



Bhakti Bharat
JOURNEY WITHIN

HIMALAYAS

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SAINTS

WITH RISHIKA ABHIRAMI



May 7-19, 2024



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GUIDE:



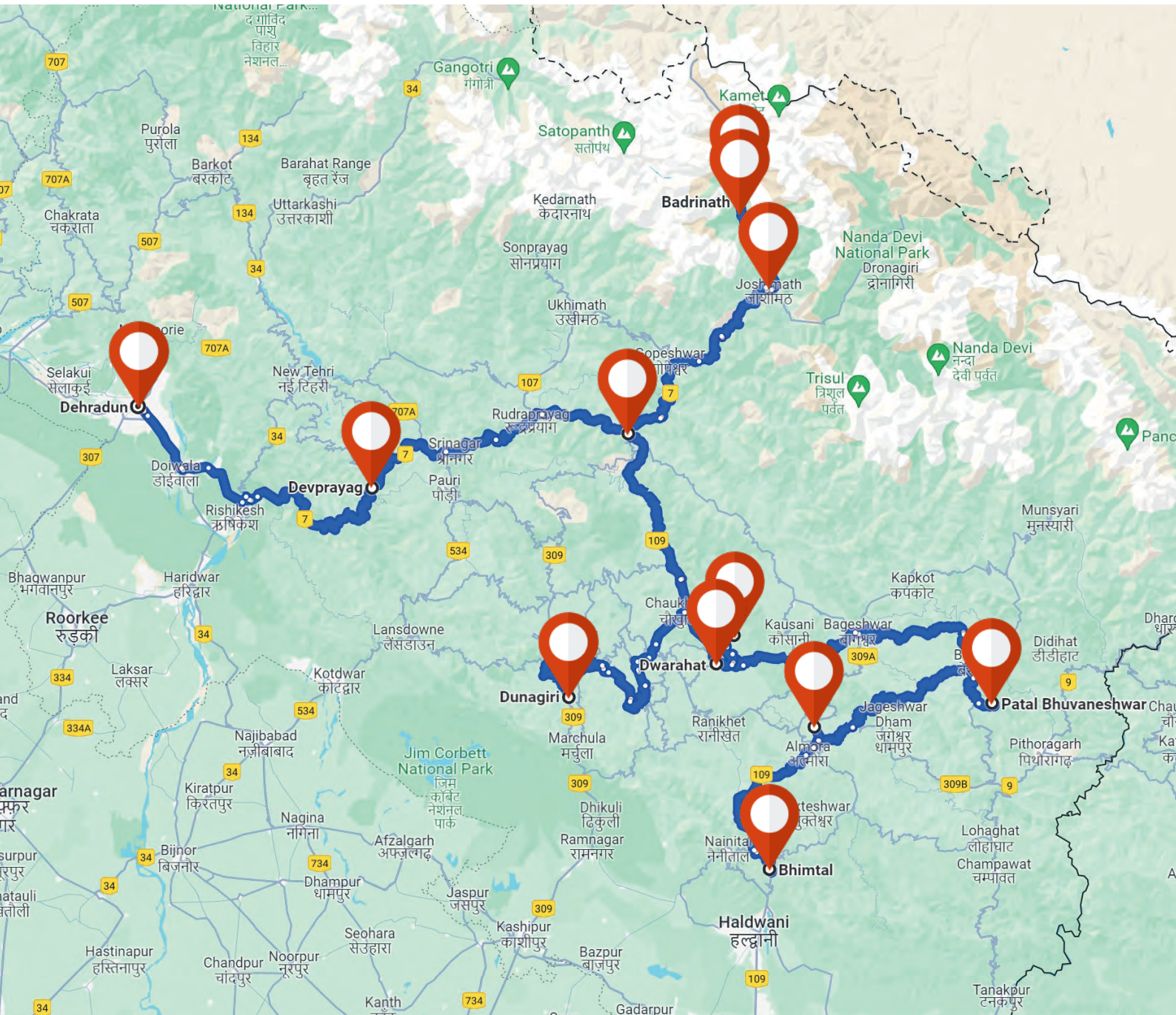
Rishika Abhirami

Rishika Abhirami is an Atma Kriya Yoga teacher with 15 years of experience, a lecturer on the Bhagavad Gita and other spiritual writings of India, teacher of meditation, mantras and mudras. Since 2007 she has been a student of Paramahansa Vishwananda, and since 2014 she has been permanently residing in Vrindavan, India, and guiding many people through spiritual trips across India.



ROUTE

Delhi - Bhimtal - Kasar Devi Village -
Patal Bhuvaneshwar - Dwarahat - Dunagiri -
Pandukholi - Karnaprayag - Joshimath -
Badrinath - Mana - Devprayag - Dehradun





TRAVEL PROGRAMME





Day 1

BHIMTAL

Bhimtal is an ancient location named after Bhima who visited the area. Bhima was a key warrior and strongest of all characters in the Mahabharata epic, where the yogic knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita was given.





