

# TO KATHMANDU WITH THE GRANDMOTHERS, AND LOVE

By Kami Kanetsuka



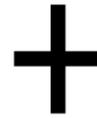
I've always had my biggest love affairs with places rather than people (they of course include people). Kathmandu has remained the big love of my life, so when I found that the '12th Council of the 13 International Indigenous Grandmothers' was going to be held there, I knew it was time to return.

I originally came to Kathmandu overland from London in 1966 when I was a young woman and spent some years there at that particularly magical time. My daughter Anna Maiya, who was conceived in Kathmandu and spent the first 18 months of her life there, is now a mother of four boys. As a grandmother myself, I knew this would be a rather poignant journey and very likely my last visit to Kathmandu.

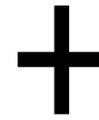
The 13 grandmothers came together in 2004 after a series of prophecies, both from the grandmothers and Jyoti, a spiritual leader who runs the Sacred Studies Centre. These

elders are medicine woman and healers who hail from the different corners of the earth, including Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Tibet, Central and North America and of course Nepal. Between them they have the wisdom of over a thousand years. One of their main concerns is with the destruction of mother earth and the indigenous ways of life. Having suffered trauma and oppression in their own countries they presently work to benefit children, elders and youth at risk as well as the environment. I had been drawn to them by hearing words to the effect that 'When the grandmothers speak, the healing will begin.'

Twice a year councils have been held in each other's homelands, and this 13th one was the time for Nepalese grandmother Aama Bonbo, a Tamang shaman, to host in Nepal. 'Praying for peace in the land of the Buddha' was an appropriate theme for the four-day public council, which was held at Hotel



During my stay in Kathmandu I was staying with a friend in Gairi Dhara and looking at my own life as a grandmother and what I was doing. I was constantly reminded of Kathmandu in the 1960s, when I lived there and the enormous changes that have taken place since. I worked for the British Council on Kantipath in a lovely little building opposite the old Royal Hotel, which is now the Mega Bank. Tourism was just beginning and there were few expatriates. Most of them worked for embassies, foreign aid or were Peace Corps. Life was tranquil and sweet. At that time there was little traffic, mostly taxis painted yellow and black like tigers and rickshaws. At this time I met my future husband Minoru Kanetsuka, who had the first Japanese restaurant in the Soaltee Hotel, taught Aikido and was King Mahendra's masseur on hunting trips. A little after a month of meeting him, we married at Bagh Durbar (now long gone) in a wedding arranged by Sushil Shumshere JBR. Our wedding photographs were taken at a temple in the gardens. On this trip I found the temple, now surrounded by high-rise apartments and garbage, looking sadly out of place. Our stay in Kathmandu was cut short as when my daughter was 18 months; my husband was given notice to leave. This was a devastating blow to me as I had imagined living my life in Kathmandu.



For my writing I had planned an interview with Aama Bonbo but it was not to be as the translator did not turn up to take me to her house in Boudha. I was, however, determined to meet with her, at least for a mini-healing. Strangely, although she is known internationally, not everyone in Boudha knew her or where she lived. With the help of a young Tibetan man, who lead me down several dusty little lanes enquiring all the way, we found Aama's modest house. She was just finishing healings with a group of 23 women from the States who had been at the council.

When I arrived Aama called me to sit in front of her. She understood that I wanted to ask some questions, so summoned a teenage boy to translate for me. It was not possible for me to ask the questions I had in mind. I was interested in the fact that she had stated somewhere that the *Kali Yuga* was coming to an end and I wanted her take on that. When I asked, she said she sees no indication of it ending at present. Finally I asked for a blessing for clarity in my writing work. Aama loudly invoked Maha Kali several times, placed flowers and rice to the top of my head and struck it three times, causing me to cry out.

Later as I wandered away through the lanes leading to Pashupati, I recalled the young woman who many years ago used to walk the same route through yellow mustard fields. At that time I had my whole life in front of me. For me this present trip to Kathmandu I regarded as a kind of pilgrimage, to the place where my adult life began. A deep gratitude for my connection to Nepal and a sense of completion arose.

In a letter written in Kathmandu, the grandmothers say, "We are beginning to envision how to pass these teachings onto our huge global family. How to involve our youth is imperative now. We want to encourage all our family to cultivate the seeds that the grandmothers have planted along the trail." They entreat us all to pass on our wisdom and tell us to, "consider the next seven generations."

de l' Annapurna in November.

A huge welcome ceremony took place for the grandmothers on arrival at Boudha. The main street, from the International Tibet Hotel, where the grandmothers stayed to the entrance of the great Stupa, was closed to traffic. Groups of women, men, and children lined the street waving flags, while entertainers and bands lead the parade. The grandmothers paraded down the street (several of them in wheelchairs) headed by an ecstatic Aama Bonbo who could hardly contain herself from dancing.

Over 350 people gathered at the council for prayers, healings and talks. Three times a day a different grandmother would offer her traditional prayers around the sacred fire held in the little garden of the Annapurna. The flame was attended and kept alive for a full five days. Unfortunately not all 13 grandmothers were able to be present, but several other grandmother ambassadors and indigenous women were in attendance. During the prayer ceremonies earth, fire, air and water was celebrated. Sadly, the day we blessed water, I could not get the image of garbage floating in the sacred Bagmati River off my head. On the last day Aama Bonbo gave a powerful healing session around the sacred fire — the drumming visibly transporting several people.

At the talks and cultural presentations, human rights activists such as Indira Ranamagar, who works with prisoners, takes care of their children and teaches them skills such as organic gardening was present. Bima Kumari, a very old Tharu grandmother, from generations of traditional midwives from the Terai was also present at the event.



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