

Letting go, letting God

When **Bhaavin Shah** set off on a 15-day penniless padayatra to the Himalayas, he found himself borne by God



Letting go is not easy. Each of us holds on to certainty, to security, to convenience, to the sphere of the 'known'. I had a similar issue. All my life. Until I did an experiment that my master had exhorted many of us to do.

My master, the late Gurujī Rishi Prabhakar (founder of SSY), regularly undertook a padyatra, a lone voyage, by and large on foot, as a mendicant. This is actually an ancient practice favoured by Adi Shankara, Buddha, Mahavira and Swami Vivekanand among others.

He gave a definite purpose to it: *The purpose was to see God in whoever you meet, make yourself useful wherever you go, and to find security in the middle of the manifest insecurity.*

In the lap of insecurity

A padyatra is undertaken on an empty wallet. With money, one feels secure. Security brings in certainty, and also a subtle arrogance. With money, one becomes a tourist instead of a pilgrim. Everything is set, planned, known, thereby robbing it of all excitement.

The penniless pilgrim too needs food, transport and shelter. Though bereft of money he manages to fulfil his every need,

sometimes to the point of plenty. This is because having left it to God, God is now on his side. Being stripped of money is tantamount to being armed with God.

Prep work

I slotted out two weeks, March 13 to March 27, for my pilgrimage in the beautiful hills of Kumaon, the gateway to Kailash, in the hallowed state of Uttarakhand. Here, I could meet with Babaji, my ever-present spiritual godfather, often called Mahavatar Babaji by many (after Paramhansa Yoganandji chose to give him that title). By many accounts, Babaji is actually Lord Shiva himself. After the old and the new Herakhan Baba bodies, Babaji has started giving darshan (to select devotees) in his present and third body in Kumaon.

My spiritual teacher, Leonard Orr (founder of Rebirthing Breathwork), is a direct disciple of Babaji. Therefore, I fortunately had access to Babaji, who approved my request for private darshan, to my great joy.

My wife, daughter and my otherwise protective parents blessed me with their whole-hearted permission, with little effort from me. I had realised by then that in surrender, everything automatically happens.

I packed only those essentials that allowed me to keep the bag easily portable - two pairs of loose clothing, woolens, a sleeping bag, a toilet kit and a book to read and one to write in. With a Baggit-built army-

green backpack, a one-way train ticket to the foothills of the Himalayas, a song on my lips and lots of courage in the heart, I was all set to go on the biggest adventure of my life.

The first leg

The first leg of my journey (and the only planned one) was a 17-hour walk from Haldwani to meet Babaji. Having developed blisters while practising walking at Mumbai, walking 17 hours over a couple of days seemed out of question. Nor did I have the money to go by bus. However, trusting in God, I got into the right bus from Haldwani. Just before the conductor reached me, a gentleman called CB Pant came and occupied the seat next to me. As luck would have it, he was the caretaker of the Himalayan Ashram of the Shri Ram Chandra Mission. On explanation, he happily paid Rs.90 for my bus fare. This was no plain luck, it was a miracle! Thereafter, I became certain that God was totally on my side, since I had trusted Him rather than trusting money! Miracles became commonplace after that.

Meeting Mahavatar Babaji

The three-and-half-hour bus ride and then a short walk into the mountains took me straight to Babaji's kutiya.

Later that evening and the next, I had the enviable opportunity of having an exclusive satsang at Mahavatar Babaji's feet for two hours each day. Dressed in maroon, with a well-built frame, he was most gentle, inclusive and erudite. He educated me over a whole range of spiritual topics. He also fulfilled a huge personal wish of mine by anointing bhabhooti on my third eye chakra. Almost instantly, I could feel a difference in my inner space. To what spiritual merit did I owe such a priceless opportunity, I wonder! This tryst with Babaji is yet to fully sink in.

As a part of my sadhana, despite the blisters, I would typically walk for five or more hours a day, followed by a free ride or two prior to sun-down, to make my way to the nearest inhabited locality. I would be like a cloud in the sky with no set destination. My destination was automatically decided by wherever the last vehicle that I chose to take a ride from, was going.

Besides the days that I had the luxury of a bathroom, happily bathing in streams and relieving myself in the jungles had become a routine affair. Backed by a couple of hours of meditation and breathwork that I would do every morning, and the spontaneous chanting of OM NAMAHA SHIVAY while walking, I had enough energy to trek through the mountains all through my sojourn.

