

Parable of the Mountain Path



ONCE upon a time, not so long ago, there lived an intelligent, adventurous young man in a *very* dull small town. The people in this town did nothing but follow the ordinary rules and conventions of materialistic society. The citizens were interested only in money, eating, sleeping, family affairs and of course, the usual mundane gossip and politics of any small town.

However, our young man was not satisfied with this stultifying existence—he wanted to see and explore the entire world, and eventually achieve his greatest heart’s desire: to meet God face-to-face. Naturally everyone tried their best to convince him that these things were impossible; or if possible, uselessly impractical.

His parents were such avid rule-followers that they tried to discourage the young man in every way. For example, they would lecture him for what seemed like hours on the utter impossibility of walking beyond the town’s sidewalks. “There’s no place worth going that doesn’t have a sidewalk. And after all, one must walk only on the sidewalk, so that settles it,” concluded his mother. “That’s right,” agreed his dad, “and cross the street only at crosswalks.”

“But I want to explore the whole world,” he protested, “even the wilderness outside of town. Maybe there I’ll be able to meet God.”

“Quite impossible,” his parents chimed together. “God is very far away and certainly doesn’t care to be bothered by impertinent young men. Now take your warm milk and



cookies and finish your homework.” And that was the end of that, or so they thought.

Unknown to anyone, our young hero began surreptitious experiments in rule-breaking. He already knew, for example, that one could walk off the sidewalk, even down the middle of the street, and cross anywhere one liked, as long as one was careful.

This knowledge made him bolder, and one fine day he took a pack lunch and walked past the old abandoned houses at the edge of town, out to the very end of the sidewalk. Hesitantly, he took a few careful steps on the soft grass beyond the end of the concrete path, and waited expectantly. When nothing terrible happened (indeed nothing at all), he took a few more steps. Aha! Just as he had thought, it was possible to walk without a sidewalk!

This discovery in particular opened up vast forbidden possibilities. Soon he was walking confidently on long-forgotten paths through the tall grass miles from town. Gaping at the hitherto unseen wonders around him, the exciting new vistas at the limits of his vision tantalized his imagination.

Intrigued, he began to explore them. He spent many a lazy afternoon reading a good book in the shade of a spreading oak tree. He chased butterflies; he drank from cool springs no one had tasted in centuries. Snow-capped peaks beckoned mysteriously in the distance. Fascinating!

Then one day, disaster struck. Skipping along the middle of the street at the edge of town on the way back from a hiking expedition, whom should he chance to meet but the town Sheriff! After a stern lecture on the importance of walking *only* on the sidewalk, he was ignominiously escorted home.



His parents were mortified. Imagine how the neighbors would gossip! Horrified, they could barely speak as he had his milk and cookies. Mercifully, he was spared another lecture and sent straight to bed.

That night he could not sleep. A certain righteous rebellious anger stirred in his heart. He hated to lose his newfound freedom. Something told him that if he didn't act immediately, he might never have the opportunity—or the courage—to leave the prison of the town and its stupid sidewalks again. What to speak of meeting God!

The full moon shone through the window, bringing the sweet scents and sounds of a perfect summer night, tempting him to pack his knapsack and just walk out into the big wide world. And in the wee small hours of the morning, that's just what he did.





FTER spending the night in one of his favorite nature spots, our young hero made a momentous decision. Seeing again the beautiful snow-capped mountain he had spotted before in the far distance, he resolved to walk to it and climb to its top.

If God were to be found anywhere, surely He would live there! So he began walking along the ancient dirt trails toward the east, keeping the majestic peak always in sight.

As he traveled across the beautiful rolling plain, he saw rich fields of golden grain, vast herds of animals with their young, and the simple homes of farmer folk in the distance. But around noon, a distant commotion spoiled the peace of the countryside. Suddenly afraid, he climbed a nearby tree and hid in its thick foliage.



A mob of bellicose vegetable growers advanced menacingly along the road, pitchforks and hoes held ready for battle, chanting “Down with dairy farmers! Down with dairy farmers!”

The mob stopped and held an impromptu rally under the tree where our young man hid. “We’re not gonna take it anymore!” yelled the leader. “How can anybody stand the smell of those darn cows?”

