

Pilgrimage... with a book

By: Susan M. Griffith-Jones

In February 2009, I took the plunge and published a book. Unknowingly, its journey had already started long ago, high up in the trans-Himalayan region of Mustang in April 2005, when I went there on a journey that would lead me to an in-depth contemplation on my inner psyche.



**His Eminence Chogye Trichen
Rinpoche**

Indeed as most life-turning events seem to begin, it was not a planned expedition, but one prompted by my spiritual Guru, His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche, a great Master of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, who was then residing in Bouddhanath, Kathmandu, as I too was. I was actually destined to go on another pilgrimage that month to a very special place in Tibet. And so it happened that the day before departing, I went to visit my Guru for his blessing as is customary before long journeys.

With tickets bought and visas and permits already obtained, I was mentally ready and all packed up to leave on this expedition... ..when he suddenly stopped me in my tracks.

“Go to Muktinath!” he told me, and even though I was fully coherent in the final decision making process, I could not fail to listen to this simple statement that his clairvoyant mind had detected as perhaps a more suitable option for me.

“Was it protective advise against an ill to befall me in Tibet?” I wondered at the time. Looking back on it now from the middle of 2010, I understand it as a fulfilment of personal destiny, a spring boarding of events and life circumstances that would follow in its wake.

Within a few more days and a plethora of mind shattering realisations between, I found myself in the heart of the Kali Gandaki gorge heading towards Mustang.

But it was only upon entering the valley of Muktinath that I was unknowingly swept into the vortex of the place as I explored its highs and lows, interiors and exteriors as well as the sacred and mundane without any intention of going anywhere in particular.

Consciously realising that I had entered a kind of sub-strata reality where the division between gross, hard-core existence blends easily into a more subtle space of being, this uncharted journey of spiritual awakening culminated in a kind of transcending of the so-called 'ordinary' world.

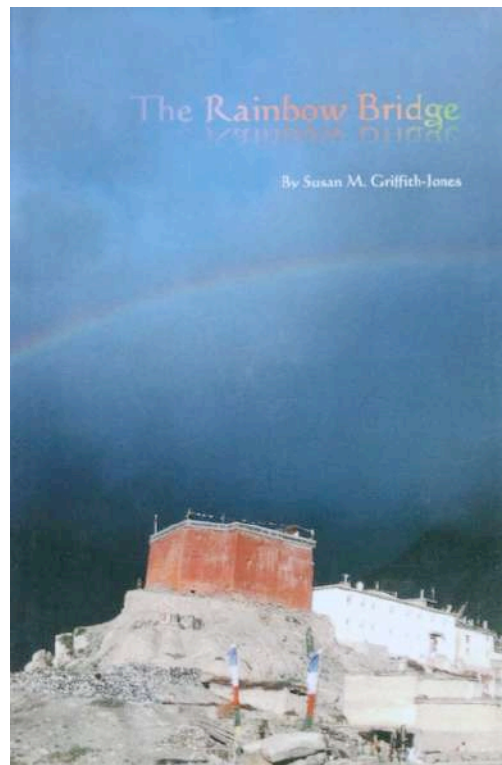


Muktinath Valley, Mustang, Nepal

Just following my Guru's advise I was truly there to visit the place, to understand it, to find out its essential meaning and the vision of the Guru who had sent me on this journey, by just simply being present there and facing whatever occurred.

"Is this really pilgrimage?" I questioned as I watched other fellow travellers pour offerings over the various sacred objects at each of the shrines in the valley. "Everything has its outer, inner and innermost meaning," replied my mind as I just focussed on being there rather than on trying to discover it.

After returning to Kathmandu and shaken in a new way by what had happened, I set about to write it down in a travelogue of sorts. A mystical and yet flowing explanation of the deeper process that had occurred ensued upon the page in the root text, "***The Rainbow Bridge***" that appeared in a series of verses pouring from the mind in an insistent and procreative way.



'The Rainbow Bridge' book

These verses remained in a file on my computer for the next three years as I set about digesting their meaning into my everyday life.

It was only in the middle of 2008 when I had already shifted to the old British hill station of Mussoorie in the Indian Himalayas after the passing away of my Guru, that I set about to explain the meaning of the verses in a commentary to the essential text.

On March 1st 2009 in Delhi, I finally gazed at the cover of a hardback book depicting a rainbow outstretched above a monastery in the heart of the Muktinath valley. Looking across at the twenty or so boxes within which the 1000 copies we had published were neatly stacked, I felt a sense of wonderment of the power of words and their capacity to achieve creative fulfilment.

I had already decided to self-distribute the books as I was keen to learn the process as well as to slightly keep tab on where they would be placed in the market. I also knew that this was not a book for everyone and that it required an audience of like-minded seekers of spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

The bottom line truth was that I did not really know how nor where to start. The only way to begin seemed to be just by beginning. I therefore considered making a fact-finding, experimental trip to one of the cities on my list of India's spiritual centres, Rishikesh, nestled

at the foot of Ganga's mountainous path in India, to see what response it may receive there.

Thus transporting eighty books to the place, on the first night, I stacked a pile of books on the table where I was eating dinner that evening, attaching a marketing poster advertising 'New Book Release' nearby. By the end of the evening, one copy had been sold and I felt euphoric.



River Ganga at Rishikesh

And so it continued, until I had combed the entire length and breadth of Rishikesh, leaving books in cafes and bookshops alike, some paid for upon receipt, others that would be paid for after selling.

Sometimes, the purchasing of a book would happen in an extraordinary way. I would have just piled a stack of books on a table in a public place as I was counting, sorting, or rearranging my bag and someone would appear out of the blue, ask about the book, glance over a copy (and not even open it in some cases) and buy it there and then.

I began to feel no attachment to the books as it became obvious to me that those who were taking them were somewhat like vessels who would transport them to further pastures.

I could not cover the entire world with my 1000 books, but if I were to concentrate on certain key areas where people, who were wishing to reach beyond the mundane and understand their inner truths

would come from all over the world, then they would do the job for me.

So it continued in Dharamsala - Northern India, where the process of distribution had become even easier as I was becoming familiar with the way that the shops worked and also more flowing in my description of the book. Then on to India's great capital of Delhi and Nepal's two largest cities of Kathmandu and Pokhara.

The finer details of what occurred in each of these places and the meetings and conversations that ensued around the distribution of ***"The Rainbow Bridge"*** to both individuals and shops would merit a book of pilgrimage in itself as I was meeting different religious backgrounds, beliefs and moods in which I came to detect a unified spiritual understanding that definitely exists between people of different origins.

So I came to see the act of 'pilgrimage' as ever there, ever present and everywhere in our everyday lives; an ever-changing, ever-increasing swell of being at one with existence, wherever and whenever.

All photographs are taken by the author, Susan M. Griffith-Jones, more of which may be found at www.pyramidkey.com, where 'The Rainbow Bridge' is also available. Amazon and Barnes & Noble are also stocking the book.