

The Climb
Elka Cartmell Ladd
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I enjoy getting lost, at least when I do it on purpose. In high school when I started to take the train into downtown Boston, each day I found that the best way to learn city was on foot. It's an unplanned city that organically has grown over the many years of its life. So it has many one-way streets and winding roads and dead ends it can be hard to maneuver so I fancied myself an explorer. I would hop on the subway take it to somewhere I wasn't quite familiar with. Once I emerged from under ground I would take in a moment to breathe in that new space. To reorient myself, then I would set out finding my way back to where I had started. I found so many places I might never have encountered, and a picture of this city how each neighborhood interacts with each another and began to come alive in my mind. Though I had a destination it was also where I began. But the journeys that I found myself on each little adventure showed me a little more of my home and introduced me to a few more of my neighbors and brought me a little closer to understanding myself.

A few years later when I got my license, my best friend and I used to drive into the most unknown and complicated neighborhoods we could think of drive at random until we got lost, and then try to find our way home. It was a special indulgence for us to leave the world behind and just drive turning whichever way we fancied. Finding new places and then popping up somewhere familiar by surprise. We cherished this time together where we focused a little more intently on each other and could say almost anything in safety. Going on these little adventures together bonded us in a new way, helped us see each other and ourselves a little more clearly and a little more fully.

In his book, *Our Appointment With Life*, Tek Nahon explicates his reading of sutra on knowing the better way to live alone. By living alone, he argues that the sutra does not mean without other people. He says that the best way to live alone, is to let go of what is past, let go of what is not yet, observe deeply what is happening in the present moment but do not be attached to it. Being alone in this way, means being without the fetters that bind us. One can be a hermit and not truly be alone, or one can be in the midst of a crowded city and be truly alone. He goes on to explain the virtues of community, particularly spiritual community as each member of community contributes to the richness of our spiritual lives just by being in touch with one another. Because being truly aware can be difficult, our spiritual communities can remind us of our strength when we can not access it on our own. There are so many distractions that can keep us from being here, so much pain and injustice in our lives and in the world, so many new things to desire, so much to become attached to. So much hustle and bustle. But this is the true test, anyone can pay attention to the birds singing in a remote area where there is no freeway to compete with the song. the true work is letting go of what is unnecessary so we can pay attention to the sacred in our everyday lives. Quieting that little voice that tells you that over there, that's the answer I've been looking for, and that if I just had that, I could get everything done in half the time. In our goal centered world we so often focus on

where we are going. We rush through our adolescence, to get to our adulthood. We rush through our education to get through our careers. We rush through our work to get home at the end of the day. We miss out on so much when we only focus on what's ahead. In truth if we do not focus on our current reality, whether we are in joy or sorrow, we may never get where we hope to go. Our path is not set, and once we think it is something unexpected will change our plans. Once we get comfortable with the road ahead of us, a large rock will roll into our way, and we may have to forge a new path to get around it. It is in those moments where we have to be flexible. To think on our feet and clear away the brush, that we truly experience life. When something comes out of nowhere and blocks our way, we learn what's important to us, what is at our core, what we are capable of? And in those moments when something blocks our path, or what we thought was our path, we are reminded just how meaningless all the noise can be. When we are shaken from a comfortable place, when we lose someone we love, when we don't achieve the goal we've worked tirelessly for. When a large rock falls in our way and it looks like there's no way around it, and we have to find a new way through in those moments we are reminded of the secret well of strength in each and everyone of us. We are reminded how transformative spiritual community can be.

Last summer, I was privileged to live with a roller coaster fanatic. In close proximity to Six Flags Great Escape, in northern Illinois. On one of our frequent visits we were joined by a seminary friend. Who was a little scared. Particularly, of the Superman roller coaster, which at this particular Six Flags, is designed to simulate flying like a superhero. So, when you are all strapped in your seat moves, so that you're parallel to the ground. In this position you're facing directly down into the space between your body and the hard ground below, unable to not notice how high up you are, looking your fears right in the face. So, on this occasion as three seminary students prepared to take the steep climb that begins most roller coasters, we spontaneously began to sing. Softly to ourselves and each other, For all that is our lives ... And my scared friend, calmly sang and laughed his way to the peak. Where he fell into our journey of twists and turns, watching the sky and ground move around us. And a ritual was born. For the rest of the summer every time we took that climb, we sang a little of that hymn, and before long we were signing it on all the roller coasters we rode. All of a sudden that trip to that peak wasn't just about slow anticipation, full of excitement and a little fear of what would come. I started to look forward particularly to that moment. When we would share a few lines of one of my favorite hymns. Sometimes clasping hands, or sharing the warmth of a smile with one another. We were truly in that moment, with each other and aware of our spectacular surroundings, and heroically facing our fears, as they moved and changed around us.

