climb to the pedestal of our own Divine-hood and claim Immortality.

Eschewing all earthly and physical benefits, though remarkable yet of temporal nature, let us aim at pure spiritual unfoldment which helps us land into Eternity — as the vedic prayer goes

असतो मा सद्गमय	Lead me from the unreal to the Real,
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय	Lead me from darkness to the Light,
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय	Lead me from death to Immortality.

So we prepare for the Highest; preparation for *Yātra* is the preparation for the Highest.

I. Find the source of all power within you :-

No doubt we are bound by Nature in every way – through our own internal nature and through the external Nature that is governing life of all beings. On the other hand it is true that our existence beyond the Nature's functional limits, is Pure, Eternal and Divine. This Divinity, The Pure Consciousness (*Caitanyasvarūpa* – चैतन्यस्वरूप) is what we really are and is the God within us. And this very Divinity which is keeping the body-mind alive and functioning is the source of all power and strength that is needed to conquer the Nature that is limiting us, and attain the Absolute Freedom.

The God to whom we pray, plead and surrender is within us, the *Śakti*, the Divine Mother who binds as *Avidyā Māyā*, and helps release as *Vidyā Māyā*, is within us. All knowledge we seek is within us. The only thing we need is to awaken these powers that are lying within us in dormancy. They can be awakened by fixing our ultimate goal, creating certain awareness to live only for achieving that Goal, and through prayers and self surrender to the Lord of the universe. Innumerable are the ways in which we advance towards the achievement. A few guidelines that stand as principles we shall discuss here which can be implemented in a manner that is suitable to us individually.

1. Have a definite Goal and a definite path :

Having known the significance of the human life and its purpose, we should not find it difficult to set our goal. Let us go a step ahead of positive thinking, to set our spiritual goal. We have to reach the vantage point beyond all dualities that our intellect can discern. Then we see that the purpose of human life is to transcend all limitations of Nature — the physical, mental, emotional, kārmic, of tendencies, of time, space and causation, of law of Nature — and realise the Pure *Ātman*, the Spirit, the *Caitanya* as our Real Self. This is the Liberation, the state of Absolute Perfection, the state of Absolute Bliss, Peace and Freedom. This is the Spiritual Goal, the ultimate goal of human life.

Once our goal is fixed, we must hold it fast in our hearts and allow it to pervade our entire being through and through, and pledge our lives to achieve that goal. Swami Vivekananda said, “Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached”. But then the old tendencies that we have gathered and the persisting desires and temptations, the attachments and aversions cloud the ideal, pervade the mind and senses, and force us rush towards world. Even the strongest dam of self-control is rent asunder, and it invariably ends with a catastrophe. So, a strict disciplined life, austerity and spiritual disciplines suitable to one's nature and temperament are to be taken up. There are four major paths — the path of devotion (*Bhaktiyoga* – भक्तियोग), the path of knowledge (*Jñānayoga* – ज्ञानयोग), the Yogic path (*Rājayoga* – राजयोग) and the path of selfless action (*Karmayoga* – कर्मयोग). To suit the modern times we have to combine all the four paths, our nature and temperament makes one of them predominant.

2. Change the style of your living :

We have to retire from our old way of living with the worldly propensities of seeking name, fame, power, status and worldly possessions and the worldly prospects. Now we must live with God, feeling His immediate presence, and live a life of purity, contentment, perfection and dedication. We must undergo true and permanent transformation. It should not be a temporary passing state, we must give ourselves entirely for all times to come. Self-analysis (‘who I am, what am I doing, why am I doing, what would be the reactions and the consequences of thoughts and actions etc., etc.,) must go on unceasingly.

When we come to a spiritual life, we should no more live a life of excuses. Today I have some other work or that I am tired or that I am not well, that I shall not do my practices — this attitude will not do. We have to find some way that ‘I shall never miss my practices.’ Even if we are to go out before dawn at five, we should be able to reduce our sleep and finish our practices before five. There is neither holiday nor postponement for tomorrow in spiritual life. The President of USA, Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) was confined to wheel chair. Despite of his disability he carried out his presidential duties with utmost care and perfection. He never lived a life of excuses. He made every effort to overcome his disability. Similarly in our lives too there shall be no compromise; whichever disciplines has to be done is whatever way, it has got to be done in the same way. For example., if during japa one should think of God alone, then nothing must be allowed to come to mind except God.

We have to give up certain normal ways of thinking. When misfortune strikes man, the normal tendency is to feel that he is only one who ever had to face such a situation, and all others are happy, or that God is against his plans or that He is angry or that He has some grudge against him. When we happen to face misfortune, failure and adversity we should never think that way. Rather we should feel more dependent and close to God. We must understand God/Nature is teaching some important lesson to me through this. At the same time evaluate what this world is — how uncertain and impermanent it is and try to develop dispassion towards world and transcend Nature. Often intense pangs of grief engulf the heart. No wisdom or discriminations works at that time. Some good deeds or righteous life or being devoted to God, will intervene to give an iota of courage to continue life. Then without allowing ourselves to plunge in self-pitying or grief, neither seeking sympathy from others, we have to slowly wake up to the situation to understand its need and purpose in our lives, and make efforts to stand up. We should never hold others responsible for hardships, neither put blame on others nor bemoan our fate. We must not blame fate or others or God for any personal loss or hardship. Giving up the brooding “if only such a thing had never happened”, if accept what ‘fate’ brings us – good or bad, then we not only get the courage to face misfortunes but also the wisdom to understand misfortunes as a reality of life. And this understanding gives us the clue to transcend the dualities. If we search, we get the answer intuitively what lesson the Lord or the Nature wanted to teach us or what for such a painful experience was. Then without relying on other material and human supports, we need to walk alone in our chosen path depending more and more on the Supreme Lord and make all efforts to help ourselves with free and independent spirit derived from our Pure Divine Nature. We soon find the way out of those difficult situations. And we thank the misfortune

for coming in our lives as a teacher as well as for making us more closer to God. Worldly fortunes and good days are even more dangerous. It is Nature's friendly trap to check Godward movement. The only way is to attribute all fortunes to God and place them at His Feet disclaiming its ownership. We have to maintain the attitude of surrender to Lords' Feet and also maintain the awareness of one's own Divinity that is beyond all dualities of world and never seeks anything from this world. In and through all these efforts we eventually discover the all capable, the invincible Self that is complete in Itself.

When we are engaged in external activities and concerned only about the outcomings or successful completion of our duties, it is then that we forget to look within. It is here that we have to become introspective and practice calmly peeping within, not to lose the track of our uninvolved pure Inner Self. Much can be achieved in the external as well as in the internal world by keeping ourselves linked to the Divine. Referring to a woman devotee working in an office who complained of getting totally exhausted by the evening, Swami Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj writes in his dairy "These women complain of getting exhausted and assign it to the load of work; but the truth is that the inner channel connecting to the Divine is not properly linked without a break. Otherwise, they can do three times more work than they are doing now".

