

# IMMORTAL SELF

A JOURNEY TO THE  
HIMALAYAN VALLEY OF THE  
AMARTYA MASTERS

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## A SECOND INVITATION

*I saw the impossible—  
the ghostly vision of a longhaired man dressed in white,  
sitting cross-legged and weightless  
in the air directly in front of me.*

The life-warming southwesterly winds had finally arrived, painting the San Juan Islands green. Winter was over. The drab display of comatose shrubs and branches had burst into song, padding the countryside with clouds of white and cranberry-pink blossoms—a picture-perfect setting for my forest retreat. I pitched my tent on a quiet mossy knoll beneath a canopy of tall Douglas firs and brawny-armed madrone trees I'd stocked my refuge with a sleeping cot, a small table for candles, some incense, and a velvety purple armchair.

The morning was young and the air sweetly crisp. It smelled of rich earth and pine, sprinkled with a delicate aroma of the nearby sea. At dawn I had let myself glide into the satisfying feeling of meditative silence. Time had yielded to the timeless. Then something peculiar occurred. It began as little more than a pulsing glimmer, a silky sparkle that faded in and out beneath my eyelids. I thought to pay it no mind, but upon hearing a curious crackle in the air, I worked open my eyes. A rush surged through me. I saw the impossible—the ghostly vision of a longhaired man dressed in white, sitting cross-legged and weightless in the air directly in front of me.

Since childhood, I had sensed them a thousand times—a distant group of extraordinary masters. Following that invitation in the Delhi

market, their influence had grown progressively more pronounced. Lately, scarcely a day would go by when I didn't sense them. But not since that day in the market had I seen one of them with my eyes open.

Not through the use of words, but with an unmistakable and deliberate transmission of thought, the master said, "We request that you will now come to our Himalayan valley!"

Then, in a blink, his apparition evaporated, leaving in its place nothing more than a diffused stream of sunlight spilling in through my tent window. After more than twenty-five years, my second invitation had come, as abrupt and unexpected as the first.

But unlike that first invitation, this one created a few previously unimagined challenges. It failed to convey where to go! I'd often thought of traveling there, but I had no idea of how to find their home without a guide or instructions. I knew only that they live hidden somewhere in the remote Himalayas.

These masters are a nearly forgotten legend, and rarely has anyone found them on their own. I hoped more information would somehow come, but I suspected that I might be reliant on my own methods—methods I was yet unsure of.

Everyone in this world is blessed with some kind of talent and purpose. When one's talent and purpose find each other, everything in life that's meant to be seems to fit together. I discovered the talent part early. However, as a child I struggled with my talent incessantly, most often when it contrasted with the learned boundaries provided by my schooling, friends, or family. I wrestled to adjust my unusual perception of things to my conservative-minded social surroundings. Eventually I learned to direct my talent into service for others. Thereafter my worries of it not fitting into the mainstream world became irrelevant; I had found the second part of the formula—a purpose.

During my journey to the Himalayas, I learned that my particular talent was once referred to as *saumedhika drishti*, a seer's ability. Specifically, *saumedhika drishti* refers to a perceptual sensitivity best used as a kind of transcendental divining tool—most useful in retrieving information or knowledge that relates to one's spiritual direction in life.

I had never applied my talent in any other manner. I was now considering using it as a compass tuned to a distant and yet unknown location. Up until now, I had been wholly content with my talent as it was. But now, for the first time in my life, I struggled with the real possibility that my abilities might not be enough. Despite the various unknowns that loomed before me, I felt convinced—even with all its potential challenges—that the coming journey was a vital and necessary part of my life's destiny. I was determined. One way or another, I would find a way to answer the invitation of these mysterious masters. And I would follow this path, regardless of the uncertainties.