BHIMESHWAR MAHADEV

There is a captivating legend connected to the temple's creation, involving Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers from the epic Mahabharata. According to this legend, while Bhima was in exile, he encountered a divine message directing him to build a Shiva temple at that location. Following this instruction, Bhima erected the temple, contributing to its establishment and subsequent significance.

The story goes further, stating that Bhima, with his immense strength, struck the mountain with his mace, causing the emergence of the Ganga River, forming what is now known as Bhimtal Lake.

DAY 2

TIGER BABA

In the Himalayas, there are many saints and sadhus who live in caves and forests. Very little is known about them because they prefer not to talk about anyone other than God, especially about themselves.

Tiger Baba is one of these saints. He is greatly loved by the locals, and they often visit him for advice or blessings. We will also visit him and receive blessings by physically being near this remarkable saint.



Day 3

KASAR DEVI TEMPLE





The Kasar Devi Temple, situated near Almora in the state of Uttarakhand, India, holds immense spiritual and historical significance.

Kasar Devi Temple is located on top a hill in the village of Kasar Devi, around 8-10 kilometers from Almora town. The temple offers a beautiful panoramic view of the Himalayas and the surrounding valleys.

This temple is dedicated to Kasar Devi, a local deity revered by the Kumaoni people. It's also believed to be one of the 108 temples built by a Katyuri king, Katarmal, in the 2nd century.

The temple has a rich history and is associated with several spiritual personalities and seekers. In the 1920s, it became a hub for spiritual and philosophical discussions, attracting luminaries like Swami Vivekananda, who meditated here.



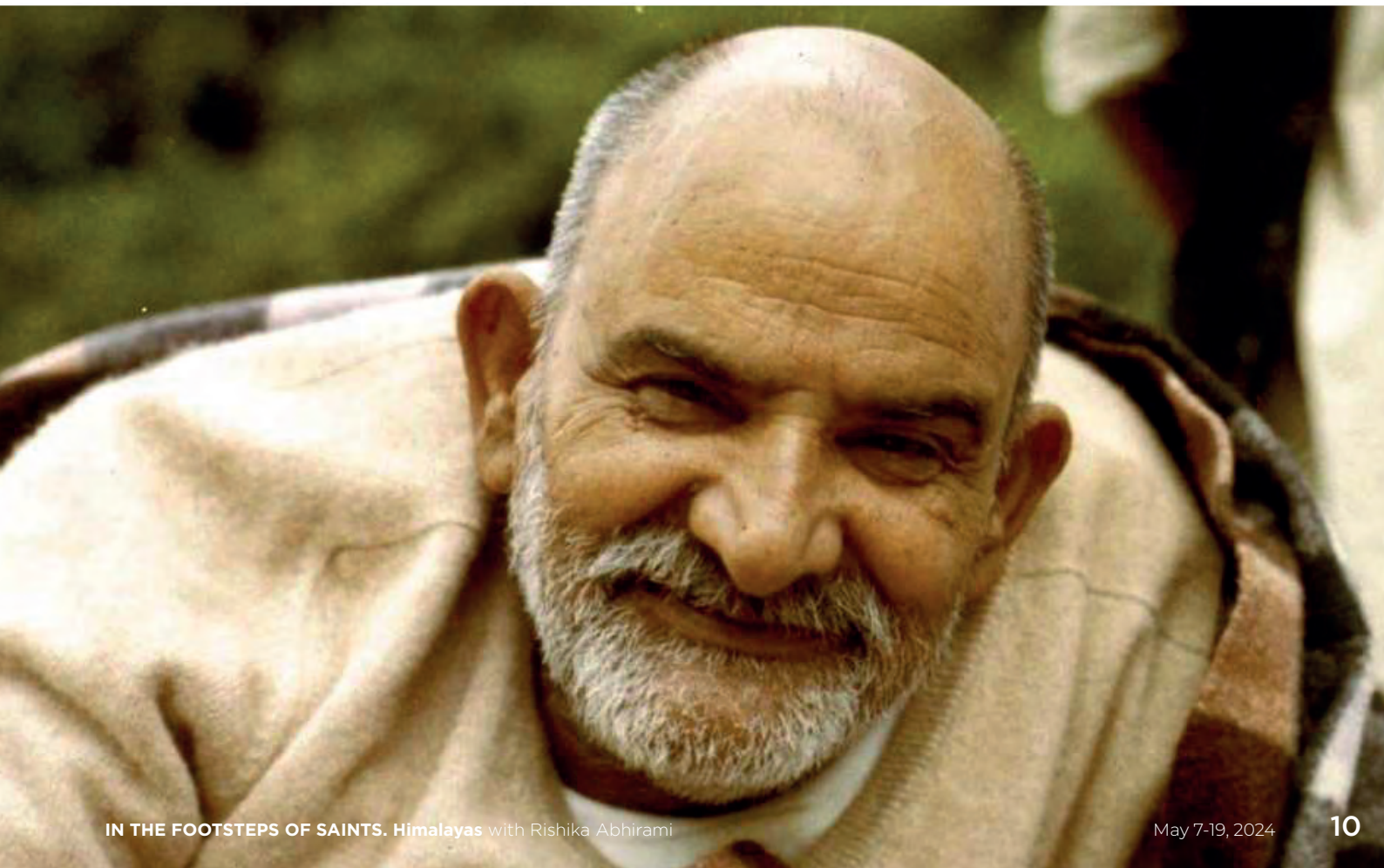


NEEB KARORI ASHRAM

The Kainchi Temple is located in the ashram of Neeb Karori (or Neem Karoli) Baba and is dedicated to Hanuman. It was founded by this great saint in the 1960s.