3. Wake up to realities:

Our physical well being is governed by our mental health. So we have to rise to higher elevated mental states that we are able to cope up with every situation of life being ourselves calm and unaffected. It is possible only when we grow spiritually, yet we need a bit psychological preparation too. We need to view the world with a childlike approach without getting confined to stereotypical notions that limit our understanding, approach and vast intellectual capacities to explore into the Spiritual Realm. But we should never get distracted often to stray away from the spiritual quest. We need to be able to adapt to any given situation being able to 'go with the flow' smoothly. We have to make it our nature to be affectionate and loving and capable of changing any dull situation into a great one with humour and charm, or by throwing the Spiritual light over it. Dealing with one's own mind to remain in a pacified state (*Santoṣa* –सन्तोष) is a tricky task, as on one day it showers grace with elated moods of joy, and just as quickly, lose interest in you and your endeavour the very next day and on the third day become distant, crazy or temperamental. To maintain it in a pacified tranquil state one must constantly reinvent the situation and keep the equation fresh, the ideal lively and the Goal bright. The nature of mind is to get bored easily and therefore needs an unbroken source of inspiration either from holy company (*Satsaṅga*) who can keep up with us and hold our attention and bind us with love and concern, or depend inspiring studies, and as far as possible live in the company of *Sādhakās*. Mind's another nature is seeking a companion or a partner to centre one's feelings and emotions and to enjoy the company. It swings from the pure sublime relationship to the seekings of base instinctive nature. To keep such a mind under check and guide it along the Spiritual path is a job that challenges every moment of life, for it takes newer shapes every moment in a self-deceptive conniving way to enjoy the world at least by glance if not by a touch. Bad *Vāsanās* (old bad tendencies) are the demons under whose control the mind functions in a self-deceptive way.

While bad *Vāsanās* take hold of mind, if one way to fulfil its evil desire fails, it quickly moves and is very good at finding a new way out! So, though it has matchless capacities and capabilities, the mind is unreliable and is known to pick adultery and corruption over loyalty and honesty in the workspace. This should not make us disheartened or suffer from anxiety and tension or develop inferiority complex or to look down upon oneself. But it is alarming and needs to be reminded to relax and unwind. Because, the same mind when under the grip of good *Vāsanās* (tendencies), become godly and loves to travel along righteous path, and dwelling in the Truth takes flight to the Divine. Mind is the indicator of our inner tendencies. We must become introspective, wise, wake up and eliminate all bad tendencies and cultivate the good, noble and spiritual tendencies preferably in the company of holy men or work out all alone diligently by holding on to the Divine through prayer and self-surrender. If we are sincere to the core, God will provide a suitable field of activities and mode of living that will allow us the freedom to struggle for Spiritual attainments, and keeps on nursing our need to constantly move towards Himself. What we need is lot of patience : Patience is mindful awareness or mindful attention to life and putting forth efforts in right direction hoping for a upshot for a higher result, letting go the expectation that drag the mind into past or future — so that one remain in the ‘present’ without judging or blaming.

When we are on our spiritual mission and yet, if we are loaded with work and activities, with many duties and responsibilities, we need not feel bad or complain. We must try to understand its need and purpose in our lives. Know for certain that there is no injustice in the jurisdiction of Nature and of God. We must tell our minds ‘God has not only burdened you many responsibilities but also provided you with unique capabilities as well; and has selected you with trust’. Without exposing ourselves to the external worldly environment around, which is harmful and unnecessary, and maintaining a very low profile we have to stick to our spiritual routine to keep our inner Divinity ever shining bright. We have to guard against impatience and allow natural order to work itself out. As we learn the values of perseverance, we strive more with seeking Divine grace that fortifies man’s plans and projects. God stands by our side in activities, and reveals His Divine presence in contemplation. This is the essence of Karma Yoga, it is to blossom spiritually in the field of work giving oneself to God. We attain wholeness and peace by erasing our selfishness and working for God and others. Sri Ramakrishna said: everything in this world has meaning only because God is behind it, without God everything is meaningless. Coming down a step from that highest truth saints have clearly stated that all experiences of life are like of series of zeros. They are meaningless without a number behind them. That digit is peace of mind. Without a calm, contented and peaceful mind, life is just a shadow of its possibilities and a dreary drag. The most beautiful scene leaves us empty if our mind is filled with worries. Even grace of God seems remote. To attain this ‘working-peace’ in daily life we have to link ourselves to the values that are most important in our lives : an expanded heart and openness to love all, an attitude of forgiveness towards ourselves and others, Light of wisdom to see things in spiritual perspective, to remain uninvolved in the world, to walk on our own way without getting affected by praises and blames of the people, to give without seeking anything from this world. If we link this external composure to our inner spiritual awareness then we reach an internal balance point where mind becomes still. In this state of stillness,

the physiology shifts into the relaxation response, freed from negative and positive conditioning the intellect becomes fit to perceive beyond physical limits, a higher understanding of oneself dawns within. And these things are essential for us for a pilgrimage to a place like Kailas-Manasarovar. When adversity hits or unfavourable situation presents, apart from taking recourse to God for Divine help, we have to lift up our spirit to face the situation (because our faith and dependence on God is still at an immature stage). We can have three attitudes — (i) Of commitment: - i.e., to accept and assert that ‘I am committed to it, I shall face to conquer or transcend’. (ii) Of control :- It is the belief that we can control the situation or influence the events, along with the willingness to act that way. It is opposite of feeling helplessness; change the situation than be a victim of it. (iii) Of challenge :- it is the belief that the challenges are Nature’s provision for effecting growth and evolution. They stimulate personal growth by consciously interacting with them — exploring, dealing with, and learning from them. This attitude transforms an unpleasant event into a nourishing food. Adversity is the crucible in which the Spirit is forged. Let us stay open to the life’s teachings so that we grow. Very often we may have to change the frame of reference of the incidents and situations or circumstance so that it helps our growth towards our Divine-hood, i.e., we move from personal to impersonal by transcending our own personality and nature. Reframing is an art, a science with a philosophy. We must avoid getting mentally wounded or may heal an earlier wound, or may help a transcendence, by changing the frame of reference. We must always change the frame in such a way we transcend our limitation and grow spiritually. Once Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing over a land in Bengal. Someone told him that the mud of that place is used for making ‘khol’ [a particular type of drum (like pakwaj) with hollow tapering cylindrical earthen base with leather on either side and played hanging over the neck in singing kirtan while dancing or moving]. This at once threw him to ecstasy. The frame of reference regarding the mud on which they were treading was changed from material base to divine base. Crows are gnawing nuisance at Belur Math and were the objects of repugnance and dislike of large number of inmates living there. Once a revered senior Swami told the trainees living there That crows live for 80 years and some of them living presently in Belur Math might have had the blessed opportunity of seeing and living with some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who lived upto 1930’s. The entire crow community started receiving love and honour of all inmates! When frame of reference changes, the entire outlook changes. Source of pain becomes source of joy. But many a times because of our attachments, desires, habits and ego it becomes extremely difficult to leave the old frames. Two birds lived in a cage for long. Once the cage door was left open to free the birds. The birds were reluctant to fly away. Neither of them risked letting of the safety of cage to fly away in order to gain its own freedom! Such is the charm and power of old frames. It demands tremendous courage to leave them behind and move forward. Unless we intensely seek our everlasting Spiritual gain, we too would be reluctant to change the old frames. Reframing challenges the mind, opening the way to release old conditioning let go so that we can wake up to the moment to find a new horizon or break through. It helps us even to penetrate into Nature’s secret and know things. Scriptures provide us two important frameworks to look to ourselves, our lives’ events and the world — (i) The cosmic view and (ii) The Ultimate Reality, The Absolute. The Truth is revealed, secrets are known, meaning and significance of life are discovered, human life is evaluated

and the Goal is fixed by viewing through these two reference points. This is what we want in preparing for the *Yātra* in general and Kailas-*Yātra* in particular.

A bit of *creative imagination* based on realities verified and vouchsafed by saints and sages, helps a great deal to unlock spiritual secrets. Meditation too begins with imagination, but one day it finds a creative breakthrough intuitively to land in the realm beyond. Our intellect has unique power of creativity and there is within us enormous store-house of wisdom that can be drawn upon. Even dreams and stray incidents have been the causes of creative breakthrough. Many times these breakthrough happens unconsciously and appear as miracles. However creative imagination and creativity is a nature's gift for humans. For some it comes as a Divine gift; in some a few contents of the unconscious group up in a novel form and manifest; some others are capable of effecting recombination of the facts in an astounding and innovative manner. As also, there is a way that favours its occurrence. The main part in creativity is blindfolding the judge, the intellect must be allowed to freely expand and flow. Let ideas flow out without any inhibitions. It has self-mechanism to be orderly. When ideas are fully formed and certain conclusions are to be finalised, we may scrutinize them leisurely for their logical setting and their feasibility. Many times we see ideas, solutions, knowledge and even talents that are unknown and unheard, spontaneously manifest from within. The state required for this sort of creativity is just letting go – release all conditioning.