“Yeah,” growled a large man wearing stained blue overalls, “It’s disgusting; it’s evil. They actually milk the cows with their own hands... and then they... they *drink it!*” A fresh chorus of angry shouts drowned out the rest of his tirade as the mob



gathered its energy and charged off, no doubt to raid the nearest 'evil' dairy farm.

Long after their raucous catcalls faded into the peaceful birdcalls of a summer afternoon, our young traveler carefully climbed down from his hideout perch and continued his journey toward the mountain, now visibly closer. After an afternoon of walking without further incident, he saw a welcome sight: a charming colonial house with a gilded sign reading "Mountain Rest—Good Food and Clean Beds."

Gladly, he entered the inn and registered for the night. At supper, seated between several other visitors, he listened carefully as the usual travelers' talk punctuated the rounds of serving bowls and the tinkle of silverware and glasses. Surprisingly, many of the guests were headed to the same exact place as he was: the beautiful mountain. There was only one problem... no two pilgrims could agree on the right way to get there.

"Y'ave t'cut t'th'nor' east," an old elfin gentleman said in his high, thin voice, "lest ye fall off th'edge o'th'world..."

"Are you kidding?" interjected a smart young raif traveling with a good-looking girl, "What old-fashioned superstition! We're going the western route," he retorted, smiling knowingly at his companion.

One tough-looking character who had remained silent through the discussion finally snickered, "I'm goin' ta da nawth. Dat's where da *gold* is hid." The others made light of him in turn.

The travelers tried for the rest of the evening to convince each other of the merits of their pet routes to the mountain. But as the conversation cooled along with their after-dinner tea, most of them kept their original convictions, except for a rather thin,



cautious and literal-minded young fellow who decided to travel with the elf.

All this was very confusing to our intrepid young man. He kept quiet, not daring to expose the sacred purpose of his journey to the crowd’s sarcasm. Nor did he want to admit that he really had no idea of the best way to the exalted peak they all aspired to attain. He thought it was perfectly obvious where the mountain was and how to get there. All one had to do was follow one’s nose!

Early the next morning he set out to do just that. He began the last stage of the eastward journey to the foothills of the mountain, keeping its exalted summit within his vision. All went well that morning, but when he reached the foothills themselves, many paths diverged in a confusing array.

“How to get to the top?” he asked the local villagers, but each gave a different answer. Some, smiling slyly, even tried to convince him, “*All the paths lead to the top.*” The mountain itself remained mysteriously silent.





NDAUNTED, he began climbing toward higher ground, using the peak as a guide. But the hills and the omnipresent clouds obscured it from his vision, making navigation difficult. Sometimes he met a dead end, and sometimes became bewildered by many turns and switchbacks in the path. Sometimes the lower ridges obscured the summit and took him far from the way. Still, from time to time he would see the real peak in the lofty distance, and its majestic beauty inspired him to try again and again.

Somehow or other he reached the tree line. Now the real climb began, across pathless, unforgiving faces of rock. He tried one route and then another, to no avail. The nearby peaks veiled the actual summit, and the illusions wasted his time and sapped his energy. Finally defeated, he collapsed, hopelessly lost in the cold granite wasteland as the afternoon darkened and wore into evening.



Mercifully, he slept. When he awakened, it was night, and he was surprised to find an old man of the mountain sitting by his side. A cheerful fire was cooking a simple but delicious meal. The mountain man smiled his wise old wrinkly smile. He well understood the young man's quest: after all, he had been young once himself. And he had seen many such brash but inexperienced youngsters on the mountain—both alive and dead.

The next morning after food, conversation and rest, the old man agreed to become his guide. Roped together for safety, they began to climb the unmarked secret pathways leading to the peak. The young fellow wanted to charge ahead, but the old man held him back. He soon realized the wisdom of pacing himself as the bright morning turned into a numbingly cold, wind-swept noon.



Higher and higher they climbed. Dizzy from the heights, beaten by the incessant wind, he lost his footing and slipped again and again. Again and again, his experienced guide



anticipated his slips and saved him from falling to certain death on the sharp rocks thousands of feet below.

