



LAND OF THE HAMSAS

LAND OF THE BRAVE

Mystical Revelations from Himalayan Masters

I traveled from the foothills of the Himalayas, starting from the sacred city of Haradwar. This city, called the gate of Shiva, was where the *Kumba Mela* (the world's largest spiritual gathering, with over 30 million participants) was held every twelve years. I then proceeded by public bus transport to Hrishikesh, where the *ashrams* of great spiritual masters like Swami Shivananda, Dayanand Saraswati and Ramakrishna offered rich yogic and spiritual learning. It is said that the great king Vikramaditya, the brother of Bhartarinath, rebuilt and renovated the cities of Haradwar and Hrishikesh to accommodate yogis and *sadhus* mainly to facilitate the great *Kumba Mela*.

Next, I traveled to Rudraprayag, the town at the confluence of the Alakhnanda and Mandakini rivers. Here Lord Shiva himself taught the *Ghandharva*, Devarishi Narada, the art of music and the celestial symphonies. The *Shiva Bhakti Sutras* were given here later called the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Then I went to Deva and Vishnu Prayags, and from there to the valley of flowers called Nandan Kanan. It is said that two British travelers stumbled upon this beautiful landscape. They saw it in the flowering season when the whole valley flowered, so they called it "The Valley of Flowers". Yogis cannot help laughing at this because during the autumn season, every valley in the mid-Himalayas becomes a valley of flowers. In these valleys the aroma is so otherworldly that it makes you forget this world and its cares.

Going further up into the Garwal Mountains, I came to the foothills of the Badri-Kedar range of the Himalayas. Here the evergreen forest was lush and rivulets of melted ice from the mountains were nectar fresh. Walking on beaten paths leading up to higher regions was like walking towards heaven. With the smell of pine-cones and wild berries, a past life nostalgia arose within me. It wafted me to yogic memories of a land far away yet so near to me. It was the land of the *Hamsas*, the Swans who took flight in *samadhi* to reach their beloved Lord. Such yogis, the *Hamsa Yogis* exist even today in the Himalayan ranges and it is to their abode in the rarer regions that I made my pilgrimage.

They are ever engaged in spiritual practices and meditations, these yogis called *Hamsas*. The *Hamsa* (Soul Swan) is represented as the inhaled and exhaled breath of one's self. The "Ham" syllable is meditated upon as our breath is exhaled, and the "Sah" is meditated upon as our breath is inhaled. This is a *Hamsa Sadhana* (spiritual practice), laid down in the *yogic* book of the *Gheranda Samhita*. The *Vigyan Bhairava* text says the opposite—inhaled breath is "Ham" and exhaled is "Sah," but Gorakshanath put an end to the confusion saying that the mental chanting of *Ham-Sah* could be done either way. He emphasized meditating on the still gap between the "Ham" and the "Sah". As the gap lengthens, our mind stills into consciousness and the yogi achieves *kevali kumbak* to enter *samadhi* of the Here Now!

The *Hamsas* have given up *samsara* (all worldly ways or pleasures) to seek God. Making the search for God, their life's only goal, they practice the *Hamsa* breath (*pranayama*) and meditation night & day. These lofty beings bless and evolve all humanity by their spiritual vibrations. Their miniature counterparts and representatives are the *yogacharya* and *hamsacharya* schools of teachers who help in the evolution of human consciousness by teaching *Hamsa Yoga*, *Kriya Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*.

Now I had already traveled quite a distance along the path to Badrinath, at times by public transport, and at times by hitch hiking. As it was not in my nature to travel much, I tarried for two days at all of these small pilgrimage confluences. My last stop was Hanuman Chatti and then I arrived at the great playground of Shiva, called Badrinath. “What’s life about anyway?” I mused. Suddenly I felt myself a dream within a dream universe.

*The universe but a pale phantom of a deeper order,
Oh Lord only thou dost know thine own awesome
reality!*

There is a legend that Vishnu loved Badrinath and wished to dwell there. Shiva did not take Vishnu’s wish seriously and was lost in *samadhi* for the salvation of existence. So Vishnu took the form of an infant crying in the snowy mountains. Parvati, the consort of Shiva, saw the child and her heart melted. She nurtured Vishnu with love until he grew up. Then both Shiva and Parvati, out of love for their adopted child, gave him the pilgrimage place of Badrinath. Here Vishnu, in the form of the sage Narayana, is established in *yoga-samadhi* for the salvation of *Bharat Varsha* (India) and humanity.

