

## **MOUNTAINS: SYMBOLS OF ASCENT**

by Alan Senior

In the language of allegory and symbol mountains stand for an exalted state of consciousness, whereby the disciple is exhorted to raise himself above the level of sense perception and normal, everyday vision. “*Flee as a bird to your mountain*” Psalm XI: 1 directs us, echoed in Isaiah: “*Get thee up into the high mountain.*” (XL: 9). David worshipped God on the mountain and Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament Mary, after the Annunciation and now fully conscious of the indwelling divine life, retreated to the high places; later, Christ often withdrew to this state of higher consciousness before giving out the teaching, the most important of which was delivered on the Mount.

So, like the pyramids, mountains are symbols of the ascent from the earthly plane to the spiritual in our attempt to know God. Mount Sinai corresponds to the Olympus of the Greeks and Mount Meru is the mythical mountain at the centre of the Buddhist universe. The mystics also quite frequently use the analogy of mountaineering and spiritual ascent, speaking about climbing to the heights, whilst depicting mountains as beautiful and uplifting emblems of the stable and eternal. St John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic, wrote a work called ‘The Ascent of Mount Carmel’, describing the way of the mystic as the climbing of a mountain.

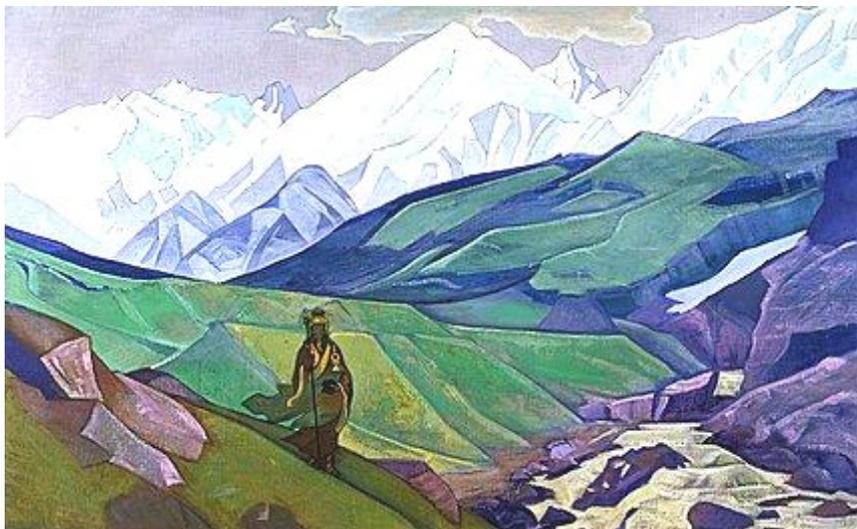
Thus these summits symbolize a spiritual world accessible to those who are attuned to the higher realities. In the words of Nicholas Roerich, from his ‘Himalayas - Abode of Light’: “*All teachers journeyed to the mountains. The highest knowledge, the most inspired songs, the most superb sounds and colours are created on the mountains. On the highest mountains there is the Supreme. The high mountains stand as witnesses of the great reality. The spirit of prehistoric man already enjoyed the greatness of the mountains.*”



‘Evening’ – Nicholas Roerich, 1939

A solitary mountain often stands as a sentinel, a tower of strength over the countryside and, by contrast, valleys are low-lying, at the opposite pole from the highlands. Most of us live in the ‘Vale of Tears’; all the hurry and bustle takes place here below, where humanity is living largely at a lower level, engrossed in the cares and high-speed living of the material world. But, as we are called to the heights (on the path to self-illumination) that which lies at a higher level within beckons, urging us to “*be still and know that I AM God.*”

A climber, whilst scaling a mountain, must be aware of every foothold and handhold, concentrating fully and using his knowledge and past experience of mountaineering. But on reaching the summit he sees everything in a new way, from the lofty height attained and without giving any thought to the means used to arrive there. And on the heights one feels free from ordinary earthly demands. Similarly, the instructions given in the Ten Commandments lead to a higher level of consciousness, whereby they are no longer *commandments* but transforming instruments for inner evolution, to reach the higher Good by applying the Truth of the Word.



‘The Friend of Travellers’ - Nicholas Roerich, 1927

But, as with mountain climbing, this new level cannot be reached directly; it demands effort and some instruction on how to reach it, how to apply the given Truth, living it sincerely by one’s own inner efforts. In the above painting is depicted one such teacher, a guru clothed with wisdom whose mind is absorbed in the ocean of pure bliss, who roams the earth to purify minds and to point the way, which will lead the aspirant ever upwards to final liberation.

Then illumination will take place on the Mountain of Vision, achieved through silence and meditation after years of striving for the inner truth, applying the disciplines necessary to correct the many errors before embarking on the next great step. But, on reaching the summit the disciple looks around and – sure enough – there are even higher mountains to be climbed until he reaches that Mount of Transfiguration (which means, in the Greek, *metamorphosis* or transformation of form, a going beyond ordinary form).

Thus, transformation has often been described *in terms of ascending a high mountain* to show, as Christ showed, that the transformation of Man is a reality, entirely possible. So let your consciousness stretch to those mighty heights in the vast wilderness. Let the mountains renew and regenerate you, so that the energies from the mighty Mountain Devas may flow through you. Again, the words of Nicholas Roerich: *“Where can one have such joy as when the sun is upon the Himalayas; when the blue is more intense than sapphires; when from the far distance, the glaciers glitter as incomparable gems. All religions, all teachings, are synthesized in the Himalayas...”*



*'Everest' – Nicholas Roerich, 1929*

An inner impulse irresistibly calls people to the blessed path of self-denial and sacrifice but the highest strivings of the spirit involves a call to action. Like mountaineers we must surmount all obstacles, building and joyfully creating for the welfare of all people, for coming generations. The great esoteric teaching, the Doctrine of Supreme Enlightenment (which is transcendental and inconceivable) must be intuited, though it is understood completely by those yogis who dwell in the heights, endowed with the highest serenity and all-pervading cosmic consciousness.

Finally, some thoughts by Alfonzo Ortiz: *“Whatever life’s challenges you may face, remember always to look to the mountaintop, for in so doing you look to greatness. Remember this, and let no problem, no matter how great it may seem, discourage you, nor let anything less than the mountaintop distract you...”*