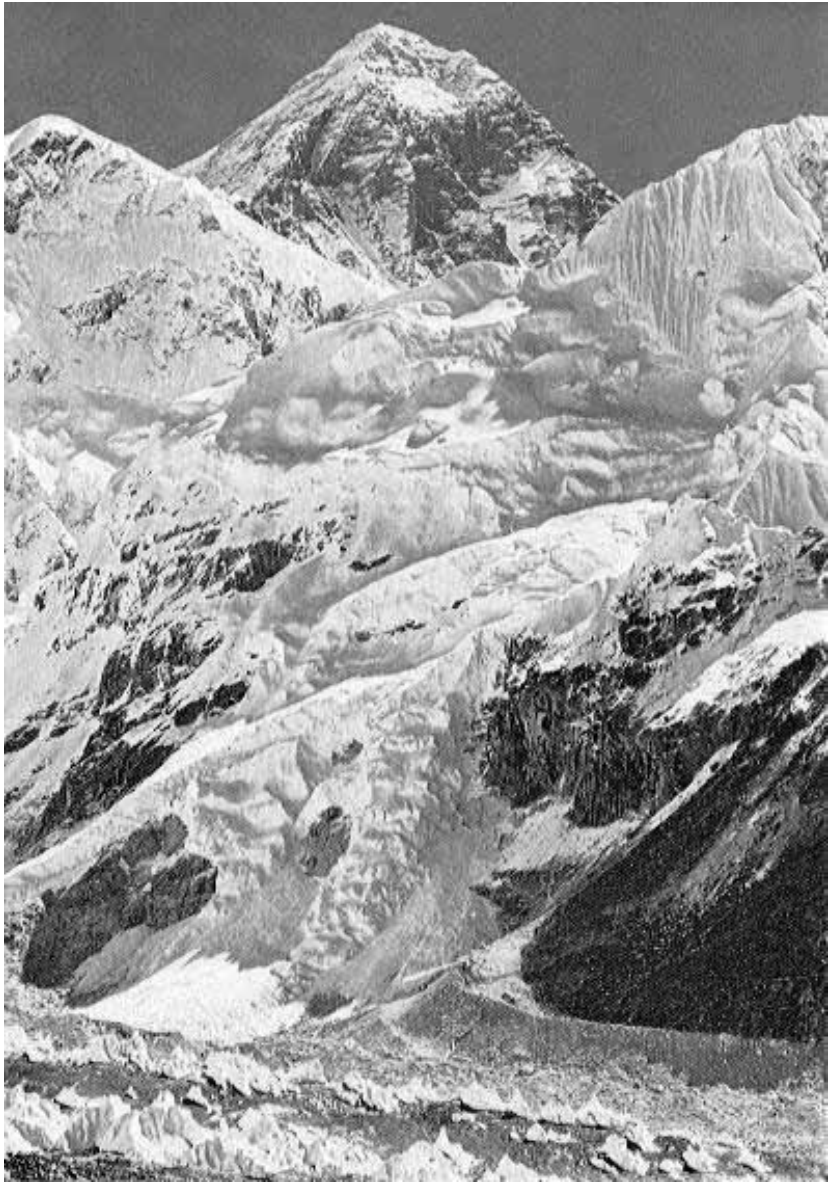
He was reduced to a breathless shadow, carefully following in the footsteps and handholds of his guide, bone-weary but wary of the next avalanche, shivering not only with the cold. Occasionally the mountain's peak would appear for a moment through the hovering cloud, closer but still tantalizingly out of reach.



Finally, limbs all but numb after a punishing vertical ascent, they reached the highest ridge-top. The old man leaned grimly into the howling wind and pointed. The final ascent to the summit lay clear before them... but it had to be walked alone. He did not know where he got the strength to climb those last few hundred steps. He instinctively felt his way, groping upward through the eternal mist.

*All of a sudden, all pain forgotten;
time seems suspended in a golden haze;
vision clears to crystal sharpness, and
the world sits waiting at a hero's feet.*







It was tempting to imagine that he had conquered the great mountain, and to revel—temporarily, of course—in the victory he had achieved. But he intelligently reflected that without the kind help of his guide, he would never have made it beyond the tree line. And he still hadn't found God.

Soberly retracing his footsteps, he looked for the old man, but he was nowhere to be seen. A metallic taste of terror crept into the sound of the wind howling through the thin air, and in a moment he panicked. Holding on to an outcropping of naked rock for dear life, he began shouting into the perpetual mountaintop tempest, mad with fear.



