Openings and Closings

Description

Missions are like life in miniature. The glorious experience of youthful missionaries, compressed into a few short months, resembles a lifetime of ups and downs, falling down and getting up again, blessings and challenges, joys and sorrows. And so it is with senior couple missions, though we have the benefit of a greater perspective on life and experience — with more behind us than ahead of us. Unlike our dear young Elders and Sisters, fellow laborers in the vineyard, we are not sharing the gospel message openly. Even so, I like this quote by Elder William R. Bradford:

When a missionary is placed in a mission environment of order and discipline where all that is done is in harmony with the Spirit the missionary experiences a great transformation. The heavens open. Powers are showered out. Mysteries are revealed. Habits are improved. Sanctification begins. Through this process the missionary becomes a vessel of light that can shine forth the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world in darkness.

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The heavens did indeed open for us this week.

A highlight was the bookend treat of our outing to attend the closing ceremony for the vocational training whose opening ceremony we attended two weeks ago at Charikot in the Dolakha district.

Sister Wolfgramm was feeling a little unwell, so she did not come with the rest of us. Sugam, Elder Wolfgramm, Taunya and I rode in one vehicle, and Sunila and her two kids, Rajshree (daughter, 17) and Chirag (son, 16) rode in a second one. Sunita had traveled there earlier to make everything ready.

Leaving around 7:30 Wednesday morning, we all made the rough, twisty, bumpy drive in just under 5 hours. The ceremony was at 2:00, so we had time before going there to freshen up a bit at our hotel (the same one, and even the same room as before)!

When we arrived at the ceremony venue, there was no line to greet us this time. The trainee-graduates were already in their seats, eager to get on with it. (We still got the traditional welcome scarves after being seated!) It was a happy, energetic occasion, and we were treated by Rajshree and Chirag to translation services for the several speeches that were made (except the one by Elder Wolgramm — and no, neither Taunya nor I was asked to speak!).

The dignitaries gave the graduates certificates, their ticket to a better future, and for blessings, the Tika — integral part of Nepali culture — a red dot applied on their foreheads. I was one of the dignitaries that got to do this!

Certificate presenting

Tika applying

Joy!

Afterwards we were fed lunch, and then did inspection of the graduates' work, and took pictures with them before heading back to the hotel. It was a great experience, not to be surpassed by an adventure to come the next day!

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Inspecting bricklaying work

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Inspecting plumbing work

A great group!

The adventure began Thursday morning when we started off from Charikot. The side road we turned onto off the main road had about a 30-degree grade at first, and much of the 17-km mountain road was that steep. Definitely 4-wheel drive territory, although parts of the road were paved, much of it was rocky and dippy. It was supposed to take about an hour, but we had a hitch. The driver suddenly stopped the vehicle and told us he had lost his brakes! The brake line hitting a rock and rupturing was the diagnosis. We were certainly glad this happened on the uphill and not the downhill stretch!

Uh oh!

http://firstthreeodds.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/06/what-to-do-next-after-vehicle-breakdown.mp4

A fine pickle!

The other driver, who was more experienced than ours, was still good to go, so we all piled in his vehicle for the rest of the ride. It would have taken us an hour to walk from there!

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Well, what are you waiting for?!

So we arrived at Kalinchowk, our destination. It is a rural municipality that is also a hill station and tourist hotspot, situated at an altitude of 3749 meters (12300 feet). That's at the peak, which to reach we took a cable car ride and a short hike. There we got to see the famous Kalinchowk Bhagwati Shrine, a Hindu temple where many devotees (not just tourists) come to worship and petition for divine favors. Sunila and Chirag (not Rajshree, she had homework to finish and didn't come with us), Sunita and Sugam participated in the prayers and also the bell ringing, whose purpose is to notify the Hindu deity that there are petitions ready and waiting to be granted!