This legend, of course, has deeper cosmic and philosophical implications, such as the evolution of both Nara and Narayana. There is also the series of *avataric* incarnations of Narayana to assist in the spiritual evolution of humanity.

The first day at Badrinath I visited the temple, paid my respects to Sanatana Rishi Narayan, then went to pay my respects to the photo of the monumental *Siddha* Sundernath, as I was honored to belong to and be blessed by his *parampara* and lineage of Masters of the Babaji Gorakshanath tradition. The legendary *yogi* Sundernath meditated in a cave near the temple of Badrinath. I had the good fortune to visit the cave hallowed by this great *Siddha*. Before I entered the cave, I saw in front of it a Margosa tree. It was bent in the same meditation posture as the yogi. This tree usually has bitter leaves, but as I broke

the leaves off the tree and put them in my mouth, to my surprise they tasted sweet. This brought to mind that a similar such tree with sweet leaves is near the *samadhi* of Shirdi Baba, in the town of Shirdi in Maharashtra. Shirdinath is now with the celestial group of Shiva-Goraksha-Babaji.

As I entered the cave I had to bend low. In front of me to the right was an earthen oven to cook food. To my extreme left was a raised rock platform, and to the interior left was another meditation *samadhi* place. With reverence I sat down and the powerful currents of the lofty Sundernath engulfed me. Within moments I was gone from myself. I was not able to have the much desired vision of this great yogi. But I did receive his blessings in the form of dazzling light, which pushed my consciousness to higher dimensions. I felt renewed and deeply privileged at having been able to meditate in the hallowed cave of the Divine Master.

From Badrinath, I set out on my sojourn and search for the *Hamsas* and the land of the *Hamsas*. “Where is this place?” I wondered. Is it true or just stories told by our parents? How could these yogis survive in such cold snowy regions? All these questions rushed to my mind as I lay asleep before my morning journey to Vasundhara waterfalls, Chakratirth and Satopant glacier. I got up early and braced myself for the trek, heading for the little Indo-Tibetan village of Mana. On reaching it, I found the Indian army had camped in the village as the China border was near. From Mana I headed to Bhimpool, a bridge where I had a glorious sight of the river Saraswati rushing out of the snowy mountains as white as milk, with tremendous force. I inhaled the power of wisdom from the Saraswati, bowed and moved on towards the falls.

I was now at 11,000 feet or so and the air had naturally become rarer. At last I beheld the Vasundhara falls with bated breath. The beautiful river Alaknanda melted from the Satopant glacier and flowed over the mountain top as a waterfall.

It was along these tracks that I came upon the wonderful *Hamsa Yogis*. One yogi, Balak Bairagi, told me that all along the Badri-Kedar tracks, right up to Gangotri and Jamnotri, yogis like himself meditated during summer. It was at an altitude of eight to twelve thousand feet that they lived and meditated. When winter came, most of them descended to lower altitudes of five to seven thousand feet, but some still remained at the higher altitudes during winter. Government officials, like collectors, have reported having seen them in winter, and some yogis have been known to go up to those heights to supply food. They practice the *Hamsa* meditation as I explained before. The Bairagi yogi told me that they practiced the *kumbaka* (retention of breath) *pranayama* with the *Hamsa* breath. They alternated it with the *Hamsa* of the watchful breath. Becoming proficient in the science of *kundalini pranayama*, and balancing the breath, they entered *samadhi*.

Samadhi is a supra-consciousness state of ecstasy. The restless mind, the yogis say, contains all sorrow and unfulfilled desires. They transform the desire-filled mind to supra-consciousness and enter into supreme consciousness, a state of blissful God communion. I was deeply moved and wonder-struck by the simplicity of their lifestyle and purpose of life. As I left to go, the Balak Bairagi yogi offered me some roots of shrubs, which I ate. Surprisingly, I felt rejuvenated and full of energy a few minutes after I had eaten them. Then he told me to go and visit a place of caves called the Chakra Tirtha, so I set out, my eyes filled with wonder and my heart full of love for these Himalayan *Hamsas*. When I reached Chakra Tirtha, there were caves and waterfalls, and I came to a cave covered by a flowing waterfall. The waterfall formed the curtain of the cave. Behind the waterfall of the cave lived a yogi. Not knowing his true name, people called him *Khadeswar Nath Baba* or just Baba. This means “the standing Lord Father.”

So I sat outside the cave, waiting for him to come. I remembered again my own past life as a yogi meditating in these regions. In this life I did the same, but it was not as continuous as before. My work was to teach people in daily life and in the lower altitude cities.