## THE LETTER

*I saw myself standing in a green landscape  
surrounded with tall white-capped mountains.  
It was a peaceful and lovely world  
where I instantly knew I had once lived.*

**A**fter an inconclusive year of sketchy research and planning, I booked a flight to Delhi. I was relying solely on my intuition and saumedhika drishti to show me the right path, and for the first few days everything moved along far better than expected. However, today was different.

After acquiring my last travel permit from the Sikkim House, my every step seemed increasingly burdened with a pressing sense of puzzling urgency. By early afternoon, the ensuing restlessness became too obvious to ignore. Having long ago learned not to deny my natural intuitive markers, I abandoned my afternoon sightseeing plans and headed back to my hotel.

Upon entering the hotel foyer, I was struck with a curious wave of attention. Surrounded by suited foreign businessmen and traveling dignitaries, I alone seemed to draw a discreet yet undeniable extra amount of notice. On detecting my uneasiness at being studied, the staff tamed their whispers and shifted their glances, but only to feign a clumsy air of indifference. My curiosity roused, I searched the length of the lobby. I spotted the concierge waving me over from his station, offering me an opportune moment to walk past the scrutiny.

The concierge carefully withdrew an ivory linen envelope from a narrow drawer but hesitated its release just long enough to tell me that a *baba*, a holy man, had left it. For some unknown reason, this baba had been dressed in white and had chosen not to wait.

“Dressed in white?” I asked. Babas typically wore saffron, the color of fire, to symbolize the burning away of impurities. “You’re certain he was a baba?” I asked.

The concierge peered over the top of his gold-rimmed glasses and offered me a mildly pretentious nod. “Undeniably, sir! Dressed in white—and most certainly a baba!”

“He must have made quite an impression.”

“Excuse me, sir?” he replied.

“On your staff. They seem to have taken an unusual interest in my return. I assume that must be why?”

The concierge directed his gaze into a censoring glare toward two of his porters as they hurried by. Returning his attention to me, he said, “Our sincere apology, sir. It’s an uncommon event—a holy man of such obvious tenor entering our hotel. We rarely see anyone other than the usual business men and such.”

“No need to apologize. I’m actually relieved. This all makes sense now.”

Was this it, my hoped-for contact? I was thrilled at the prospect! After studying the envelope—shorter than average length, with an old-world texture—I slumped back into a burgundy leather club chair, kept private between two overhanging palms. I looked over to see the concierge still studying me inconspicuously through the corner of his eye. *Obvious tenor*, I thought to myself, while I ripped open the envelope’s short end with my hotel key. Inside was a single leaflet smelling strongly of incense:

Shri Aaravindha, namaste. Greetings. We have commenced preparations for your arrival. We recommend that you follow this secure route.

My eyes immediately shot to the finish. Hmm. No signature. Just the simple salutation, *jai*.



What remained of the letter seemed particularly odd. It felt a bit reserved and said very little, only laying out a puzzling new travel plan. Over the past year I had taken great care in studying maps in search of possible locations where I intuited, but more often imagined, the masters might be. I managed to catch occasional glimpses during meditation, mostly of a hidden Himalayan valley, but in the end I couldn't say for certain if I'd actually sensed anything of real value. Hopeful, I settled on a hypothetical region, but I knew that I hadn't really determined anything concrete.

This new route proposed in the letter didn't reveal much at all; it stopped short of providing me with anything I could follow once I reached the mountains. However, in its final leg, it did end in an area in which I had originally intended to *begin* my journey—in Varanasi. From there, I had planned to catch an overnight train to Sikkim, and in Sikkim I had hoped to trek stealthily into an eastern Himalayan divide, where I believed I might find the means to begin my trek toward the approximate region I sought to find. My plans were rough, sketchy at best, and with no real correlation to anything substantial.

*Maybe in Varanasi they will contact me again? Could that be why the directions ended there?*

The letter presented a curious new setback—the first part of the route digressed a long way south before heading north. It didn't make sense. Rereading the letter only amplified an unsettling sense that something new and peculiar was afoot. My eyes kept returning to the same two words: *secure route*.