Baba Neeb Karori Maharaj was born in Uttar Pradesh, India, in a wealthy family in Akbarpur village. Orphaned at an early age, he married at eleven and left home at twelve. He travelled for 10-12 years, earning recognition for his service and devotion in Rajasthan and Rajkot.

In Bavania village, he meditated by a water pond, earning the name Talaiyaa Baba. Eventually, he settled in Neeb Karori village, Farrukhabad district. The villagers built a cave for his spiritual practices, where he lived and engaged with the community.





Maharaj displayed mystical abilities, astonishing the villagers with his playfulness and supernatural abilities. Despite his unassuming nature, he had a profound impact on people from different backgrounds.

Numerous anecdotes happened in Neeb Karori's life, such as the train incident. Once he went to Farrukhabad in the first-class compartment of a train. Seeing his sadhu-like appearance, an Anglo-Indian conductor told him to get off the train at the next station. Neeb Karori got off and sat on the platform. Following this, no matter the efforts of the station staff, the train could not move. The conductor could not explain the problem since no mechanical defect was found – the engine was running, but the wheels would not turn. Some railway employees asked Maharaj in jest to make the train move. Maharaj said, 'I got kicked out of the train and you are asking me to let it move!' An employee replied, 'Perhaps you had no ticket.' At this, Neeb Karori showed them several genuine first-class tickets. Amazed, the train staff begged him to re-board the train and once he boarded the train started moving.

There was an inexplicable bliss in the households that Neeb Karori Baba visited. No effort was needed to find out where he was in the town at any particular moment because his presence could be felt by the spirit of joy and festivity pervading that place.

Neeb Kakori Baba was a family man who managed to take care of everyone in his large spiritual family. He regarded all human beings as his own children and treated them accordingly.



He often said, 'You get tired with just a few children, but I have so many.' A devotee shared that Maharaj once said, 'Why do you come to me? You come to me because of my love for you.' He nurtured the concept of vasudhaiva-kutumbakam (the world as one family) and would say that love binds all together.

In 1973, Neeb Kakori Baba left his physical form in Vrindavan, leaving behind a legacy of divine presence.

<https://babaneebkarorimaharaj.com>





PATAl BHUVANESHWAR

The Patal Bhuwaneshwar Temple is a fascinating and significant temple located in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, India. This temple is an underground cave temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It has existed for thousands of years and holds immense spiritual energy for many spiritual aspirants who come here to meditate. Legend holds that within this underground cave resides Lord Shiva and a pantheon of thirty-three crore (330 million) gods.

Ancient legends recount how King Rituparna of the Sun dynasty (Surya Vansha) stumbled upon this cave during the Treta yuga. Recorded in the Manas Khand of the Skanda Purana, it's said that certain doors, now closed, were once open years ago. Despite these accounts, the cave's depths remain largely uncharted.

Patal Bhuwaneshwar is associated with the epic of Mahabharata, where it's said that the Pandava brothers meditated here and received blessings from various deities.

Furthermore even Adi Shankaracharya visited Patal Bhuwaneshwar in 1191 AD along with countless other saints. Venturing into the cave requires navigating through dimly lit passages while gripping protective iron chains for guidance.



DAYS 4-5

DVARAHATA

In the mountain village of Kukuchina in the Dvarahata region, there is a place of incredible energy and power – the cave of Mahavatar Babaji.

The first disciple of Babaji, who began to spread Kriya Yoga among ordinary people, and not monks or ascetic hermits, was the family man Lahiri Mahasaya, and this is the cave where their first meeting with Babaji took place. This encounter was no accident. Lahiri Mahasaya was a disciple of Babaji in his previous incarnations. At this place, this revelation came to him, as well as the realisation that it was in this cave that they lived and meditated together with the Master.



MAHAVATAR BABAJI



The mystical immortal yogi Mahavatar Babaji is known as the founder of all Kriya Yoga traditions. He comes as Guru to great spiritual Masters such as Lahiri Mahasaya, Sri Yukteswar Giri, Paramahansa Yogananda and Paramahansa Vishwananda.

Many people first got to know about Babaji in the late 19th century thanks to Paramahansa Yogananda and his book 'Autobiography of a Yogi', which had a significant impact on the proliferation of yoga and meditation in the West and influenced famous world innovators such as Steve Jobs.

