July 29-October 26, 2012
Peju Winery, Rutherford, CA

A message from photographer Richard Christiani

To Tibetans, a pilgrimage is a journey from ignorance to enlightenment, from a preoccupation with the self and possessions to a deep sense of the relativity, impermanence and interconnectedness of all life. The goal of pilgrimage is less to reach a particular destination than to transcend attachments and inattention that block awareness of a larger reality.

It was my goal as well, as I embarked on a three month trip to Asia with my wife in the fall of 2011. It was a needed break from the stress of running an architectural firm during the recession and an opportunity to renew myself physically as well as mentally since our itinerary included two Himalayan treks. The treks would also be to very sacred places in Tibet and Nepal and thus, spiritual as well as physical journeys.

On our first trek, we hiked six days into Tibet from western Nepal. From the border, we drove to Lake Manasarovar, whose name means consciousness and enlightenment. Then we circled Mt. Kailash as pilgrims have done for the last two thousand years, a journey that is believed to erase the sins of a lifetime. For Buddhists, Kang Rinpoche, the Precious Snow Mountain, as it is known, is the holiest of mountains. The region is also the source of the four longest rivers in Asia and thought to be the base of the mythical Mt. Meru, the birthplace of the universe.

Our second trek was a three week loop into the Inner Dolpo, a wild and remote region behind Dhaulagiri in western Nepal, bordered by Tibet. The Dolpo’s remoteness and inaccessibility has preserved its Tibetan culture in relatively pure form and the devotion of the people was evident everywhere; from huge piles of carved mani stones, chortens and stupas along the trail to the monasteries we visited in Ringmo, Shey Gompa and Saldang.

I felt very connected to the land and peaceful as I looked out over the vast Tibetan plateau. Its colors and peaks extended as far as I could see or even imagine. A great emptiness and quiet. As I hiked whole days through the stillness and beauty of the unfolding landscape, it felt like a walking meditation through many layers of time. And in those moments, I achieved my goal.

A glimpse of a larger reality that was truly transcendent.