Being a hero like Superman, doesn't mean being fearless. It means knowing your fears and facing them when necessary. No one can honestly say that they're not a little scared of falling from a great height. But, heroism means standing up to what scares us, or not letting ourselves be defeated by them. We encounter losses, and scary events everyday. It could seem easier to live fearful of losing our loved ones, of being alone, of not accomplishing enough. It could seem easier sometimes to let ourselves drown in our fears and our frustrations. Ultimately, however this sends us down a path towards more pain, more anguish, more anger. We have the opportunity to become spiritual heroes of our

own lives, if we can find the strength that is within each of us. In our central selves, we can learn how powerful we can be, and we can see the power of transformation, we can learn to except the impermanence of world, and live more fully, love more fully, and knowing that nothing is forever. But, roller coasters don't offer you options on where to go, as life does. On them you are stuck on whatever path they take you. While life can feel like a rollercoaster at times bringing you up and down, at its whim. We have a hand in design our own rides. How we interact with each moment can effect what happens in the moments to come. If we are able to be present, to each moment without being consumed by it. those moments will create a future we can be proud of. While we may be able to control when our ups, and downs, and twists and turns may come. We are responsible for what we take away from our experiences, and who we let ourselves become. It's all too easy to let our experiences become excuses for our actions. To get caught in our losses and misfortunes. Or to be trapped in our own joy and comfort, and miss out on the pain and suffering around us. It's dangerous to let ourselves become engulfed in our experiences. We must be attentive to it and to the experiences of others. Remaining aware of this moment, also means seeing our place in the larger picture. See how iatrical we are to the interconnected web of existence, while seeing our insignificance in the grand scheme of reality. Our present has been made by a unique combination of each moment of our past, and our futures can only be built by the raw materials of these moments we are living now. We can dream and plan all we want, but if we weren't present we will never achieve those dreams. Nor, will we be able to find the path towards future fulfillment. It's every step of the journey that matters not where we are going, where we think we are going, or where we think the path may lead. We may not recognize ourselves as the same as the people we use to be, with the goals we use to have. Looking back on our lives haunts us all, as we heard earlier in our reading. But we also heard that those dreams of our past, they've brought us where we are. Yes, even the unfulfilled ones, even the ones that may sting a little bit. Our aspirations of this moment they'll take us wherever we gonna go. The path is unclear so we must, so we must be present yes, but we must also keep our heads up in the clouds. We must also work to achieve successes. we must also strive to be our best selves. We must also aspire to something greater. Plan for the journey and be open to your plans changing. Do not regret the time you spent planning for unfulfilled dreams, it was well spent it brought you here now. And it showed you a little more of yourself. Helped you learn a little bit more about whom you truly are. It is our experiences as drastically different as they can be, that make us who we are. They can easily make us bitter, entitled, or selfish, if we let them. Or they can bring us closer to spiritual fulfillment and wholeness. Who we will become is not already decided, I t is forever changing.

Sometimes, I think it would be nice if my path was pre decided. If I was just on my way to becoming the same me no matter what I did. Sometimes, I wish this was all easier to make sense of. Sometimes, I long for a simpler understanding of my youth before I realized how complicated life is. How complicated I am. How complicated the Holy is. But, there's so much beauty in those complexities. Revolution is continually unfolding. In my quest for truth this belief, both lifts me up and discourages me. It can be frustrating sometimes to not have all the answers, yet I'm reminded that there are no complete answers to be had. As time moves along more of the mysteries of existence reveal

themselves to us. As a question seems to be answered, a new question appears. This is not something to be mad about. Though it can be maddening. It's a beautiful truth our existence is not concrete the world is a living breathing organism that forever evolves with each moment. Each being in this world, affects the whole. It is an interconnected system. Constantly flowing all around us, never static. Essentially as time goes by and more is revealed we can get a little bit closer. Closer to understanding, closer to wholeness, closer to truth, but we get closer to place that doesn't really exist. For as we get closer in our understanding expands the road just gets a little longer. God is not to be completely graphed by our human mind, that's not the point. Trying to shove the scared into something that small would only prove disheartening. Each moment of this existence is a blessing to be cherished and learned from. It shows us more of the world more of the questions and more of the holy. So, here I am in a place so drastically different from my childhood home of Boston, all the way on the other end of the country. I have had to climb some mountains to get here. Mountains of various sizes, shapes and colors. Beautiful mountains only to find that the other side was yet another journey. Not my destination. How many times have I looked back at something I rushed through and wished I could have relished that time more. How many times have I distracted myself from something painful, or uncomfortable, only to have it hunt me where ever I traveled. There is one striking similarity, I've noticed though between Boston and San Diego. There are a lot of windy roads and one-way streets, and dead-ends here too. Here those dead-ends often cut off into a steep canyon. So here to I'm starting to rediscover that joy I had of getting lost in order to learn a new place, in order to find some new hidden treasures, in order to find some more companions for the journey, in order to find some more of myself.