Although His nature allows Him to be anywhere at any time, Mahavatar Babaji's association with the Himalayas is often mentioned in spiritual literature and teachings, suggesting that He often maintains His presence in these places.





There are 1,000 steps leading up to this temple dedicated to Dunagiri Devi, form of Goddess Durga or Shakti. It is the same mountain that is mentioned in the Ramayana epic, which Hanuman brought to the battlefield because of the healing herb that grew only on this mountain. That herb was needed to cure the injured Lakshman, the brother of Sri Rama. Apart from its spiritual significance, Dunagiri also attracts trekkers and nature enthusiasts. The region offers picturesque landscapes, serene forests, and panoramic views of the Himalayas.

The trek to the temple involves traversing through dense forests and ascending steep trails, providing an adventurous experience for those seeking to visit the temple. We will meditate here, do a joint practice of Atma Kriya Yoga and receive the blessing from the Saint who lives in a small cave directly opposite the temple, and whom Devi, according to him, constantly visits.

Day 6

PANDUKHOL ASHRAM

This is the dwelling place of the five Pandavas from the Mahabharata during their journey to the Himalayas after the battle of Kurukshetra. Here, they lived and meditated.



The top of the mountain now has an ashram where sadhus live. A Saint from the Dunagiri Devi Temple lived here for a long time where it is said Mahavatar Babaji once appeared to him. In a small temple here, you can see the murti of Babaji and His sister Sri Mataji.



Day 7

ADI BādRI

Adi Badri - one of the five temples of Pancha Badri, where Lord Vishnu spends His winter every year.

The temple complex of 16 temples is located 17 km from Karnaprayag and literally translates as 'primordial'. It is considered to be the first Temple of Pancha Badri (five temples of Badri) and we will visit it on the way to Karnaprayag. Tradition says that Lord Vishnu stayed in Adi Badri during the previous Satya, Treta and Dvapara yugas. And now, in Kali yuga, although, according to the Scriptures, He lives in Badrinath, every winter, when the road to the mountains is closed due to weather conditions, devotees can offer their prayers to Him here, in Adi Badri. In the temple there is a black stone murti of Lord Vishnu holding a mace, a lotus and a chakra.





KARNAPRAYAG

Karnaprayag is a small town on the way to Kedarnath and Badrinath at the confluence of two sacred rivers, Alaknanda and Pindar.

Karnaprayag is one of the five places where rivers merge, hence these are energetically power places. The five prayags are Vishnuprayag, Nandprayag, Karnaprayag, Rudraprayag and Devaprayag, each of which is a pilgrimage site. There is an ancient temple of Uma-devi at the confluence of the rivers in Karnaprayaga.

It is also the place where Karna, the hero of the Mahabharata and a contemporary of Krishna, meditated and worshipped the Sun god for many years. In some sources, Karnaprayag is the place where Lord Krishna performed the cremation of Karna. In order to defeat Karna on the field of Kuruksetra, Krishna Himself got off His chariot and, in the form of a brahmin, asked Karna for his punya as alms. Karna gave all his services to the brahmin in the form of his blood, and Krishna rewarded Karna with the Darshan of Visvarupa. Karna asked the Lord to cremate him in a virgin land where there is no one else. Karnaprayag became this place.



Day 8

JOSHIMATH

Joshimath (from Sanskrit Jyotirmath, which means ‘abode of light’) is a small town 250 km from Rishikesh, located at an altitude of about 1900 m. With incredible views of the Himalayan Mountains, Joshimath is a sacred place on the pilgrim trail to the Himalayas.

Joshimath, which is home to one of the 4 monasteries founded by Adi Shankaracharya, is situated on the slopes of the Math Mountain. It was here, in one of the local caves, that Adi Shankaracharya lived and gained sacred knowledge. The large tree that He sat under still grows there at the entrance to the cave. It was here, in one of the local caves, that he achieved enlightenment. It is here too that the ancient temple of Narasimhadev, with a self-manifested Shaligrama, is located. Narasimha is God in the form of a lion-man. There is also a beautiful temple of Sri Krishna in His Krishna-Narayana form and deities of our Beloved Nava Durga Ma.





ADI SHANKARACHARYA TEMPLE

The life of Adi Shankaracharya (788-820) is full of wonderful events. He was born into a brahmin family in the southern state of Kerala, in the village of Kaladhi. His parents were childless for many years. They prayed to Lord Shiva to give them a child, and he appeared to them in a dream and offered them a choice: many good sons who would live a long, blessed life, or one son who would leave early, but become a great sage. The parents made a choice, and soon they had a son, who was named Shankara.

His father died when Shankara was just five years old. At this age he began to study the Vedas, showing amazing abilities. At the age of eight, when the period initially allotted to Shankara for earthly life expired, in front of his mother's eyes he was grabbed by a crocodile and released only when the woman agreed with her son and gave him the blessing to become a sannyasin, a monk.

So, at the age of eight, Shankara left his home to get an education and became a student of Govinda Bhagavatpada. Under his guidance, Shankara studied many scriptures such as the Vedas, Brahmasutras, Upanishads, etc. Everyone was amazed by his talent.