Energy field of Kasardevi

One of my destinations was a temple on a Himalayan peak by the name Kasardevi near Almora. At Kasardevi I was fortunate enough to be offered a meditation room with a dhuni in the famous Kasardevi temple, where apparently the likes of Vivekanand and Swami Rama

had meditated during their Himalayan voyages. As instructed by Babaji, I meditated and did breathwork for a few hours every day for the next three days in the beautiful locales of Kasardevi, which, according to NASA scientists, is one of the world's three best places for meditation. Over here, I also had an exclusive two-hour satsang with the very loving Swami Muktanand, the head of Anand Ashram, Kerala, founded by the great Swami Ramdas. I also spent quite a few hours in blissful contemplation at a famous Tibetan Buddhist monastery once inhabited by Lama Angarika Govinda.

The beauty of Kumaon was unparalleled. Roaming in hills that were 6,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level, I was always in the company of pines, deodhars, oaks and fruit trees like plum, apple and apricot. It was heavenly to dwell upon the cinematic panorama of snow-clad Himalayan peaks like Trishul, and Nanda devi.

Seeing daridra-narayan

My journey took me further to the city of Almora where I slept on a chilly night in the porch of Nandadevi temple because I was denied permission to sleep within the temple. To add to my woes, I was woken up and interrogated by local policemen. That night changed my entire inner landscape. Back in Mumbai, I can now very easily relate to the plight and aspirations of every homeless beggar that I see. I can now clearly see the value of the roof over my head (and the value of a loving family that I had taken for granted all my life). Back in Mumbai, I can't stop myself from fully emptying my pockets into the coin-boxes of the beggars on the railway bridges. I can also see so much value in Gandhiji's philosophy of seeing Daridra-Narayan in the needy. I have become far more empathetic and sensitive to anybody in misery. In hindsight I can see how this one and only shelterless night was a more precious gift for my spirit than all the other sheltered nights that God blessed me with.

The kriya pilgrimage

Among the highlights of my journey was a trip to Kukuchina, the village that serves as the foothills to the famous cave where Mahavatar Babaji had initiated Lahiri Mahashaya to teach Kriya Yoga to the world. I meditated in this cave on two consecutive days while staying at a very hospitable villager's home who, with a few of his friends, took me on an arduous trek to Pandav-Kholi on the



The beautiful Haidakhan mandir at Chilianaula formed part of Shah's itinerary

day of Holi. This is the place where the Pandavas lived during their exile and which now sports a wonderful small temple complex. He and his friends would lift my bag, pluck apricots on the way to offer me, make me water infused with Electral and slow down their pace to match mine. All of this for no monetary gain. These humble villagers taught me lessons in selfless love that I had only read in books.

Shallow pockets, deep hearts

My entire journey was lit up by the kindness of strangers, by acts of radical generosity from friends with shallow pockets but deep hearts. Besides a couple of times when I proactively asked for food and shelter, I was spontaneously offered them when people learnt of my padayatra. Unlike what the media leads us to believe, this world is full of selfless souls. Today, I have come to believe that every single person in the world wishes to contribute to others. Besides the gift of this new healthy perspective, all the free gifts that came my way from my humble friends, also filled me with such awe, gratitude and need for reciprocation, that I have decided to remodel my life to dedicate every moment of it purely in service of humanity, and personally live on whatever is offered with love.

Every time I would get food, love, shelter or

a free ride, the words 'Bhagwan aapka bhala kare' would spontaneously come out of my mouth. It had become my takia kalaam. Asking like a true beggar, and heartily blessing the benefactor was a totally worthwhile gesture in my quest of reducing my ego, and enhancing my spirit.

Law of surrender

In due course, I proceeded to Kathgodam station on the morning of my 13th day. Unbelievably enough, I had met with enough generosity along my travels to accumulate enough money to return to Mumbai, that too by the AC Duronto Express. The logic is simple. If I had trusted money, money would have obliged. But I had trusted God, so God obliged.

When we envision, we manifest. But when we surrender to the universe, we manifest in abundance. This was my experience. The law of surrender trumped the law of attraction. At least in my life. I feel radical surrender has catapulted me into glory. Right into the lap of God.



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