All beings constantly seek three things — happiness, peace and freedom, because they are the very nature of their lost empire, they want to re-acquire their true nature, of purity and perfection (of That Absolute), of peace, bliss and freedom. But without freedom how can there be peace, and everything being there, if there be no peace, how can there be happiness. Again, how can we attain peace when the very nature of mind is restless, projecting its wants, anxieties and fears endlessly — jumping into the past and the future? On the other hand, if we happen to think of a fine beautiful moment of our life, where everything was displaying Nature's beauty and calmness, say, we were in our own moods listening to a fine tune — that moment was filled with contentment and peace. Why can't we live in such a fine peaceful state always? The answer is that : We have put on ourselves so many duties, and feel responsible for so many things, and have assumed so many obligations, to add to those there are our desires, ambitions and demands — any of the thousands of things like this throws us back to our 'scatter-minded' state.

If we can let go things, let go the desires caused by *Rāga-Dveṣa* (attachments and aversions), returning to them only when the actual moment appears to attend to them, we would experience a relaxed mind resting joyfully within itself reflecting great peace. This is called *mindfulness*. The opposite state to this state of mind is the scattered-mind jumping restlessly from one thought to the other and is called '*scatter-mindedness*'. For achieving the mindfulness the usual procedures consists of anchoring attention in the breath¹ and then in an

¹ Concentrating on the breath is a good exercise for the beginners whose mind is extremely gross and remains wild and uncontrolled. This procedure is adopted only for psychological purposes to practically build up an understanding that the mind is only an instrument where as the Self, the Master, is distinct from mind. And then practise taming it and bringing it under complete control to derive mental peace. But it is not a part of

uninvolved way passively observing thoughts, perceptions, feelings and sensations without any judgement. The ideas of good and bad, right and wrong, of needed and not needed, fade away and there shall be only openness to the present. This is what we need during pilgrimage '*the openness to the present*'. It is something like being a silent uninvolved Witness to the normal perceptions and being neutral to one's own thought current and feelings : — but intensely searching and seeking something beyond. In our normal life ninety percent of our thinking is unproductive and pertains to past or future, which is unnecessary and injurious. Through mindfulness we not only attain peace, but also save lot of time and energy. If our time and energies are drained out by ephemeral things, nothing shall remain with us to devote to the spiritual.

A person met with an accident, legs were broken with a serious head injury. After a protracted course of treatment he was sent home. He came home with retarded memory, unsteady movements, leg joints stiffened unable to walk, think and talk properly. He had to re-learn how to walk, how to talk! Each thought, each movement, each step was consciously carried out, each step was, indeed, nothing short of a meditation. Everything dragged full attention to the minutest level, at all times, even to turn sides while lying down! He was mindful at all times : mindfulness while paying attention to his movements or speech, and the short gaps of digression from such fastened attentions obviously landed him into a sort of 'mindlessness' because his participation in the world had come to a halt. His disabilities were blessing to him to teach how to live in the moment. This sort of 'meditation in action', the '*be here now*' approach is mindfulness. This frees the mind from the holdings of expectations, undesired pre-involvement and pre-judgement. If we can expand it to 'all-time' level, make it spontaneous and our natural state, then it shall radiate peace at all times keeping us in a relaxed natural state of attentiveness to both the inner world of thoughts and feelings as well as to the external world of events and actions. Mindfulness is to be fully present to the moment we are living in, to the situation we are placed in, and to the action we are engaged in, yet be at peace and joyful being masters of our own mind. "Work while you work, play while you play and that is the way to be happy and gay" — be present with the meals while dining and enjoy it rather than think about other avoidable and unnecessary things. When we are travelling to Kailas we must be fully present at every point of journey and the places we visit and be awake to the Nature around; totally avoid drowsing or becoming absent-minded or being scatter-minded. Then we will see Nature speaking to us and revealing Her various hidden aspects in Nature. Then an unknown awareness dawns within to direct us to the Divine present everywhere in all objects. We can see the mindfulness in action in young children. A child was weeping. A round plastic box containing toffees were given to it. The child threw it away in anger. The box started rolling like a wheel. The child stopped weeping and started gazing at 'that rolling wheel'. When the box went to the corner and stopped, the child ran to it and picked it up. The toffees in it started making sound. Child saw a drum in it, started beating with tiny palms. Slowly it tried

meditation in spiritual practices where there is the need to transcend body and mind. Breathing being a function of body, fixing mind on breath may help concentration but obstructs transcendence. So love of God, the indwelling Spirit, or the thought of oneself being Ever Pure and Perfect *Ātman* is recommended instead of concentrating on breath.

to sit over it, it was a stool for that baby! Mother opened the box and took out a handful of toffees from that, but the child's entire attention was on the box, it snatched the open box, it put its tiny Barbie doll in it, the box was a cradle. Next moment its attention was drawn by a gardener watering the plants, the child ran there with the box, took water in it and started watering the plants, it was a pot, a container! How many ways the child viewed the box, it has no limits. To a child, everything is fresh and new. It is all possible because mind is not conditioned, not limited. For us it cannot be anything but a box, a container! We must acquire that state of a child for our Kailas trip. We should not label, we should not judge, we should not limit things and possibilities in any way. The moment the understanding comes "this is such and such" or we think "we know it all", the doors to changing experiences in perception and of life get closed. The beautiful colourful world of God becomes a monotony. If we let things go, keep ourselves open in every way, we find joy in everything, we see the 'Ānanda' aspect of Reality in this world. The world is the immanent aspect of God, the *Sat-cit-ānanda* (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Absolute). But why do we not experience bliss every where in all objects? Because mind limits its perception; nevertheless the child perceives that *Ānanda*.

Mindfulness is a definite attitude. Infact, the joy lies not in finishing an activity but in doing it. This is another secret of *Karma Yoga*. Even among the renunciates, there are two types : (i) those who have renounced for God 'to receive' something or 'to avoid' something and (ii) those who have renounced for God 'to give' their all, themselves too. The former ones, we may call them the 'No' type or N-type and the latter we may call them 'Yes' type or Y-type. The N-type remain busy in *finishing* an activity somehow, and the Y-type are intent on *doing* it in a perfect way as a worship. Through the statement '*Karmanyrvādhikāraṣṭe Mā phaleṣu kadācana*' 'You have right to be intent on action but not to be intent on the fruit', Sri Krishna instructs us to be the Y-type and not the N-type. The entire world with an exception of a few, belong to the 'No-type' and to them this give-away type of understanding is entirely alien to their common way of perceiving things. Small insignificant things in their way makes them upset, they appear as big problems for them. Because they do not want to take pains, they do not want to put more efforts, they do not want to sacrifice. They retain their comforts, reservations, ambitions, self-respect and an ego which gets hurt when someone comments or instructs in a blunt or strict way. They never bear criticisms nor take the things in the right spirit to serve better, to evolve oneself. Even if an authoritative person who is taking care and dedicating in every way for someone's welfare tells the latter 'why are you wasting your time/material/energy that way, you could have done this way', he/she gets offended, weeps and hits back a reply saying 'I do not know how to satisfy everyone' and bring all people and situation around into picture for complaining against to justify his/her action. The truth is that such people are those who have reserved themselves for their own sake. They are not giving type. They cannot make much spiritual progress in life, for the spiritual life is purely a life of giving, pouring away the entire *nature* with and within us to win the kingdom of God. Unless they give up their No-type nature and acquire the Yes-type nature, there is no chance of securing spiritual unfoldment. The Y-type on the other hand feel grateful for having pointed out their mistakes, in all humility they accept and put all efforts to eradicate their defects and shortcomings. They want to be perfect instruments of giving.

