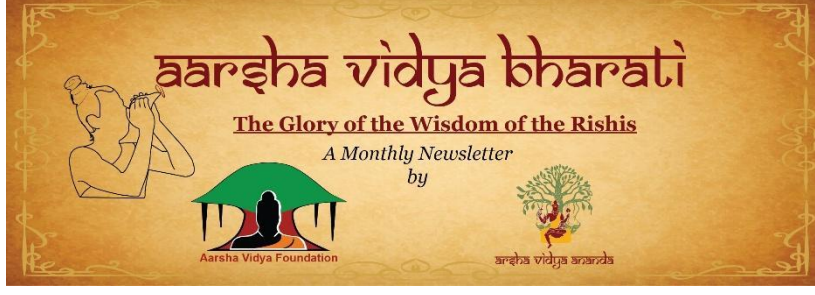


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# Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Apr 2024

Chaitra - Vaisakha 2081

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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## Sā Kāśikāham Nijabodha Rūpa

By Sonali Ambasankar, Mumbai

Based on Kashi yātra with Swamini Brahmajnananda ji in Feb 2024

Kashi is on a different time space continuum. Seems as if time has stopped here since *Bhagavān* Shiva, being time, has settled here. For space, everyone & everything is clamouring to be here, *devatā*-s, celestial beings, human beings (residents, tourists, pandits, pujaris, sadhus, aghoris & many more), animals, other creatures, ghosts, objects, all *cara* & *acara*. Clamouring for, yet celebrating this brilliant effulgent space Kashi. Why? Due to the one & only Shiva.



One witnesses words of *Taittirīya* Upanishad here:

भीषास्माद्वातःपवते। भीषोदेति सूर्यः।

भीषास्मादग्निं श्रेन्द्रश्च। मृत्युर्धा वति पञ्चम इति ।

Since Shiva resides here, all beings want to be near Him, eager to serve & work for Him. If Shiva were to leave, all beings too might go away. Shiva is the *Puruṣa*, the *purādhipati*, the king who rules over the entire city. *Devatā*-s & all beings stay & work here out of love & respect for Him. Maybe all 33 crore *devatā*-s have found physical space to settle here. Other beings soak themselves in Shiva on their visits.

Gangaji, our *nitya vṛtti pravāha*, our mind, takes a northward turn here to meet her beloved, Lord of her mind, Shiva. She stills & steadies down, almost stopping here, flowing with minimum speed, not wanting to move down further. She wants to be with Shiva whom she is wedded to.

Kashi is a whole, complete, miniature universe of the cosmic multiverse, *Viśva* of the *Virāt*. Shiva is aptly called *Viśvanātha*, one who is the Lord of the

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entire *sagaṇa* multiverse. Everything is happening within Him. Nothing happens without his presence & approval. One can't even enter, without gate-passes given by his *Kālabhairava* form. Kashi is like his physical body with Him pervading everything. And Parvati in her forms of *Annapūrṇa* & *Viśālākṣi* resides with her beloved.

One's entire life is witnessed here. Birth to death & life in between, with all chaos, clutter & winding paths that one could take in life. One can get completely lost in the gallis & not reach Shiva. But when you have your Guru, the city guide, who knows how to navigate chaos & convoluted routes, holding you & directing your life, you will definitely end up in the right lane & culminate in meeting Shiva. You navigate highs & lows of the lanes going through many sad & happy emotions to ultimately experience *ānanda*, Oneness, fullness, upon *darśana* of *Viśvanātha*.

One witnesses one's own death at the *akhaṇḍa* burning *Manikarnikā* Ghat. With an ego, which is battered & wounded while navigating the chaos of life, when one stands by the ghat, one realises that one has been trying to hold on to one's ego like holding onto a straw while drowning in the ocean of *samsāra*. Only when one witnesses the burning pyres, that one surrenders & cremates the final straw, the ego in a very matter of fact emotion free manner.



The ego was anyway taking its last breaths as it had now realised that it never had any identity of its own. It was only masquerading to have an independent identity not knowing its reality. Only Shiva remains. And now, life as Shiva, is a celebration, *Ānanda*. On understanding this form of Shiva as *śmaśān*-baba, one

dances with joy at the *śmaśān*-ghat.

With Shiva being me & I being Shiva, where is the separation? There never was any, but I didn't see the Oneness earlier. When my *vṛtti pravāha* is wedded to Shiva, through Gangaji, the knowledge of the Vedas, the only truth I see is *Śivoham*. Only the self effulgent light that is Kashi, that is my *svarūpa*, remains. *Sā Kāśikāham Nijabodha Rūpa*.

Priya Gopie writes 'Kashi seems an ordinary bustling town at first glance. Stepping into its walkways, temples uncover every few feet. Simple, small shrines line regular passageways along with grander edifices of *Viśvanātha* & *Annapūrṇa* Temple. *Darśan* at these was life's blessing. *Pūjā* at *Viśvanātha* Temple is a forever memory. At *Annapūrṇa* temple, as I got up after bowing, the *garbha-gr̥ha* closed unexpectedly. How fortuitous to see & bow to her before it was closed!



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Ma Sheetla Devi temple, on the Ghats was a simple beauty with many deities & an unexpected, opportune visit to *Dandapāṇi* Temple was an experience. *Kālabhairava darśana* was momentous. Hair on my arms stood on end as we stood in His *garbha-grha*. Got a sense of *deja-vu*, like this had happened before.

Sequestered *Rājṛājeśwari* Mandir, allowed an intimate meeting with Devi & evening *ārṭi* to beats of *ḍamaru* at *Paśupatiṇāth* Temple, was awe-inspiring. Gangaji granted a lovely boat ride giving a different perspective of Kashi. Offered lit diyas & flowers to her & enjoyed evening riverside *ārṭi*.

Visit to *Manikarnikā* Ghat was mystical, from many burning pyres, to first-hand experience of rhythmic beating of *ḍamaru* at *Śmaśānbaba* Temple during evening *ārṭi*, other-worldly. The company of Vedanta colleagues & Guru for this most auspicious trip added to the exceptional nature of this *tīrtha yātra*. Lot of occurrences at Kashi seemed purely by chance & grace. Kashi remains a pleasant reverie of the mind, until we meet again.'



Priya's brother, Rajiv adds 'Kashi trip was an experience of a lifetime. As a Hindu, visiting temples, offered devotion to *Bhagavān* in all His forms. Ganga boatripe was

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peaceful & refreshing. I was able to pray to Ganga *Mātā* & be one with nature, the sacred river was a sight to behold. On our early morning trek to *Viśvanātha* temple through alleys, sound of bhajan-s coming from neighbouring shops & stalls filled the air. I felt privileged to offer milk on *Viśvanātha* lingam and also felt blessed to receive *mālā* at *Kālabhairava* temple. The range of temples was a source of peace & inspiration. Will always cherish Kashi.'

Margherita Tessarin says 'I will always remember days in Varanasi as dearest moments of my life. Being with Swaminiji & spending time with her was *Bhagavān's* blessing. Loved meeting fellow students & felt our connections & bonding become deeper & stronger. Experienced value of a *sangha*, spending time, sharing, learning, experiences & our connection with *Bhagavān*. As an Italian, baptised as Catholic, but embraced *Sanātana* Dharma, feel very grateful to visit temples & to participate in *pūjā*-s & worship.'