There must be a reason. Had I failed to see something, some sort of threat? Should I be concerned?

I traced my steps back to the beginning of my journey. I was well aware that the Himalayan masters lived in seclusion and that they didn't want anyone uninvited to know of their whereabouts. But it didn't seem reasonable that this route had anything to do with that. I had been especially careful in keeping private any details involving my plans. Even now, with the exception of the masters, only two people knew exactly where I was. Both were in the United States, and both were sworn to confidentiality.

But this puzzling roundabout direction and the odd use of *secure*—there had to be more to it. If this letter was from my contact and was meant to convey some type of warning, it still didn't explain why the masters wanted me to follow this out-of-the-way southerly route, particularly now. In New Delhi, the temperature had risen above 41 degrees Celsius, or 106 degrees Fahrenheit, and traveling through the Rajasthan desert would be like driving through an oven. A popular daily newspaper had reported the weekend's heat-related death toll in the region of the new route: over one hundred people had perished.

I contemplated the possibility of just bypassing the southern stretch, to go directly to Varanasi. But even the slightest thought of wavering rang out disturbingly wrong. This letter's arrival, here and now, was nothing short of miraculous. If the masters had gone to the trouble of sending it so far, carried in the hands of a holy man, their reason for setting this odd route must be a good one! That was good enough for me.

With the help of the concierge, I commissioned a professional driver. Atmaraj was a fit, smartly dressed man with a '50s-style, oiled-back haircut. Initially he appeared a bit too young—unseasoned and in his early twenties—but after a frank conversation Atmaraj convincingly assured me that he'd been driving the lower routes for years and knew them better than most. We agreed on a fair price and I hired him for the duration.

After a few quiet laps in my hotel pool, I searched for an out-of-the-way spot on a rooftop terrace for my evening meditation. The grinding sounds of the city hushed to a murmur, becoming almost mesmeric, as if the city's gods were secretly casting a sedative spell.

Facing the hazy setting sun, I nestled into a comfortable wrap-around wicker armchair. Closing my eyes, I yielded to the inward pull and sank like a rock into a soundless depth. But my meditation wasn't meant to be. Barely ten minutes in, I was vaguely distracted by a delicate flutter of something foreign that brushed through my awareness. The stir evoked a feeling that I wasn't alone. I sensed a watching presence, not in my surroundings but perplexingly half-veiled beneath the

causal inner folds and muted whispers that live amid the first stir of thoughts. Clearly someone was crossing over there to touch my awareness. I flashed back to the time of my second invitation—was this experience going to form into another possible contact?

I waited in quiet repose but soon realized that unlike the second invitation, which arrived as a kind of phenomenal apparition, this time the other being remained elusive and tenuous at best, veiled inside an obscurity of silence. Watching the way silence watches, my perceptions expanded to touch that subtle inner vastness where common thoughts become altogether superfluous.

Then, as gentle as a sigh, a delicate thread of something subtly alluring lifted through the silence. It attracted me to a kind of mental passageway that seemed to open to another world.

*I've been here before, I thought, in the Delhi market over a quarter of a century ago.*

I let myself go, dropped into an effortless abandon, and then surfaced again as a young man living in a past life in a time very long ago. A trainload of images started flashing in and out of my awareness. And then I saw myself standing in a green landscape surrounded by tall white-capped mountains. It was a peaceful and lovely world where I instantly knew I had once lived. This was their hidden valley, where I had been raised as a son to one of the masters I was presently on my way to see.

Pieces fell into place perfectly. A vivid chain of memories, conversations, choices, and finally realizations all came together to reveal my primary reason for having left the valley. A moment later, an even deeper memory surfaced: that of an unrequited vow, a promise I had made long before that life in the valley. It was the same promise I recalled when the master in the Delhi market had helped me first sense it. My circle of remembrance was about to find completion. A surge of anticipation and excitement flooded my body, so strong it nearly roused me out of my meditative state.