God utilises such surrendered and dedicated souls as His messengers of peace, wisdom and righteousness. The N-type depict features of multi-phasic or multiplex tendencies : many thoughts crowding the mind together, trying to do disorderly many things at a time. [a devotee took her son to a tutor for tuitions, she (the tutor) was nursing her baby, eating her food, talking now and then over the cell-phone and side by side she is teaching the children. The devotee returned knowing she can't teach]. In either case of thinking or doing, the reality is that, we can only think or do one thing at a time. Mind can fling back and forth from point to point amidst several things but can fully focus on only one thing at a time. Polyphase thinking kills time and creates stress. We have to wash down completely our No-type tendencies, and shift to the Yes-type. We have to become true children of Nature – pure and flexible, and of God – ever noble and divine. Through it we pave way to Self-discovery by going beyond the mind and reaching the ultimate Witness within. Though it is a matter of intense struggle, perhaps a life-time job, to cross over the Nature in every respect, it is worth moving along that path and it has to be done. We have to break so many walls, the conditioning we have to put on ourselves since our birth as well as those we have inherited from our past and a little brought down from our parents as hereditary.

We need to lead ourselves methodically depending entirely on the Lord. Methodically means transcending our personality and individual limitations. In spite of all efforts and the so called right understanding, the old personality persists perhaps with a few new qualities. And, so many limitations which we have put on ourselves and allowed others to put on us too persist. The old personality which says 'I am so and so, I possess such and such qualities, I lack such and such qualities -----' etc., has to be dissolved i.e., disconnect ourselves from the entire past — so much so that I must feel I never had a past. The only identity I possess shall be that I am divine and belong to the Lord forever. Similarly we have to transcend all our individual limitations. Certain false understandings like 'I can't get up early in the morning', 'without me things may not move smooth', 'I am responsible for such and such person', 'I should maintain my self-image', etc, etc.,. The entire scene is but a play of the ego and the mind. They have imprisoned us. Ego, at any time, in general, is the resultant final *Balance sheet* of one's all good and bad impressions at that moment of time. Based on that, we have created a set of opinions and understandings about ourselves, to feel safe and secure as well as to describe ourselves to the world. We want to project a good picture of ourselves and hide the bad ones. So, we have put on a mask and moving about guarding ourselves from our own mind-hatched fears. In the depth of our unconscious, being good imparts hopes and being bad threatens our very survival. Fears of abandonment, rejection, blasphemy, criticism, condemnation and of desolation daunt man's consciousness. Many harbour secret fears of being not up to the mark or being deficient in some way, and care too much for other's opinion. While, on the other hand, the desire to enjoy and to acquire a good position does not leave them. We also want to be loved and honoured by posing ourselves as good. So, we put on the masks, and have erected multiple walls within (that governs our thoughts, actions and feelings) to keep out hurts and pains and to store in security. These are the strategies created, protected and sustained by our own ego. This illusion of pain and pleasure, of security and safety must go away. We must understand that God and Self alone are our unfailing securities, for, they being Realities strengthen us from

within and make us Spiritually rich. While, the masks and walls being false, are treacherous supports that weaken us from within and ultimately render us spiritually destitute. A day shall surely dawn in every one's life when he/she experiences that the very walls and masks coveted as sole-support of survival and of existence, themselves have become causes of fear, pain and insecurity. The soul shall then struggle to find a resting place. This struggle leads him/her to the Divine within and the Divine without, to the Self-discovery and realisation of God, and to the attainment of Immortality.

The pure Self-awareness and its conditioning begin even from its spermatic condition. Let us see in a nut shell how bodily unfoldment takes place and how the identification with it expands and finally how the false ego appears. So that we will be able to discover our real Self. A sperm is a *spark* of Consciousness; with the conception (fertilisation) Consciousness manifests as 'self-awareness' to develop into a growing embryo. In fact, both the sperm and the ovum carry in them the blue print of their part in bringing about a body. The self-awareness at that tiny level helps its bodily unfoldment. The causal body forces out the subtle and gross bodies. Like the flow of electricity creates a magnetic field around it, the self-awareness activates the subtle body – i.e., the mind and the senses, from their dissolved dormant causal state to their functionable subtle state to act on the matter bound cells to mobilise, multiply and into various organs : — the organs of perception to perceive and interact with external surroundings for self preservation, and the other functional organs to continue life and continue the species. The Nature had made senses to perceive sense objects; they are forces in themselves. Being a force, every force seeks expression. It is this compulsive force of expression that works miracles in the formation of the wonderful sense organs. The efforts of the sense faculty of seeing (चक्षु-इन्द्रिय; *Cakṣu-Indriya*) to express itself, moulds the formation of eyes, and so on. The mind's urge for its expression precipitates in the formation of the brain. At birth, an infant has mind in its pristine form, clean and fresh — without a single impression of the external world. Till then it was aware of itself in itself. Now the senses and mind are exposed for the first time to the world. It is conscious, it perceives but attaches no meaning to the perceptions. Gradually, experiences attach meanings to objects and events; labelling and conditioning too begin. The three parts of the mind namely the conscious, the unconscious and the sub-conscious are formed. On one side the personality of the baby is getting forged, on the other, the frames through which it perceives, observes and understands are getting forged. We are not able to see the Divine everywhere, though It is expressing Itself in and through all objects, beings, events and actions, because of our individual personality and the framework we are carrying. If we can dissolve these two then we can see Divinity everywhere at all times.

Parallel to this entire process of formation of bodies look at the way how 'self-awareness' fell to the 'body-level' and generated a ego to get indulged in the world. The spark of the Consciousness trapped in the ovum at fertilisation, identified with ovum and developed a stigmatic self-awareness. The causal body was derived from the blue prints and activated to project out the subtle body. With that the identification with ovum got expanded up to the subtle body, the subtle as an array of forces managed to manifest the gross body. The identification then pervaded the entire gross body too and the 'I' as *body* emerged. All

these developments of reaching to this state of degeneration is caused by the limitation put by the Nature on Consciousness making it appear as a finite entity, the spark. It remains conscious but remains incomplete, lacking fullness, wholeness : because it thinks of itself as finite. It therefore rushes forth hither thither in search of fulfilment, in search of Bliss and freedom from limitation. The entire cause behind the search is, itself being ignorant of its own true nature, the *Brahman*, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute. Ignorance first hides our true nature and then makes us identify ourselves with what we are not. Through ignorance the true Self becomes identified with our body, senses and mind, and there is the fantasy of the ego created. As a result, we feel we have two levels of body — the physical or gross and the mental or subtle. Through introspection and analysis of dream phenomena we can find that we have a still subtler level of existence called the causal body. Beyond all these there is *Ātman*, our True Self.

Further we are caught in the three states of consciousness : (i) the *waking state* in which consciousness gets identified with the gross physical body, and we are conscious of the physical world and are part of it; (ii) the *dream state* in which consciousness is withdrawn from the gross and remains identified with the subtle body, and we live in a dream world created by our own mental impressions; (iii) The dreamless *deep sleep* state where the consciousness is withdrawn even from the subtle body, — and the mind and senses remain in a sort of inactive dissolved state. Men of Realisation, the Illumined ones, tell us that beyond these three states there is Super Consciousness or Transcendental Consciousness also called the '*Turīya*' state in which one regains one's pure Spiritual nature independent of Nature's participation. In this state of Pure Consciousness the individual Self realises that it is nothing but the infinite Spirit, the Immortal Being. The scriptural studies, the spiritual practices, the pilgrimages, the vows and observances — all these are but various aids to transcend the limitation put by the Nature and know the Real Self.

