

A guide on the side

Bhaavin Shah had to confront early trauma in order to find his life purpose and success as a self-help teacher

Looking back, I seem to have undergone the hero's journey. Mythologist Joseph Campbell talks of how a potential 'hero' begins his journey with 'trauma' only to discover a certain 'elixir' that he later shares as his unique 'gift' with the world.

As a child, I was pretty complex and touchy. I would think and feel way more than I should. As a result, I led an emotionally turbulent life by the time I was in my mid-teens. While on the one hand, I graduated with flying colours as an engineer from the country's premiere engineering institute VJTI, on the other hand, I was sporadically depressed for upwards of a decade, suffered from bouts of anxiety and insomnia, and contended with all sorts of body aches. To boot, the universe blessed me with enough button-pushers to bring gut-wrenching emotions to the fore. It was excruciating. Anybody else in my place would have died a thousand deaths.

Right perception

In hindsight, I realise that all this agony was actually a training ground to make a stronger, wiser and more deeply empathetic person out of me. My struggles also acclimatised me firsthand with the best of wisdom traditions and healing modalities. My illness was not born from any personal negativity; it was



actually an answer to my prayers for unlocking my spiritual power. To be able to revalue my traumatic past through a meaningful lens is perhaps the first foundation of all my success in life.

A sense of studentship

By 18, I was already done with learning a lot from Jain monks, the Bhagavad Gita, Osho and J. Krishnamurti. That's when I met my master – Guruji Rishi Prabhakar – the founder of Siddha Samadhi Yoga (SSY). I was extremely lucky to have encountered this profound man and his mission.

Interestingly even while I was soaked in the bliss that earnest participation in SSY brought to my life, I would yet oscillate to disturbed emotional states made worse by friction with my protective parents. This went on for quite a few years until I met Shri Amit Mishra from Lucknow, who is an accomplished sadhak of Maa Kamakhya and an adept at Tratak.

Further, I happened to learn rebirthing breathwork from the legendary Leonard Orr. As a result of dedicating a huge chunk of my waking hours to SSY practices, Tratak and breath-work, I reversed all my emotional afflictions and gradually became a deeply relaxed, joyful and loving being. Being able to surrender to rich traditions and wise gurus seems to be the second important foundation of my success.

Self-belief

Because of the work I had to do in overcoming my personal trauma, I had already discovered my 'elixir'. I

realised that I was sent through a traumatic personal journey and made to internalise the various spiritual sciences so that I could make it easy for many others. Now was the time to share the 'gift'.

One fine day, I came across a book, *The Presence Process* by Michael Brown. No sooner had I started practising the breathwork elaborated in the book, the results started hitting me hard. It surfaced for me the deepest of my scars and at the same time created the biggest breakthroughs within a matter of days. A group of friends asked me to teach them the process and there began my formal journey as a self-help teacher.

Until then I was manufacturing nuts and bolts for automobiles. Now I was committed to manufacturing joy for human beings. Through years of persistence, I had won the support of my family. Thanks to that and the subtle inspiration of my friend, philosopher and guide - Manoj Lekhi - an accomplished SSY teacher himself, I took the big jump.

I was moved to create trainings and initiate hundreds into a high quality life. I enjoyed helping people heal themselves. I talked and wrote about everything from emotional healing to personal productivity to enlightened prosperity.

To be able to trust my innate gifts and take a leap of faith into a full-time spiritual life was perhaps the third foundation of my success.

Low frustration tolerance

I was cruising well with my workshops until I realised that I was overwhelming myself in generating an audience for my offerings. I didn't like that. After all, I didn't quit my business to start another business. One fine day, I took the bold call to discontinue all my trainings (in their conventional form) and moved on to what (I later realised) is called the flipped classroom model - where I conduct whole-life trainings by doing only short seminars in the classroom backed by self-paced learning through pre-recorded e-courses, peer-to-peer contributions and tech-enabled hand-holding for each student.

Now I stand more fulfilled as I give shape to the personal journeys of a few dozen deeply interested student-friends than in making small contributions to hundreds of semi-interested participants who attend

my short seminars. In Alison King's words, I have moved on from being a 'sage on the stage to a guide on the side'. I would rather be a ladder than a leader. That's success for me.

Miles to go

While I have come a long way, I guess I still have a long way to go. Inspired by Vinoba Bhave, success to me means a capacity to connect heart to heart. My current endeavour is to create rich inter-connections amongst my students. To me a teacher is truly successful when he facilitates many-to-many connections between his students rather than one-to-many connections with the teacher alone.

Success to me also means actualising that which one is cut out for. Each of us holds a unique piece of life's jigsaw. My piece seems to be about doing greater justice to the message of effortless living that I have internalised from my master and the Taoist tradition. That has led me to initiate a project called the 'Easy Revolution' (www.easyrevolution.org) to help people restore work-life balance and internalise higher states of ease and spontaneity. I so wish to see millions of people embracing playful lifestyles. I am yet to succeed at that.

And eventually, in line with my master's vision, I would love for all my work to culminate into the creation of many intentional communities where clusters of families live, eat, pray and play together. That should be the last step of my hero's journey, if at all there is one.



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