From the age of 12, Shankara travelled extensively throughout India and participated in public philosophical debates with representatives of various orthodox schools.



He wrote many Shaivite and Vaishnava hymns, created several philosophical treatises and commentaries on the scriptures – more than 300 texts are attributed to his name. Shankara lived in a time of political instability and religious rivalry. Numerous religious movements in India, such as Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, had to compete for recognition and followers. At that time Adi Shankaracharya presented a new notion in the development of religious thought.

Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy has always been clear, direct and profound. He supported the existence of the One Supreme Entity, which is Brahman. All deities are different forms of the same Supreme Being. According to Adi Shankaracharya, to achieve liberation, a person must identify his/her true Self with God.

The central theme of his writings is the knowledge of the true identity of the individual Self.

‘I am other than name, form and action.
My nature is ever free!
I am the Self, the supreme unconditioned Brahman.
I am pure Awareness, always non-dual.’

— Adi Shankara, Upadesasahasri 11.7

Adi Shankaracharya left this earthly plane at Kedarnath, which is the eternal abode of Lord Shiva high in the Himalayas. He left by dissolving into a rock and leaving no trace of his physical body. Behind the Kedarnath temple, this place is still revered. He was 32 years old, he lived a short, - but outstanding life as a great thinker.



Day 9

YOGDHYAN BADRI

Yogdhyan Badri is located in Pandukeshwar. This temple is as ancient as the main Badrinath temple itself.

King Pandu, the father of the five Pandavas, meditated on Lord Vishnu here to purify himself from the sin of killing two mating deers, who in reality were a married rishis couple. The sons of Pandu were born here, and years later, having defeated their Kaurava cousins in a war, they came here to repent.

The murti of Lord Vishnu in the Yogdhyan Badri sanctuary was installed by King Pandu himself, who later left his body here. At this location, Vishnu sits in a meditative posture, which is why he is called Yogdhyan (meditative) Badri. A human-sized murti is carved from a huge Shaligrama stone.

Yogdhyan Badri is also the winter residence for the murti of another temple, Badri Narayana in Badrinath. It is brought here when everyone leaves Badrinath before the onset of winter.



Day 10



BADRINATH

The town is located high in the mountains. Only one village, Mana Village, is slightly higher. The temperature in Badrinath may drop to plus 6 degrees. In addition, it is quite windy in the mountains.

Another name for Badrinath is Narada Kshetram, because Rishi Narada achieved Moksha (Liberation) here. Brahma himself installed the deity of Badri Narayana in the temple of Badrinath.



At least once in their lives, Vaishnavas and yogis of all denominations try to get to Badrinath. Here, you can meet yogis who are not affected by the cold, meditating naked in the snow, sustaining their bodies with just prana and water. The Vasundhara Waterfalls and the cave where the Mahabharata and the Srimad Bhagavatam were written by Vedavyasa are also situated in the Badrinath area. It was here that the Pandavas came to journey further into the mountains to the Satopanth Lake after Sri Krishna left the Earth. The Skanda Purana says, 'There are many sacred places in Heaven, on Earth, and in Hell; but none of them can compare with Badrinath.'

VISHNU PADAM

This is the sacred place where Narayana set His Foot upon the Earth, and on a huge stone, one can clearly see His one-meter-long Footprint. At that blessed spot, there is a cave where Baba lives. Baba is a very hospitable local who would be happy to meet us



INDRA sava





A sacred place near Badrinath that only local sadhus know about. It is here that Mahavatar Babaji meets the saints. We will visit this place with one of the local Swamis and meditate where the Great Masters sit in the same circle with the Eternal Yogi Mahavatar Babaji.

From Rishika Abirami's satsang, June 2022

'Jay Gurudev!

I would like to share a story that happened to us. Earlier, every time before a trip to Badrinath, I felt certain anticipation of deep spiritual experience, but this time the anticipation was special. Probably, it was because that, when we had been on the Dunagiri Mountain not far from Babaji's Cave, we had met a sadhu there, who is believed to be a local saint. He lives at a temple and he receives the Divine Mother's darshan every day right in his cell, where the Divine Mother comes Herself.

We visited him with our group, and at the end of our visit, he gave us his blessing. When he heard that we were planning to go to Badrinath, he said it was very good and that 'in Badrinath you will meet Sriman Narayana and who knows who else you will meet there, perhaps, the Divine Mother Herself will come to see you'.

On the night before the departure, I had a very warm dream with Guruji in it... I felt the presence of Gurudev all morning on our way to Badrinath, the presence of the Divine within my heart, and His very strong inner guidance. When we arrived, we went to Vishnu Padam immediately, it is Narayana's footprint located at the foot of the Narayan Parvat Mountain on the side of Badri Vishal, the temple of Badrinath.