In the case of vast majority of spiritual aspirants this is a gradual process which takes the form of gradual unfoldment passing through various stages. Making up for the erroneous frames of reference created, even if we empty our mind by dissolving all understandings and conditionings of mind (which is extremely difficult, almost impossible), we still fail to enter into Super Conscious state. We may at the most move back to the new born baby's state of mind — mere perception without attaching any meaning to it. The reason behind it is that our identification with the three bodies created prior to our birth and the root-limitation put by the Nature on the Consciousness which caused individuality (*Jīvatva*), continues to remain in-tact. And to enter into *Turīya* state to realise the Truth, we have to transcend our that very individuality by destroying the root-cause. This can be achieved when Nature triggers the Spiritual Consciousness in those who have washed down their acquired impurities; or through higher spiritual practices leading to *Samādhi*; or through the unconditional self-surrender to God.

If a person acquires purity and simplicity of a child, and when he/she is in tune with Nature's enchanting serenity, or with the Divine pervading or manifest in Nature, or is immersed in the transcendental beauty of Nature with rapturous attention, then the Nature Herself triggers spiritual Consciousness in that person where-upon the person is effortlessly able to penetrate through the Nature and see beyond — and, he/she gets a spiritual/transcendental experience or a 'vision'. Whenever we get a *vision* or enter into an enraptured ecstatic state called the *Bhāva Samādhi*, we lose our external awareness including the awareness of our physical body and remain oblivious of external world totally absorbed in the object of our attention. It is *Spirit* seeing *Spirit*. Something transcendental in us seeing something transcendental in Nature. It is rather a revelation. This is what usually happens during pilgrimages. The one who is pious, simple and unassuming, the one who is devoted, dedicated, striving and free from hypocrisy, the one endowed with faith, ever and anon holding on to the Supreme, surrendered, the one who is holy, innocent, virtuous and a sincere seeker, the one who is pure, loving and compassionate at heart, are the people who usually get such visions.

While the above is like a natural fruit of the virgin forests, there is the effortful cultivation of entering into the Spiritual realm. There are various approaches to that Reality and various path — like the Vedantic path, the Yogic path, the path of devotion, the path of self-less action, of other Religions etc., each ultimately leading to the transcendental (*Turīya*) state of realisation, a direct immediate experience of the Supreme Spirit. The path a soul selects is according to its inherited nature and, the bent of mind created by the culture in which he/she is brought up and, the developments through self-culturing the Soul has strived to achieve.

There is the Vedantic method of denial of all sense perceptions and mental understandings — all that we hear about, see or think — as not the Absolute Reality and, concentrating on the ultimate Truth, the Brahman as the only Real and Eternal, depending on the scriptural validity and Guru's words. This is a stern path of 'discarding', supported by strong renunciation of all that one thinks as unreal except a morsel of food to keep the body alive to achieve the Supreme goal. This is the path of reasoning wherein heart/emotions are totally suppressed. In path of devotion, however, they move according to their own nature. Those who are Satvic (calm and contained) go for surrender; those who are Rajasic (active and extrovert) go for self-less work seeing God in all beings, serving Him in them; those who are Tamasic (rude, furious, lying in darkness of ignorance, lying still in lethargic state with intense attachments and aversions) go for crude way of worship like the animal sacrifice. The good and the bad experiences the soul has undergone and the opportunities available, also influence the path.

In our conscious state we are physical bodies. And therefore think that we are old or young, short or tall, dark or fair. Identifying with *Prāṇās* (energy level) we feel hungry, thirsty, strong or weak. Identifying with the ego we think 'I am doer, I am enjoyer, I am bound or free'. We have hypnotised ourselves and must dehypnotise ourselves. For that, we must re-build our old self. We must come to the realities and understand, accept and feel and become aware of our being Divine which eliminates old bad ways of thinking, feeling and

acting. Our spiritual ideal help developing in us good moral standards and guide our thoughts, emotions and actions. then we become purified.

Then our spiritual practices - prayers, worship, *Japa*, meditation, service etc., develop the power of introspection and help us dive within. Then we enter into a new dimension of our being. We find within ourselves various centres of consciousness, 'the *secret stairs*' of the mystics a lift with diverse landing stages connected with different planes of consciousness. They belong to our various levels of existence from the gross physical to the pure spiritual level. During infancy, old age and sickness – man is purely physical body (the centre of consciousness lying at base/anal level). Later from youth to old age his whole attention gets riveted to enjoyments, comforts and luxuries — his consciousness lies at the carnal level, when swayed by deep emotion he is at heart. When emotion leads to absorption in abstract thinking we are at the throat level. When deeply contemplating, when thoughtful his consciousness lies between the eye brows. From this we understand we have various centres of consciousness and also that we are constantly moving from centre to another. This is with reference to our gross and subtle levels of physical existence. At a still deeper layers we have corresponding levels of causal and spiritual centres — they are called the *Cakrās* (चक्राः). According to *Tantrās* there are seven *Cakrās*. Corresponding to the above mentioned six points, the six Spiritual centres are *Mūlādhāra* (मणिपुर्- reached by withdrawing consciousness through the base of the spine— coccyx.), *Svādhiṣṭhāna* (स्वाधिष्ठान- through carnal point), *Maṇipura* (मणिपुर- navel), *Anāhata* (अनाहत- heart), *Viśuddha* (विशुद्ध- throat) and *Ājñā* (आज्ञा- between eyebrows). The seventh, however is when the Absolute Truth; Non-dual, is experienced at the crown within the head. In pilgrimages when we experience ecstasy we are at the heart level or the above. So, to have a spiritual experience/vision we must practise maintaining our centre of consciousness at the heart level or above, and never allow it to come down to lower levels of common life in the world. This is path selected by those who have mystical (Yogic) nature supported by intellectual drive, the Yogic path.

The other path is a direct approach — an unconditional surrender to the Divine wherein the cause of all problem, the ego itself is sacrificed in its entirety and offered at the feet of the Supreme Lord of the universe. What remains is He and He alone and the 'I' dissolved in Him. This is the concluding part of the path of devotion (*Bhakti*) to God supported by faith, love and total dependence on Him and His grace.

In fact spirituality is a discipline leading to a growing awareness of the ultimate values that draws man into his ultimate depth. The secular happens to transform the world and the man from without, to make his living possible or comfortable, while the spirituality transforms the man from within, conferring everlasting Bliss and Freedom. Spirituality can be associated and can be defined as the essence of religion in so far as it is not only accepted, but lived and experienced. Thus the import of pilgrimage cannot be properly defined in today's empirical and utilitarian context, but can find its proper meaning when drawn through the cultural language, the language that is capable of expressing human realities, the realities of life and the spiritual values. The pilgrimage to Kailas must ultimately awake us to our Spiritual depth; because in front of a concrete magnetic bedrock of Spiritual Eminence man's

unconscious spiritual urges and desire for eternal freedom spontaneously rushes forth seeking fulfilment. And, our internal preparations must be sufficient to avail that rare and unique opportunity so as to succeed in transcending all physical awarenesses and sink to reach our Spiritual depth. Then we experience, The Real Kailas and the Spirit, the *Śiva* within. When the inner screen falls off we see one homogenous Existence, the Bliss Absolute.

