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In My Opinion

Steps of Faith

How climbing Tirupati hill helped me realize the driving force behind our accomplishments

By Meghana Pisupati

Three thousand five hundred fifty steps of gradual incline. Three to four hours of physical sacrifice. A collection of seven peaks spanning ten square miles of unpolluted land. A total of eight kilometers on a completely uphill path. These enormous numbers seem to be nothing for the countless devotees who climb the Tirupati hill each day of the year. Their single driving force: faith. Intrigued, I, too, climbed these steps, each one beautifully coated in kumkum and turmeric. Like many other people, we started off from the temple at the base of the mountain. We said a small prayer and embarked upon this strenuous journey. There were stalls with food and drinks along with shade the entire way. The sight was undoubtedly beautiful; the perfection of nature seemed to catch everyone's eye.

Being an athlete, I was able to easily walk the first couple of hills--each step, a means of exercise. Truth be told, I had not come to fulfill a pledge or to mindfully take each footstep in the name of God. Two hours later, when the hard surface of the stone started making my legs sore, and fatigue had hit my body, I wanted to stop; but some unknown force compelled me to make each step, aiding me throughout my journey until the very end.

At the end of the day, it was not my own journey that baffled my mind but the journey of others who had climbed beside me. The countless native Indians who ascend these steps each day have probably never walked such a distance before, nor must they have heard of the concept of stretching or doing exercises in preparation for the trek. I watched with a certain shock as Indians of all ages hiked along, sweat trailing down the sides of faces, some bent over at each step to coat the stone in the precious red and yellow powders, while others were burdened with

heavy sacks placed upon their backs or heads. There were elderly people who struggled with each step, grasping the railing for extra support; while at the same time, children quickly walked up as if the task was not at all difficult.

I wondered about the motivation of these countless people, how they were able to do all that they did. I began to realize that despite the differences in region, wealth and personality, they all had faith in common. Whether theirs was faith in Lord Venkatesha or another God, in accomplishment of a promise or faith in their own ability to complete the task, I could see it shining in the spirit of each individual beside me. I doubt any believer could clearly explain why or how he believes; but I suppose that when you have faith, you no longer require proof or answers. I think only faith could enable one to endure waiting in an excruciatingly long line that snakes around the temple for twelve hours only to lay eyes on the Lord for a rushed ten seconds, and still come away from the pilgrimage with the euphoric, content feeling typical of these devotees. And then, despite the countless distractions during that brief ten-second darshan, the only thing on a devotee's mind is God and nothing else.

Because of this life-altering experience, it has become clear to me why people are so determined to accomplish a task. I have come to realize that throughout the visible universe of material things and in the invisible universe of the human soul, there is only one thing powerful enough to fully control the body, mind and consciousness. I have found that this force is one which is predominant in each and every one of us. Despite whether people call it faith, God or potential, it is the sole reason that drives humans to accomplish infinite feats. One of the many demonstrations of this force is found within each and every step taken by a faithful pilgrim upon that tall mountain.

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