Suddenly his guide reappeared. But instead of a grizzled old mountain man, He appeared as a celestially beautiful, luminous Being. As the young man marveled, speechless, at His transformation, He simply smiled lovingly and extended His luminous hand to save him. As the young man, still shaking with fear, reached toward his Savior, he felt something soft inside his heart go *snap*. “O my God,” he thought, “I’m dying.” With this he passed out.



The next thing he knew, they were in a quiet cave far downslope. Once our young hero recovered his composure somewhat, he threw himself in gratitude at his divine Master’s feet, which, he noticed, were not quite touching the ground. He began shaking, sobbing and heaving uncontrollably.

His celestial Guide touched him lightly on the head with His life-giving hand, quieting his distress and clearing his mind. Then He spoke in the most heartbreakingly beautiful tones of love and compassion the young man had ever heard:



My dear friend, long did you search for Me, but I eluded you. I know this caused you much pain, for after all I am seated in your heart as your eternal Friend, and I know everything about you. But you needed this pain to spur you on in your search for the Absolute Truth. For if you had become too comfortable you would have abandoned the quest. Now your love has matured and you have proven your devotion by risking everything and coming to this lonely place to find Me. This is very good.

You have waited a long time for this day, and so have I. I have an important mission for you to perform. There are millions of people in the world, and all of them are suffering from ignorance and separation from Me, just as you have suffered. In these evil days pretentious sinful people are everywhere, and the sincere and faithful are few and far between. I will give you a special message for them, which you are to broadcast all over the world. To counteract the miseries of this materialistic age, I will reveal Myself in greater clarity and detail than ever before. In this way I will shower My blessings and love upon My flock of the faithful.

Soon I will disappear from your external vision for the rest of this lifetime. Stay here in this cave, ever thinking of Me with love and devotion. Whenever you feel too much separation from Me, pray to Me and glorify My Holy Name. Then I, sitting on the throne of your heart, will reveal many confidential truths to you, which will give you great joy. I will inspire, guide and protect you for the rest of your life, making you victorious in all ways, and at the end you will come to Me. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend. Do not fear.



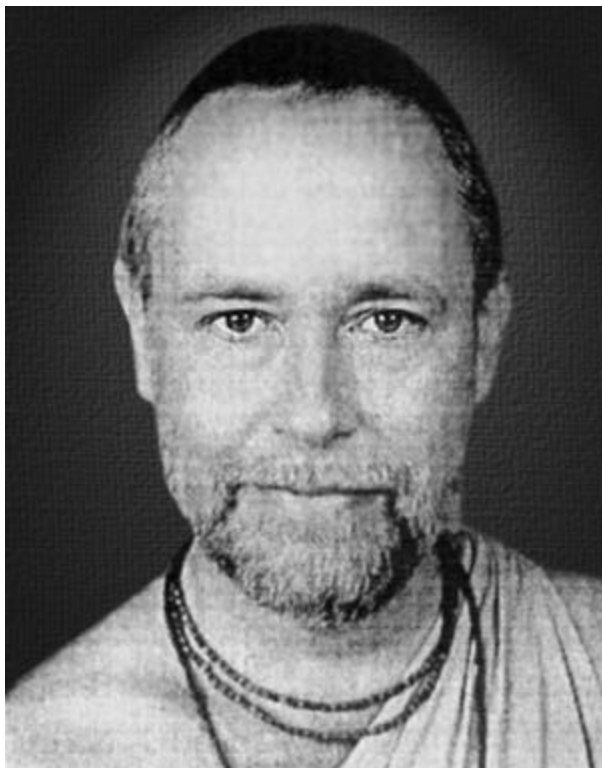


With this He vanished. The young man was stunned as if he had been struck with a thunderbolt, and for many hours—or was it days, he could not know—he remained in an ecstatic trance of separation from his Master. Sometimes crying, sometimes dancing, sometimes laughing, sometimes falling on the ground, he reveled in the satisfaction of his greatest heart's desire.

Gradually he regained external material consciousness and found the cave to be stocked with provisions for a long stay. He remained many days in that sacred place praying, meditating and recording the wonderful message of his Lord that was gradually revealed within his heart.

Then one fine day, our young man—now a grown man—walked out of the cave and down the mountain as he had come, his old knapsack weighed down with a thick bundle of manuscript. By that time, he no longer remembered who he was, where he was from or where he was going. But it didn't matter, for his heart was full of love.





The Author

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Upon returning from the Himalayas
after receiving the Esoteric Teaching

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