Sometimes the external screen may fall off giving a similar experience. A Swami visited Mt. Kailas, while he was at Rakshas Tal, he had a beautiful experience. Rakshas Tal has a matchless beauty of its own. The scenic beauty of it is distinctive, lone and breathtaking. The panoramic set-up is more impressive than Manasarovar. The vehicles we travel land us in such a vantage point that the very sight of the tarn drowns us in its enchanting beauty — dark blue water, clear and still, amidst high and low smooth multicoloured mosaic of hills and mounts set in a beautiful sequence, and decked with a few islands under the vast canopy of light-blue sky shaded with dark and bright clouds illumined by the changing hue of sun's refulgent rays. The Swami went to answer the nature's call and got separated from rest of the group. All alone he arrived to the spot and was spell bound by its captivating charm. The distant whisper of a few rare birds, the vacillating sound of the blowing wind were sensational. The descending sun was pitching out its shimmering radiance through the cleavages of clouds. Everything around looked as if dipped in a kind of remote solitariness and in a sort of soothing deep silence. Steadily in no time he lost the track of external set-up, the common perception was missing. Instead he experienced an unusual state of being one with all things around, one with the lake, the sky, the clouds, the radiance of sun, with the people and vehicles around and even with earth on which he was standing! The boundaries between the subject and object, between himself and his perceptions had melted away. The Manifest and the Unmanifest (the *Śakti* and *Śiva*) were simultaneously viewed. Though for a short time, say about five to ten minutes, it was *timeless* in every respect. Everywhere, at all times, Nature sings this type of lullabies that can make any person sleep to the world and wake up into the Grand world of the Spirit. But, unfortunately all men except a few, keep their deaf-ear turn to it! Oh! The *Māyā*, The Great Deluding Power! She has captured the attention of all beings! Sometime or other many of us have had some such experience, may be in a less intense way, of the *Inner Self* and its connectedness to a larger *wholeness*. But we might not have it viewed in that line. For e.g., a mother plunged in love and peace, nursing her baby completely feeling one with it, is an experience of the Self, the Self has expanded to include the baby within. Similarly a husband in an elevated state of mind enveloped in love and joy hugging his wife or a saint loving the devotees of God is an experience of one's own Self, the subject extended to include the object of attention within itself. The Swami's experience and these examples make us understand human consciousness is not limited to the individual but is merely a apparent part of the indivisible Cosmic Consciousness. This truth is the basis of all spiritual experiences.

Human birth is a rare opportunity. Human body is an appropriate vehicle to transcend Nature. Human life is a magnificent gift of God, unique in every respect. We need to live a richer life, rich in morale and spirituality. Let us raise it, elevate it beyond the range of mental conceptions and physical limitations. Let us rise beyond the relative, conditioned and

fettered entanglements of the ever changing phenomenal life of two days in this world, so that we discover ourselves as the ever-free, ever-blissful, ever-existent Reality. Every human being, be him/her in any state, is eligible and is qualified for a spiritual life. None can say "I am not eligible because.....". We have to lift our hearts, fill them with faith, confidence and enthusiasm. Nothing great can be achieved without enthusiasm; the enthusiasm of a little boy going for a picnic – lively, fresh, delighted, spirited, earnest, one-pointed and persevering. We should not delay, William James of Harvard University said, "if you are going to change your life, you need to start immediately 'now and here', and do it flamboyantly". And, there is the saying of St. Francis of Assisi — "start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you find you are doing the impossible." If we learn to love the task, the impossible becomes possible. We have to make a commitment and stay committed. Then the success follows.

Finally, as a part of preparation for a successful pilgrimage, we have to feel concern for our fellow beings. Success does not mean absence of failures, it means attainment of ultimate objectives. It is like winning the war, and not every battle; but utilising every battle to prepare for the war. The war is inner conquest leading to eternal Freedom. Spiritual striving is cultivation of a definite attitude. The conquerors and the victors do not do different things but they do things differently. We shall do the same things what we are doing now, with a revised vision/attitude with a new goal: as a service unto the Lord, for Spiritual realisation.

A person by named Rabbi had two teen-aged daughters, the younger died. He himself being in great distress could not comfort his other daughter. So, he wrote to Albert Einstein pouring out his harrowing agony. Einstein's reply was: "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest— a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison house for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison house by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of Nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the strivings for such achievements is in itself a part of *liberation* and a foundation for *inner security*."

Here the most important message that has been conveyed is *the liberation of the soul* and attainment *inner security*. When we try to extend our compassion to all living beings and embrace the whole of Nature, our consciousness expands to cosmic levels to find oneness with it; the within me is hugging the *Śiva* behind the universe. Service to a being is a service to the Consciousness behind that being, i.e. it is direct worship to the *Śiva*, the One standing behind as an "Uninvolved Eternal Witness". We lift ourselves to unknown heights of being one_with God through service, love and compassion to all beings. In the light of enormous knowledge possessed by the philosopher and writer – Aldous Huxley, he was asked at the last moments of his life, what in his life, if any, he would have done differently. His reply was, "I would have been a little kinder". Kindness, compassion and service are indeed, the heart of spirituality. We cannot help ourselves without helping others; we cannot enrich our lives

without enriching others; we can't prosper without bringing prosperity to others. It all means expansion of consciousness, widening ourselves as if. Be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and suffering, tolerant of the weak and wrong, indifferent towards the wicked and loving to all. If we seek compassion from God, we have to be compassionate towards all beings. Then only we know what compassion actually means and prove its immediate need in our life. Sri Ramakrishna emphasised on realising God and serving God dwelling in all. That means each one should lead one's own life in such a way that he/she not only attains spiritual realisation and is freed from all bonds but also is able to promote the welfare of others. We have to realize the God-head in the innermost core of our being; then we have to experience Him as manifest in all beings, and then offer all possible services with humility. This is the ideal and the integral path, the essence of all the four *Yogas* – *Jñāna*, *Bhakti*, *Dhyāna* and *Karma*. We do our spiritual practices; and as we progress in our spiritual path, let us try to be of services to others — this is twofold way. Through it we gain purity, experience the Divine presence, attain pure love for God, and great joy within. Einstein said – “Try not to be a man of success but rather try to be a man of value; (success shall be at your command)”. Moreover real joy exists in giving and not in receiving. And, both in spiritual as well as in secular fields, no person was ever honoured for what he received; honour has been always a reward for what he gave. So, let us give to be one with all and one with God.

Some may find it easy to implement the above attitudes and practices in one's own life seeking a real spiritual conversion, for others it might be a bit more difficult. But, the one truly seeking to reach the summit of spiritual realisation in fulfilment of the goal of human life, shall be able to realise them in one's life inspite of all obstacles and hindrances. A great person said “I won't mind failing again and again by putting in all my efforts in a cause that will ultimately succeed than succeed in a cause that would ultimately fail”. Here the reference is to the two opposite paths – the spiritual and the worldly prospects. By the Divine grace we are on the path that ultimately succeeds. Let us cast-off all fears and doubts and walk on that Great path. Any amount of reading or thinking does not make us Spiritual. Spiritual development (The destruction of old tendencies and manifestation of Divinity) is a gradual process of unfoldment. The spiritual awakening is a gentle awakening rather than uprooting an unpleasant fortress by force and building a pleasant castle in its place. It is like the blooming of a flower, or fog condensing overnight and shining as dew-drops at dawn — silent, unseen. It is how smoothly and naturally the child-hood disappears and youth appears, in the same way our worldly awareness and worldly-vision disappears and spiritual awareness and seeing everything in a spiritual context appears. It is as if we are seeing godly everywhere being ourselves blissful gods with godly nature. Worldly version gradually declines and spiritual version gradually dawns. As in the case of anything precious that is adored and treasured, spirituality too emerges smoothly when nurtured lovingly with due respect giving full attention. The human nature is to run away from Truth and wallow in the mire of *Māyā* forgetful of one's ever blissful Self. Yet, the indwelling Self being itself The Truth, the only Eternal entity, and It being the source of all knowledge, purity and perfection, with a little sincere effort, these shall spring up to the surface in a surprising and delighting way to bestow peace and bliss.