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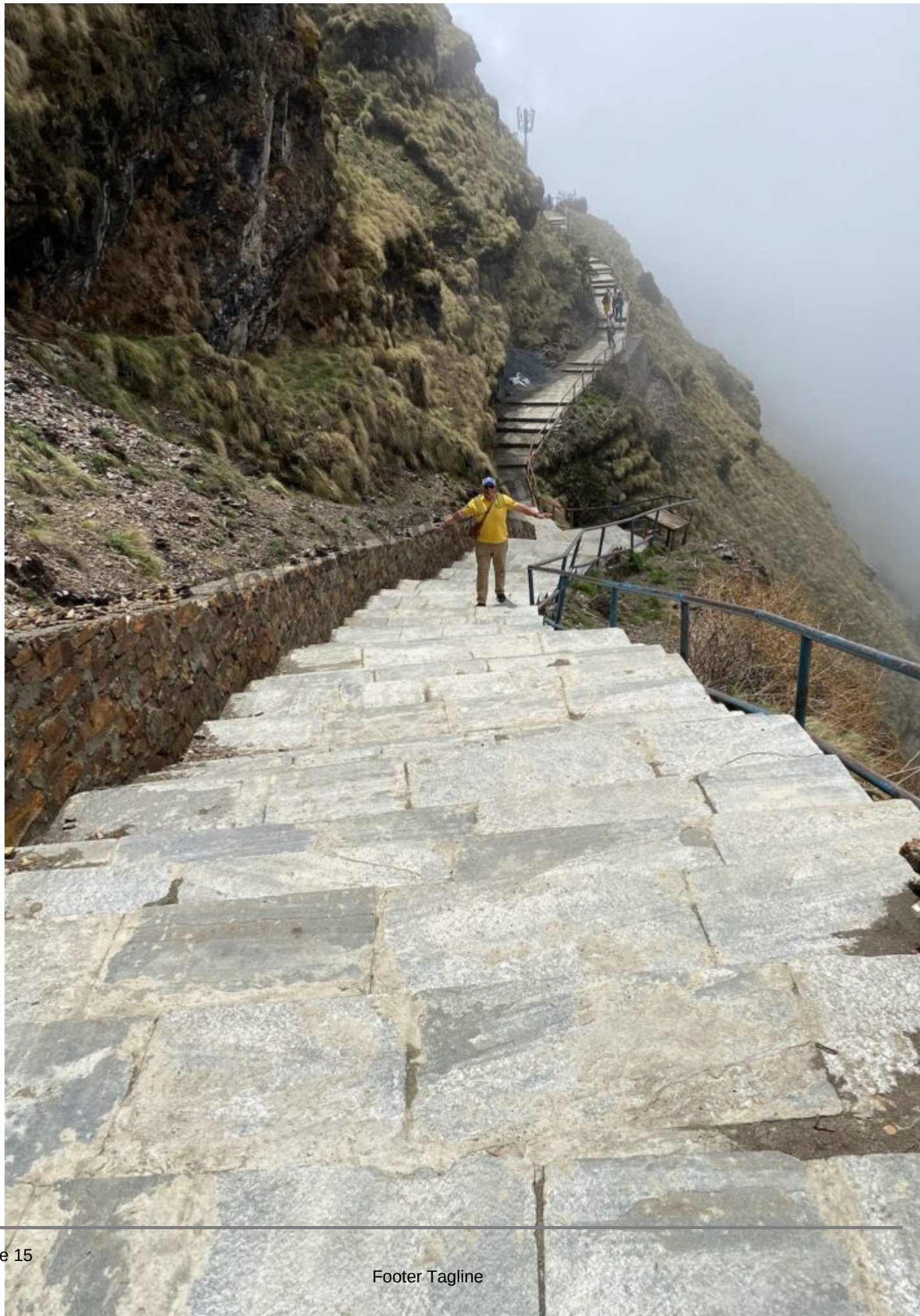
Cable car to the (almost) top

Intrepid climbers



Hey, wait for me!

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Making offerings at the shrine

Oh the bells, Bells, BELLS!

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सूचना

Sugam in comtemplation. The trident is called The Trishula, a divine symbol, commonly used as one principal symbols in Hinduism. The Trishula also represents the three energies found within a person two side prongs go up to a person’s brow, while the third rises higher.

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A view from the top

Nepal mountain high!

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Not sure about these strange looking white people!

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Yes, I live here

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Heading down

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Carefully!

Afterwards, we ate a nice Nepali lunch at an eatery at the hill station, then we all rode back in the one good vehicle (the other was repaired sufficiently to get it back to town for real repairs for the return trip).

Yummy!

Before heading home, we met in the office of the Chief District Officer, one of the dignitaries who spoke

at the ceremony. We exchanged business cards, and expect to keep in touch with the hope that future humanitarian projects might come to pass there.

Speaking of which, another great blessing for our humanitarian work came this week as It Finally Happened! We've been waiting on pins and needles for the opportunity to get a new General Agreement signed, and it came at last after the government official who needed to sign it came back from his travels out of country. He is the Member Secretary of the Social Welfare Council of Nepal, and we met in his office for the signing. The signature on our side came from the branch president, who was granted limited power of attorney to do just that one thing — sign the agreement on behalf of LDS Charities.

Why not Elder Wolfgramm, current Country Director of LDS Charities, Nepal? Because his work visa had very recently expired, thus making him ineligible to sign. I will be taking over as Country Director when the Wolgramms depart in seven weeks, but will not have the experience of signing the next agreement — because this one is good for five years! This is what allows Utah-based LDS Charities to work with local NGOs with the goal of lifting the poor through collaborative projects that the NGOs will manage and that LDS Charities will fund.

This is a **Big DEAL**!! An agreement like this is what we would like to have (and need to have) with the Indian government, who, for whatever reasons, seems much more wary of foreign aid. We are grateful beyond measure that this came to fruition!

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The signed General Agreement!

I love the thoughts expressed by Elder Neal A. Maxwell in a conference talk years ago. They really resonate with me, as I contemplate where I am in the sanctification process Elder Bradford talked about through which we may become “vessel[s] of light that can shine forth the gospel of Jesus Christ”.

The title of his talk was taken from the hymn: *Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and King:*

I testify that, though he never needed it, he gave to us what we desperately needed—that program of progress—repentance, which beckons us to betterness. I thank him for helping me, even forgiving me, when I fall short, when I testify of things known but which are beyond the border of my behavior, and for helping me to advance that border, bit by bit. His relentless redemptiveness exceeds my recurring wrongs.

[…]

I testify that just as he has helped to carefully construct this second estate for all mankind, he also has helped to carefully construct each of our little universes of experience. I thank him for blessing me therein with a wife, children, parents, leaders, and friends to help me. I thank him now for the tender times, the jarring times, the perplexing times, and even for the times when my learning is so painfully public—lest in such moments to come I am too taxed to testify or too anguished to appreciate.

As we enjoy our “little universes of experiences” here in Nepal, we want to thank you all for your love and prayers. We really appreciate the support we feel from you!

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