We bowed to this footprint and afterwards we had an Om-Chanting practice there, which was very strong, and some participants shared later that they had never felt anything like this before. We felt the presence of Mahavatar Babaji and all the Masters, and there was a lot of light and energy coming from our circle. Few other pilgrims, who were also visiting Vishnu Padam, would sit around our circle, meditate and sing Om with us. It was marvellous.

After the Om-Chanting, we went to see my acquaintance, Swami Ramdas, a sadhu, who lives at the foot of the Narayan Parvat Mountain. I met him for the first time during my previous visit to Badrinath. When we came to his cell, he asked where we had been before, and we said that we had gone to Bhavishya Badri. Swami said that the last time we met, he wanted to show me the place called Indra Sava, a plateau, where devas and saints, great masters, such as Mahavatar Babji, Sundarnath Baba and other saints worshipped in the area, meditate, and also saints from the entire world meet there on the Narayan Parvat Mountain, which is located right behind the wall of Badri Vishal, the main temple of Badrinath. This place is considered very blessed, and Swami Ramdas said that he could take us all there, if we take the chance...

Of course, many from our group were keen on going, because even the name of our trip was 'Following the Footsteps of Mahavatar Babaji'. Before that, we had visited Babaji's Cave, where he once initiated Lahiri Mahasaya, a famous Kriya Yoga master. We had reached Badrinath, where Babaji dwells invisibly, and where the actual place of his meditation, his asana - a large stone - is located.



Of course, we wanted to visit it, but, as we were on a very tight schedule, and this place had not initially been on it, and also because Swami said that the track was 5 km one-way, we decided to start at 4 a.m.

No sooner said than done. It was interesting to watch Swami Ramdas' positivity of mind and his absolutely 'childish' spirituality, which was very gladdening. I think they are real saints, because they have 'childish' hearts and very sincere attitude towards everything they do - their sadhana, prayer, walk around all those places. It was incredible to watch that, of course.

Half an hour after the beginning of our trip, quite a heavy rain started, but Swami Ramdas met us with shining face and said 'What a beautiful weather for the ascent, see how the masters favor you'. And with this joyous attitude, he dragged us up. I can say that the track was indeed hard, but not very long; occasionally we had to climb sheer cliffs and narrow footpaths. Considering that it was wet and slippery, it was indeed a challenge.

When we reached Indra Sava, Swami Ramdas showed us several large rocks that looked like platforms, worshipped by local saints as asana stones of Mahavatar Babaji, Sundarnath Babaji, Hanuman, Garuda and other saints and demigods. Babaji is always in the middle, and around him, a bit lower, sit the other saints and devas. Swami told us to climb the rock believed to be the place where Babaji was sitting. We doubted a little, if we were eligible to sit there too, but he said it was ok, and that we would sit on Babaji's lap.)) We sat and started meditating together and singing Om. I had a feeling that the mountain itself, and this stone, and everything around us was singing Om loudly.



The entire space was vibrating with the Om mantra. Immediately, I thought how great it would be to have an Om-Chanting with everyone there, but this time it was impossible, so we decided to include Indra Sava into our next pilgrimage, so that the grace of this place could also pour on its participants.

At some moments, we were even higher than the clouds on this mountain, and the views were amazing. Interestingly, the entire plateau was densely covered with strawberry plants that bloomed with red flowers, and I remembered Strawberry Fields Forever;). People use flowers of this strawberry to cure ocular diseases, and all animals, even carnivores, who live on that mountain, are always friendly to humans, and never attack.

Right after we started meditating on Babaji's stone, the rain and cold ended and the sun appeared. Probably, many had expected to see Babaji or somehow feel him. We didn't see Him, but we felt very blessed indeed. Interestingly, on our way back, we met an eagle, first one, then another one, and the second eagle was half white. As you know, Garuda is Mahavishnu's vahana, and it was a sign to us that Mahavishnu, Narayana was present with us, that He was with us on that trip.'



Mana VILLAGE

This is the northernmost village in India: 'the last one', as the locals call it. Here we will visit Vasundhara Waterfall and Vyasadeva Cave. We will meet with local saints and sadhus living in caves on the mountain, where Narayana Himself performed tapasya for thousands of years. We will also visit the Bhima Pool Bridge which is 3km from Badrinath, just beyond Mana. Bhima made this bridge for his brothers and Draupadi to help them cross the stormy Saraswati River.





VYASADEVA CAVE

The caves of Vyasa and Ganesha are located in the village of Mana, 400 m from each other.

Sri Vyasadeva is the spiritual master of an entire era. Vedic knowledge, which had previously been transmitted orally, was made available by him in written form.

One day, the great sage Vyasa thought about how to help people return to God. Vyasadeva saw that it was very difficult for to understand the language of the Vedas and its content. Even Brahma, the creator of the universe, needed clarification from Lord Narayana. Then Vyasadeva divided the Vedas into four parts: Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Rig Veda and Atharva Veda, and wrote them down so that people could follow and practise them. In addition, he wrote down Puranas, Mahabharata, Samhitas, Brahma Sutra and other important texts. However, it is Srimad Bhagavatam that Vyasadeva considered the most important of all his work.