Finally we must know and re-affirm to our mind that the joy and all that we seek is within us and not in the external world. The joys, pleasures and happiness we see in the world are like the grass bundle hung in front of the cart for bullocks to move forward to pull the cart, they can never reach it. As Buddha said, it is desires that drag us to the streets of the world, bind us and make us beggars in the world and inflict constant and unending pain and suffering. If somehow I acquire all those things that I think that can make me happy, I see I am not I yet happy in any way and will move on to the next set of conditions for happiness — and this continues till the end of life, but the desires never end. A man went to Buddha and said, “Sir, I want peace”. Buddha replied remove the two words in your statement – “I” and “want”, you will see that what remains is peace and peace alone, the True Happiness. That is —the the destruction of ego and desires— wants and fears that prevents us from turning inward and from living in the present. Desires are the only cause of our staying away from the Bliss of Self and thus we lose the present and fall into the ego’s ruminations and chasing of the activities, and be a prey of all possible worldly suffering. When desires cease, mind becomes still, no thinking, no emotional bindings, no wants, no fear; it is in itself totally absorbed and attentive. The Self shining behind the ripples of mind now peeps out as previously inexperienced peace and bliss — the contented state of mind. This mind we must possess when on a pilgrimage.

Every night should make us thoughtful that how fleeting is this world and how time is fleeing and must close the day with oath to make best use of this human life by manifesting divinity at all levels of our being – physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, in perceptions and actions, in dealings and in transactions. It must be followed by unconditional surrender to the Supreme Lord. Every morning with the getting up, the heart must be filled with thrill and joy of the arrival of a new day, the mind should be cheerful and exuberant, the intellect be buoyant and steady, body and limbs be active and spirited. Let them dispel all anxiety, fear, low-spiritedness and lethargy. Our trust in God, our pure and devoted life and our dedication to an higher ideal make us feel a sense of confidence in all ventures, and impart inner calmness. Our moods too shall not be determined by what other people think of us, instead it shall search for what Lord wants me to learn and wants me to do. We should live our life fully present to the moment, with a constant flow of feeling of gratitude and connectedness to God and the world. This shall avoid living in false mental movies about the past and the future. Nature is constantly speaking through silence and is radiating bliss and peace. We must feel it now and then like small kids and shun being ever too busy thinking about our income taxes and possessions, or about something ‘if only I had been.....’ and ‘what ifs’ or about things that we think we could have said or done differently. Let our minds never get clogged with judgements and labelling. May we keep our hearts open – to understand every one in way conducive to all, to see the best in ourselves and in others, to love all with equanimity. Let no day go without offering at least a few minutes of service to others – if not anything at least a hearty prayer for others.

Let us keep in our mind as a watch word the following words of wisdom wrote to me by an honoured Swami.

“.....Keep your heart and mind riveted to the goal. Have complete trust in God, go easy with yourself along the way. It will wash down all your impurities and defects, make up all short comings and enrich you spiritually eventually making you reach your cherished goal. Mind you, the goal is closer than you might think, provided you are a striving soul....”. Let us strive, let us attain.

A Self-suggesting song runs thus :

*O! My inner marvel, listen to me for a while,
Why are you sleeping yet, the Teacher has arrived, the greatest Spirit
Awake, awake, run to His Feet —
In slumber you spent innumerable lives and slept through millions of years.
Right now he is waiting at your head
Why not wake up, before he goes away,
And witness your Spiritual dawn,
Learn the path and win the immeasurable treasure of Immortality.*

मेरा अन्दर का सुर सुजान
छिनभर सुन मेरा बात बखान ।
आय खडे गुरु तेज चेतन
फिर अब काहे कुहक सुपन
कितने जनम गवायो, युग युग नींद में बितायो
सिरतट गुरु ही बाट देख्यो, क्यूँ न उठ, उन फिरत जायो
चैतन्य किरण तब तो निहार्यो,
ले ग्यान, सो अपार अमर धन पायो ।

Years back, in 1960s a friend of mine studying Indian Medicines took me to the Ayurvedic College at Bangalore to witness a Yogic demonstration ‘to death and back’. The demonstrators were two – a yogic master in his fifties and his disciple in twenties. Many professors, lecturers and doctors had gathered. The master made the disciple lie down on a bench and went on giving commands to close the eyes, to control the breath, withdraw and concentrate the mind on certain parts etc., and within a matter of three minutes stopped completely all physiologic functioning including breath and heart beat, which was prolonged to nearly eleven minutes. Almost all doctors personally tested and were astounded by what they saw. The master then uttered something in the disciples ears and pressed a blunt pencil stub between the eyebrows and tapped the chest — the breathing and pulse were restored. The master told us ‘It’s nothing’ mere control of ‘*Prāṇās*’, ‘the vital energies’. Scientists, very often, are forced to deny what they actually see because the underlying mechanisms are not revealed or not understood. Science is a search for explanations based on certain previously known facts. Yet many things that happen to real people in the visible world just do not fit inside the framework of well-established theories. Twenty centuries ago a woman who had suffered prolonged uterine bleeding came to Jesus of Nazareth and pushing through a crowd, she touched the hem of his garment and was instantly cured. Jesus turned to her and made her know that it was not a miracle, neither there was his hand in it, but it was her own faith that had made her whole. After centuries of slow progress towards rational explanations of this physical world and the laws governing it, even scientists are trying to

have a revised view with something ‘unknown’ working beyond the scientific framing. We are gradually entering a new phase of understanding of principles by which faith, belief and imagination can actually unlock the gates to the realm beyond the normal human perceptions.

The main object of human life is to be constantly aware of That One Divine principle that is governing this universe and our lives. Call it by any name – The God or any other name; that Divine is embedded in the heart of all creatures and pervades the entire universe. Being aware of Its presence in our heart gradually builds up our identification with it eventually leading to realisation. Being aware of the Divine as the all-pervading, all our actions become offering unto the Divine and we find ourselves living in perfect harmony and mutual love with all beings. Since the Divine is the source of love, peace and benediction, and bestows Immortality, bliss and wisdom, and also is governing the universe and all our lives, It is called God or the Lord of the universe or the Supreme Lord. He being a conscious Entity, nay, The Consciousness Itself, understands our feelings and listens to our hearty prayers. He being our Indweller we can’t deceive Him; hypocrisy, lack of faith, doubt and insincerity does not work. Refuge in this all-benevolent Lord makes us fearless, our *here* and *hereafter* get secured and our Soul that was reduced to an ever-lacking and sorrow-stricken state is restored to its pristine imperishable bliss, peace and freedom. The one who aspires to attain this Supreme state, the highest good, should un-conditionally surrender to this Supreme Lord who is the Creator, Sustainer, Controller and Protector of the worlds and the saviour of all *Jīvās*. Forgetting Him, there can never be true happiness to man. So long as the darkened sense of separateness distorts one’s vision, one cannot be free from discontentment and feeling of the void within. And, this distortion can never disappear until and unless the inner eye opens up and it beholds the same Divine Principle permeating all creatures and things. So those blessed souls who look upon the entire universe as the very image of God or a manifestation of God are alone perfect, wise and free. Such a person alone can truly and absolutely see *Śiva* in Kailas, or Kailas itself as *Śiva*. Reaching this Supreme height, he enjoys the rarest bliss of union with God.