I now realized that I had remembered that promise then, when I had lived in that valley as a young man, and it had deeply influenced me in that particular life. At some point, its call had become too

compelling to ignore. And though I knew I wasn't in the right life to fully answer it, I had chosen to leave the valley at the age of eighteen to begin my quest to bring it to completion.

When the master in the Delhi market had alerted me to my memory of that promise, I had vaguely sensed that it was yet to be fulfilled. And though I didn't fully understand it then—not in its entirety—I've continued to feel it calling me, even in my present life.

My thoughts flashed back to when I told the master in Delhi that I wasn't ready. At the time, I felt it was too soon, that I couldn't go with him. I sensed I had something left to complete. I now knew what that something was. The vow was bound to an ancient divination, to a prophecy that foretold the coming circumstances of our present era, the twenty-first century. It foretold of a time when our world would pass into an unavoidable and tumultuous period of upheavals and struggles that would be fueled by a dark cloud of collective greed, corruption, and social denials. And though this isn't an altogether new theme in our world, these events would be far more impactful on our world than at any other time in our history. They would inevitably lead to a global onslaught of cataclysmic incidents that would threaten humanity's survival across the globe. A daunting and exceedingly dangerous revolution in our world's economic and human social environment would ensue. Humanity would be compelled to make an unprecedented shift in its ethical motivations, bringing on another shift that would optimally pave the way for a monumental global healing, leading to the potential genesis of a far more evolved age.

Since the visit from that master, I had devotedly assigned my *saumedhika drishti* efforts toward the retrieval of our world's long-forgotten spiritual knowledge. But until now I hadn't fully realized the unseen force compelling me. It was clear now! The retrieval of that knowledge was an essential part of my vow.

I was about to end my meditation when another memory broke through. Initially it was just a word; I heard the name *Krishnalila*. It was as if the presence that had come to visit my meditation had intentionally stirred it up in my mind. It wasn't long before the name invoked a broader memory that quickly developed to become

remarkably vivid. Approximately one year after leaving my Himalayan home, I had befriended a gentle, compassionate sage who was living on Sikkim's western border near an area called the Five Treasures of the Great Snow. When I first encountered him, he was lecturing his devotees, a group of mountain locals to whom he taught that it was the duty of every fortunate man and woman to alleviate the suffering and hopeless circumstances of the less fortunate. And though he was older and far worldlier than I, after a series of long conversations he became one of my first students.

Then, in a sudden flash, my mysterious watcher vanished. I was once again alone in my meditation.

After that experience, Atmaraj and I pushed south for a few days through Rajasthan's sun-scorched, red-brown cities, finally arriving in Udaipur. After enjoying a day or two of rest, we would change directions and follow the route north-northeast, traveling first through the blue city, Jodhpur, and then head on through Agra. From there, we would stop only briefly to view the Taj Mahal, and then head directly to the city famous for its Kama Sutra temples, Khajuraho. In Khajuraho, I planned to catch a flight to Varanasi, and in Varanasi I would wait.

Hopefully another message would arrive to further instruct me. If for any reason more guidance failed to appear, my contingency plan was to simply follow my original, self-intuited route. I would catch a train to Sikkim, and if in Sikkim a message failed to arrive, I'd slip into the mountains and try to divine my way to their home—an unsettling prospect at best. If that intimidating circumstance did come to be, my departure into the Himalayas would have to be a surreptitious one. Slipping into the deeper mountains through Sikkim is forbidden. Nonetheless, I now had an unwavering sense that I'd find a way, one way or another.

After an early breakfast of chapattis, herbed eggs, and a hot cup of masala chai, I chose to spend my morning touring the historical parts of Udaipur, and later in the evening finish up with a quiet boat ride to the famous Taj Lake Palace for dinner. But first I planned to explore the surrounding countryside and possibly a few ruins.