

A spiritual journey

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Once in a Lifetime Chance It is a great feeling going to a place where it's a huge matter in one's life. " Revisiting Sacred Ground" N. Scott Momaday had made a pilgrimage which his Kiowa ancestors. Momaday has said," There are certain villages, and towns mountains and plains that, having seen them, walked in them, lived in them, even for a day, we keep forever in the mind's eye. " Just like how Momaday relived his ancestor's trails, I had a chance as well. I was lucky enough to be able to go on such a sacred journey that people would pay in thousands of dollars.

The pilgrimage I would like to talk about is the one I took to a sacred city in India called Badrinath. I follow Hinduism, and in Hinduism there is a saying/belief that if we go on this enriching, and spiritual journey, we will go to heaven after we pass. I have a guru, like a living god, who I listen to and look up to. He took me on this spiritual journey. This spiritual journey had started for me 7 years ago in 2005, around June I had left San Francisco International Airport, and left to my motherland India. I landed in New Delhi, India to be exact. From there we drove to a city called Kasi.

The city of Kasi is known for its sacred river. My guru had told me that in Hindu mythology if you bathe in the holy river of Ganges it will get rid of all your sins. We stayed the night there and we went to the sacred river and bathed early in the morning around 5. Then we went to the temple and did some prayer rituals that are performed after the bathing in the river. Later that day we took a bus from Kasi and drove into a city called Haridwar, one of the beautiful cities in the foothills of the Himalayas. When we reached the

city of Haridwar, my guru told us a little about the place before we got out of the bus.

That is where I learned the myth being told that Haridwar is one of the four cities where amrit (the elixir of immortality) spilled from a pitcher which was being carried by a bird named Garuda. I was amazed by the fact, and my guru said, " this is nothing wait and you'll see more amazing things. " He left me questionable that there were more amazing things than this. We got an auto (taxi) and went to the river because we heard that they do an extraordinary festive every night. This festive is known as Ganga aarti, and it happens at the river banks of the Ganges (Har ki Pauri).

At Har ki Pauri every night at both banks of the river, people are flooded, with an aarti in their hand. An aarti is a lamp lit by fire. After the priests finishing chanting the mantras and show the aarti to the gods, everyone lets the aarti down into the river and they pray what they want, and let the aarti go down stream. I was lucky enough to do that myself. We then went back to the hotel that we had checked into and left the next day back on our tour. We then travelled to our next stop Rishikesh, which is another city in the foothills of the Himalayas.

We were in Rishikesh for no longer than 4 hours because we had to get to our sleep stop. During the four hours that we were there we went to a lot of ashrams (meditation center) and saw many Saints. After the four hours had ended, we went back to our bus and left to our night stop, which was called Nanda Prayag. Since it was night time and we were all tired from the really long day, we went to bed, but I kept hearing the noise of the river really loud, and it sounded like it was just too close. Next morning the noise of the river

and the animals woke me up and the noise was just so close that I had to go look how far it was.

With all my curiosity when I went out to the balcony and I saw the most spectacular view. I saw two of the most holy rivers combine together, the combinations of the two rivers was just so distinct, the Alaknanda River and the Mandakini River confluence. At this place there was a temple ashore of the river. After I went and bathed in the river I had gone to the temple and I had learned the history of this place, it was fascinating. Then we all left the temple to the bus and we left and arrived at our longest stay in our tour, Badrinath. Badrinath was literally the whole reason we went on this trip.

It was known as one of the most holiest, and sacred places to be at. We arrived there later in the Afternoon. After we checked into our hotel, we went and explored the city. And while exploring the city we saw many beautiful temples, and all these lead us to the main temple, the Badrinath Temple. We had to cross over a small walking bridge which went over the Alaknandha River, It went with such force, and if you sit in that water nonstop for more than ten - fifteen minutes, you will surely have a heartfailure, because the water is that cold, and we are at an extreme altitude.

And the most Ironic thing about this cold river is after we crossed it we have to bathe before we enter the temple, even if we had bathed in the morning. When we went to the place we were supposed to bathe, we came to find out that it was a hot spring and this hot spring was ten feet away from the extremely cold Alaknanda waters, ironic enough, I thought so. After we finished bathing there was a ritual which we had to perform. We had to get

into brand new clothes and we had to give the clothes we were wearing to the more unfortunate people.

So after we did that, we went into the main temple, it was enriched with beautiful colors and sculptures all made since the time the temple was created. We had gone in and while we were coming outside, we had ran into a very famous priest, and we all greeted him, and he invited us to come to his ashram, so we all went. There he told us about the main reason of this temple. This temple is only open during Spring, Summer and Fall. They closes the temple, right before we end fall and enter Winter. The closing and opening of the temple is a huge ceremony.

This is the most important ceremony to come to if you have major problems which need to be resolved. He told us that during the ceremony they do many poojas (rituals and prayers) and they have an extremely huge lamp and they fill it to the rim with oil and they light the lamp, and during the lighting of the lamp we all must pray for what we all want most. After they light it they close and seal the temple for six months through the harsh winters. The most amazing part is that even though it snows and rains, and harsh winds blow, the lamp never goes out. I was dumb founded by this statement.

It is said that it doesn't go out because of the bonds of all the prayers and wishes the people had made, it is so strong, that nothing can affect it. He continued by saying that after the six months pass, for the wish you made to come true you, must come back for the opening ceremony of the temple. If indeed you do, you will see that the lamp that was lit is still lit and the glory of the light is just so divine. Since he had an urgent issue to deal with he left

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us in awe. My guru then told me," I told you I would show you something which is even more fascinating. " I was speechless, and we left back to our hotel and slept.

The next day my guru took us to the last village in India, Mana. My guru told me that this is the main source of the river Saraswathi, (the goddess of education) and he had told me that this river is so tricky and mischievous. My guru said that this river after 3 miles this river disappears, it is said that it runs underground and comes back up in a city more down south. After we saw where the main source had come from we saw this passage on the left and my guru had told me out of my whole family to go up because it was a very dangerous path/cave and he said I am the only one in the family that is very capable of going through it.

As I went through this path I experienced the biggest fear of my life, snakes. They were literally everywhere. I had gone through this extreme passage and I got out of this tight hole and I could not believe my own eyes, there it was, The Great Wall of China. I had come back down the passage I went up but this time the snakes were all gone, there was none there anymore, which shocked me even more. I had come down and my guru said do not tell us what you saw.

I was bursting in excitement and he made me hold it in. It was the hardest thing in life for me to hold in. After we left the village and started going back down on the bus, my guru called me and I went and sat next to him on the bus and he told me," now I want you to tell us all what happened. " I had then told them that I went up this cave of snakes and saw the great wall, and

on my way back not even one snake was there, everyone was in shock. That was the biggest mystery in my life till now.

After we came back down we had left back to our beginning destination New Delhi, India. On our way back though we went back in a helicopter, I asked my guru why we didn't use the helicopter on the way up, and he said," you wouldn't have experienced all that you did now if you came on a helicopter. " This was the sacred pilgrimage that all Indians must take at least once in your lifetime, according to Hindu mythology. I now have a dream to go back once again and revisit the same places and relive what did in 2005.