The *Bhakti*, *Jñāna* and *Karma* should not be viewed as distinct limbs of *Yoga* or different *Yogas*. They are One Truth expressing through different levels of our being — the heart, the intellect and the body. It is like one water-falls, through a generator, producing three phase current: the three phase current at its other end runs a motor. The fullness in *Janana*, *Bhakti* and *karma* keeps on hauling the life-train as well as keeps on serving humanity. Pure love of God, the *Bhakti*, is in itself the fire of *Jñāna*. The drive and momentum born of the equality of *Bhakti* and equanimity of *Jñāna* is itself *Karma*. The waves of love and compassion in the heart generated by *Bhakti*, and constant light of wisdom in the intellect (*Buddhi*) radiated by *Jñāna*, commingle and flow as a blissful stream of *Karma* for the welfare of humanity and all beings. This *Yoga* state, the state of being united with God, formed by the confluence of *Jñāna*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* — that makes all faculties in man to plough back to the source, the Divine, is called the *Prema Yoga*, the *Yoga* of Love. This love is the true love that enables, enlivens and enthrals. It totally transports the devotee into the climes of blissful Contentment and ultimate Perfection – which flows out as love towards all beings and service to humanity. This love, whoever be its recipients, remains

ever directed to God and invariably flows towards the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Reality. Thus the love of Gopis of Brindavan towards Krishna was the expression of a total merger of their personalities with the Supreme Truth that was, for them, the Lord Sri Krishna. It was not the base, ignoble, fleshy love we commonly see in this world. It was free from sensuality — pure, unalloyed and gracious. The fact becomes clear when we see the context — Śukadeva, the Absolute purity manifested giving out Bhāgavata to king Parikshit facing imminent death. The holy text reaches him as the ultimate saviour and redeemer. Mere hearing makes him attain Immortality. Can a common earthly love story make us immortal? God's godly love for man and man's divine love for God alone can make us immortal. Every *Jīva* is the king of his own life waiting for his/her death in the house of body, living in the boat of dreams in the ocean of transmigration. Salvation comes from love. If the love is deprived of Infinitude and Eternity, which are the essence of the Lord, it shall be a self-insulting, disparaging and condemnatory relationship that defeats the very purpose of love and never matures into the ecstasy of true divine love. Merely entertaining sentiments of devotion without an equally clear and vivid intellectual vision of the Lords supremacy, grandeur and majesty, of His greater heights entering into the Absolute and deeper depths immanent in the universe, and of Himself dwelling within us and accessible to us, and of our eternal immortal relationship with Him — is to dwell on the surface without sinking in His love, a sort of moral balancing to compensate our errors and the endless flow of desires cherished by us in our hearts; sheer foolishness and self-deception. We must truly love God. The pure divine love, does not mean emotional upsurges, neither the tears that trickle down the eyes nor the flooding of illumined thoughts; these are mere dull external expressions of *Prema*. *Prema* is such a state in which the 'I' lost in the essence of God, ceases to find its existence and the God Himself shines forth projecting all good, great and noble qualities and perfection in *Bhakti*, *Jñāna* and *Karma*. Should that God, who is infinite love reveal Himself in us, His love does invariably express in our thoughts, words and deeds. In saints and illumined souls, it is God that thinks, speaks, feels and acts. The true love or the *Prema* is composed mainly of four powers viz., the power of right knowledge, power of forgiveness, power of compassion and power of endurance : we see them in their fullness in saints, for these are the qualities of God expressing His glory. Thus we find them pouring their love and blessing even on those who hate them and subject them to insults, blasphemy and persecution. The power of knowledge helps them to see the people independent of their good and bad qualities, and their power of forgiveness makes them overlook their faults and endear them. The power of compassion makes them take upon themselves others' pains and sufferings as their own, and strive to bring them relief, serve them with love and concern in a selfless spirit. They sacrifice their all : time, energy and resources in serving them. Finally their power of endurance makes them ready to bear all sufferings in their way to serve others and help them evolve to their Divine-hood, and for achieving that end, they are prepared to give up all their personal joys and comforts. If we observe the life of Swami Vivekananda we understand what forced him to toil till his last breath was the Divine within him fully expressed to its ultimate radiance. And, the same was behind his placing of "*Ātmano Mokṣārtham Jagad-hitāya ca*" "For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world" as the ultimate ideal of human existence and as the necessary discipline in the life of a Sannyasin (monk) renouncing the world. With all that, it is God serving man; none can claim

at any time that he or she had done any act of service. It is obligatory for every monk and nun of the Ramakrishna Order of Sannyasa : to dedicate one's life entirely for the purpose of God realisation, and to serve all beings, as much as possible, being constantly aware of the fact that God alone is serving, not I, and that the services are received by God dwelling in every being. By this we move from many to the One, from the manifest to its Source, from the effect to its Cause, from the body to the *Ātman*, from the world to its Substratum, from the human to the Divine, from the man to the God. It is a life of self-denial and denial of *Māyā* – which instills in us pure, essential and independent delight which is beyond normal understanding. In its fully matured state, man sees one that the true love '*Prema*' has manifest in him. In this exalted state free from all nature's bindings, the soul free from all knots and load of *Karma*, is revealing its true being as the Bliss absolute, the Brahman. This is the goal of human life to experience directly one's own existence being merged in the limitless ocean of *Ānanda* at all times, in all state, under all circumstances. This is the true '*Śiva* state' to discover the *Śiva* within, to discover the *Śiva* without and to see *Śiva* in all things at all times and beyond. That is the purpose of our pilgrimage to Kailas and Manasarovar, and in the following section we shall try to understand the *Śiva*-concept in the Hindu context.

The LIGHT, The KAILAS Is

(An experience of a Swami, 2003)

The entire group was resting, it was evening, dreaming of KAILAS

I had reached its foot. My dream took wings, leaving the group behind I moved all alone to a place where I could witness the Great Mountain. The ageless Mountain is shining with its antiquity. The evening sun throwing his last crimson rays is disappearing at the horizon casting an afterglow of bloomed ethereal light on the sculpturous mountain, my reverence getting deepened and my love getting intensified by a whiff fragrance brought by the cool evening breeze. Now, the sky as a lighted background, the silhouetted mountain looks enliven making me stand on my toe to feel its darkening warm embrace, sky sucking up the light within and becoming blue to black. My eyes are becoming wider trying to sense the ancient spirits of yoga masters, of sages and seers who are said to be living in their subtle forms. My heart beat is on an upturn and my heart is filled with awing joy. Soulful fervour is engulfing my mind as the darkness is enveloping the entire landscape, the snow-clad mountain is dully brighter than the dark sky!

The sound of cold blowing wind, a gale indeed, is heard like the sound of thousands of horses and antelopes galloping by my side. I am by myself as if in a dreamland!

I am seeing the snow bound mountain gleaming again aglow! O! It is getting lit up, enliven! I turn back and see, it is moon rising. Dispelling the darkness the moon is proudly posing its cheerful face in the blue sky. Everything is looking as if bubbling with life. Forgetting the short fleeting human life, I feel I have entered into eternity! The patches of cloud and the blowing wind, the showering moon light are bringing inexplicable bliss. The wind driven patches of cloud are taking different shapes; they look as if gods and goddesses have descended to play and rejoice. As if, the celestial maidens languorously are picking up their musical instruments — sitar, veena, flutes and drums and cymbals to celebrate!

Yes, I understand the secret now, You are That! Your sight has cleansed my vision. You are in my eyes, dwelling within the temple of my body, making it possible for me to witness this unique scene, the Eternal dance going on for ever.

You are, I have known now, my Lord, the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer of this again and again appearing universe.

O! Lord of contradiction, the nearer than the nearest and farther than the farthest, the greater than the greatest and meaner than the meanest, You are the unifying principle of the poles of opposites. Seeing Your glory here, my heart is able to sense and recognise the REAL KAILAS, free from all material world of transitoriness – what it is to be Eternal and what it is to be Immortal.

Make me, a lowly creature though I am, being Your child, be able to enter that fragrant everlasting World of Brilliance where You dwell through eternity, the Real Kailas.

So, I knelt before the Mountain with tears flowing down my cheeks and prostrated with a surrendered heart in all humility.

Reluctant to return from there, I stood up. Everything was still and silent. Wind too was moving hesitatingly not to disturb that silence; the Mountain looked intently at me and I, at the Mountain; — The Great Kailas Mountain seemed to be telling a deep secret through that Silence —

“Know thyself, thou are That; That, I am”

॥ हरिः ॐ तत्सत् ॥