When Vyasa decided to write down all the Vedas, he realised that this was an impossible task for one person, so he asked Brahma for advice. Brahma said that Lord Ganesha could help write the Vedas down following dictation. Ganesha agreed, but on one condition: since he is a resident of the higher worlds, his meal and sleep times are different from those of humans, and if he adheres to the earthly regime, he will become bored, so Vyasa must dictate without being distracted by food and rest. Vyasa agreed, but also with one condition: Ganesha would have to write down Vyasa's thoughts only after he understood their meaning.



Vyasa and Ganesha sat in the Himalayas on the bank of the Saraswati River in different caves, communicating at a distance. Ganesha broke off one of his tusks and used it to write down the Vedas.

When Vyasa needed to eat or sleep, he dictated in such a complex and incomprehensible way that Ganesha had to ponder over it for so long, that it gave enough time for Vyasadeva to rest. Besides the Vedas, they recorded Mahabharata, Upanishads and 18 Puranas in this way.





VASUNDHARA WATERFALLS

Not far from the Bhima Pool Bridge, is a 122m waterfall called Vasundhara. Once upon a time, the sages were engaged in meditation and austerity there, but there was no water. Over time, the water appeared directly from a sheer cliff above the ground and ultimately became a waterfall. These holy waters purify sins, bring health to the body and peace to the mind.





BHRIGU Cave

In Badrinath, there is a cave in which the great sage Bhrigu performed austerities.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna:

‘Among the great sages, I am Bhrigu. Among words, I am the single syllable om. Among sacrifices, I am the sacrifice of japa. Among immovable things, I am the Himalayas.’ (10.25)

In Chapter 10 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Sri Krishna gives Arjuna examples of how, in whom and in what one can recognise Him in creation. He gives examples of all the most outstanding things in the world, and, of course, it was not by chance that He chose Bhrigu to compare with Himself. Bhrigu is one of the seven great rishis who brought the fire sacrifice (yagna) into this world, he is the son of Brahma, born from his mind, and His descendants are such famous gurus as Shukracharya (the guru of all asuras), sage Chyavan (a famous teacher of Ayurveda), Bhargavi (the incarnation of Maha Lakshmi) and sage Jamadagni (the father of Lord Parashurama).

Bhrigu is mentioned in Padma Purana, Shiva Purana, Bhagavata Purana and Vayu Purana.



Bhagavad Gita. The Song of Love, Chapter 10, Verse 25. Commentary of Paramahansa Vishwananda

‘The story goes that the rishis were discussing between them who among the Trinity is the greatest – is it Brahma? Is it Vishnu? Or is it Shiva? So, they decided to test the Trinity!

Bhrigu went to Brahmaloaka, where Brahma was sitting with Saraswati. Saraswati was busy playing the sitar, and Brahma was in deep contemplation, in meditation, so he was not aware of Bhrigu Rishi being there. Bhrigu stayed for a whole year, but he didn't get any attention, so he became very angry and left.

Then he went to Kailash, to Shivaloka. This loka of Shiva is not the Mount Kailash here on earth – it's representative of that loka, but it's not on this physical realm. So he went to Shiva loka and as he arrived there, Shiva and Parvati were dancing so intensely, they didn't notice him at all. Bhrigu waited there with folded hands for the Lord to finish his dancing. In this way, another whole year passed and Bhrigu became so angry, he started shouting saying, ‘How dare you! You didn't even notice that I have come! I am the son of Brahma, I went to my father, but he didn't notice me. Okay, finish!’

Then he went to Vishnuloka, Vaikuntha, and he saw the Lord lying on Adishesha. Maha-Lakshmi was also present. So there also Bhrigu waited. And the Lord was deep in His own awareness. As I explained, when Maha-Lakshmi asked Maha-Vishnu, ‘Why do you meditate?’ He replied, ‘I am in Myself. I plunge Myself into Myself, I revel in My Self-awareness.’



Maha-Vishnu was so deep in His awareness of His Self, in His Consciousness, that He was not aware that Bhrigu was there. Bhrigu became so angry, that he went and kicked the chest of Maha-Vishnu with his feet. At this, Maha-Lakshmi got very angry, but she stayed calm, controlling Herself. Bhrigu, still very angry, was walking away. At that moment, Maha-Vishnu came back to Himself, and rushing to the feet of Bhrigu, started pressing Bhrigu's feet, saying to Bhrigu, 'O great sage, forgive me! I didn't notice you coming. You kicked me, but my chest is so hard, like stone, you must have hurt your feet.' And Maha-Vishnu started pressing the feet of Bhrigu. Seeing how the Lord cared for him, Bhrigu returned to the other sages and proclaimed that among all the devas, Maha-Vishnu is the ultimate one - due to His humbleness, due to His Love, and due to the concern He has for His devotee.'





BADRI VISHAL TEMPLE

The sacred springs of Tapta-kunda and Narada-kunda, in which many pilgrims bathe, are situated near this temple. In winter, the temple is closed due to severe weather conditions. When the brahmanas close the temple at the beginning of winter, they leave a burning oil wick on the altar. Returning in the spring, they find the oil wick burning, surrounded by fresh flowers and sandalwood paste, indicating that the temple service continued unabated during the winter – by the heavenly inhabitants themselves.

There are 15 deities in the temple of Badri Narayana. The main deity of Maha Vishnu is swayambhu (self-manifested). This is the only temple on Earth that Sri Vishnu sits in a meditative pose, just as He did many eons ago when He first meditated here.

There are several legends explaining why Sri Vishnu is depicted sitting, and not reclining in this temple. According to one of them, a holy sage once scolded Sri Vishnu after seeing His wife Sri Lakshmi massaging His Feet. After that, Sri Vishnu retired to Badrinath, where He performed austerities for a long time, sitting in a meditative pose. In order to protect Her husband from rain and sun, Sri Lakshmi took the form of a Badri tree, and covered Him with Her crown. Pleased with this act, the Lord said that from now on this place will bear Her Name.



To this day, Badrinath is the abode of many hermits and saints. According to another legend, Shiva and Parvati performed Tapasya in Badrinath. One day, Lord Vishnu appeared before them in the form of a crying boy. When Parvati asked Him why He was crying, the boy replied that He would very much like to meditate in Badrinath. Lord Shiva and Parvati, guessing that it was Narayana himself, left Badrinath and continued to meditate in Kedarnath. Since then, Lord Shiva has been living in Kedarnath and Sri Narayana in Badrinath.







Day 12

DHARI DEVI TEMPLE

Dhari Devi Temple is located on the bank of the Alakananda River. The temple houses the upper half of the goddess Dhari's body and the lower half of her body is in Kalimath, where she is worshipped as a manifestation of goddess Kali.

Dhari Devi is a very powerful goddess, she is the guardian of Uttarakhand and is revered as the protector of Char Dham (the four main holy places for Hindus: Yamuntori, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, located in the Indian Himalayas). Her shrine is one of the 108 Shakti Sthalas in India listed in the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam.

A peculiar story happened with the temple of this goddess. On 16 June 2013, the original temple of the goddess was dismantled and moved to a concrete platform at an altitude of about 611 m from the Alakananda River to make way for the construction of a new hydroelectric power station. Just hours after Dhari Devi was moved, the region faced what would become one of the country's worst natural disasters since the 2004 tsunami. North Indian floods of 2013 washed away the city of Kedarnath but spared the temple itself, destroyed many other settlements along the way (including Rishikesh) and killed hundreds of people.



Locals and devotees believe that Uttarakhand had to face the wrath of the goddess when she was moved from her mulastan (the original abode) to make way for a hydroelectric project, the initial structures of which were left in ruins after floods. A similar attempt by a local king in 1882 also led to a landslide that destroyed Kedarnath to the ground.

The new temple is now built in the initial place.

DEVPRAYAG

Devprayag is one of the most sacred places of the Himalayas, with an incredible history.

This is one of the most sacred places in the Himalayas, where the Great Indian River originates. It is the point where two major rivers, the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi, merge to form the Ganges River. The confluence of these rivers is regarded as a highly auspicious and spiritually charged site.

Visiting such a place helps purify and renew oneself. Devprayag is considered to be a place where all devas (celestial beings or divine manifestations) take ablution. We will bathe in this sacred water and also visit the ancient temple of Rama.



Day 13





RISHIKESH

Rishikesh is a sacred city often referred to as the 'Gateway to the Himalayas' situated at the foothills of the mighty mountain range at an altitude of 356 m above sea level surrounded by foothills on three sides.

Rishikesh has gained international recognition as the 'Yoga Capital of the World' renowned for its numerous yoga ashrams, meditation centers, and spiritual retreats. It is associated with many saints, sages, and spiritual luminaries such as Adi Shankaracharya, who practiced and imparted spiritual knowledge on this holy land. The sacred river Ganga flows through the city, and numerous ashrams are located along its banks. Here we will visit some local Saints, the famous suspension bridges of Ram Jhula and Lakshman Jhula, the cave of Rishi Vasishtha (one of the seven Sapta-rishis), and participate in Ganga Aarti.

VASISHTHA CAVE

This is the cave where Rishi Vasishtha meditated. In Hinduism, the seven stars of the Ursa Major constellation are also called Sapta-Rishis – the seven great sages. They are considered enlightened beings who played a significant role in shaping the Vedic scriptures and imparting spiritual and practical knowledge to humanity.



They contributed immensely in the preservation and dissemination of Vedic knowledge within the Upanishads and Vedas such as: astrology, astronomy, knowledge of medicinal herbs, laws of nature, Dharma, and intricate rituals founded on their understanding of the cosmic order and interplay between the divine and human realms. It is said that they led a simple life in the wilderness around 10,000 years ago, in the times of Rama.

Vasishtha was the teacher of the kings of the Sun dynasty, into which Rama incarnated, and, subsequently, the master of Rama Himself.





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