

Two Good Samaritans

By Ravi Shankar

I was suffering from what the famous Himalayan explorer, Tilman termed as ‘mountaineer’s foot’, the inability to put one before the other! The stones and boulders were loose and the moraine walking difficult. The sun had disappeared behind the clouds and the atmosphere looked threatening. Dark clouds were gathering on the highest mountains on Earth. The rumble of avalanches could be heard in the distance. I was on my way back from the Everest Base Camp, walking fast on the Khumbu Glacier trying to reach shelter before the snowstorm broke. A few snowflakes were beginning to fall. The temperature had dropped by around 10 degrees Celsius and the wind was picking up. My body temperature was also beginning to drop.

Though I had on many layers of clothing I was not dressed for the coming blizzard. The day had dawned warm and bright when I started from Lobuche at 4900 m. Lobuche is a collection of lodges in the Everest (Khumbu) region of Nepal. High, dry and arid the place had for long a bad reputation because of the poor quality of the lodges and was known as ‘the armpit of Nepal’. Recently up market lodges have sprung up to cater to the increasing number of trekkers drawn by the pull of the highest mountain on Earth. I regretted not having any hot drinks in my day pack. The water in my bottle felt distinctly chilly.

I sat down on a rock by the side of the trail to eat a chocolate bar and think over my options. Physically I was all right but my blood sugar was low, I was feeling hungry and cold and a bit dizzy. I heard voices in the distance. A group of trekkers was walking towards Everest Base Camp accompanied by their guides. The head Sherpa was able to discern that I was not doing well. He asked me what happened and I explained to him my situation. He made me drink two cups of hot lemon juice with plenty of added sugar. The warm drink sent a welcome burst of warmth coursing through me and then the sugar kicked in, providing an added burst of energy. Admonishing me to trek safely and stay safe the Good Samaritan and his group continued their trek towards the base camp. For me it was a long trek back to Lobuche and the Eco Lodge but I was now energized and ready to meet nature’s challenges.

On another occasion I was trekking in the Helambu region north of Kathmandu. Nepal’s most important festival of Dashain was being celebrated. I had started my trek around three in the afternoon from the settlement of Sundarrijal

on the northern outskirts of the Kathmandu valley. Due to a variety of reasons I was delayed and the bus ride from the old bus park in Kathmandu to Sundarijal was slow and seemed to take forever. People were transporting goats on the bus to be sacrificed as part of the festivities. The goats perhaps aware of the fate that awaited them resisted attempts to force them to take the final journey. I had read about a lodge in the village of Mulkharka and planned on spending the first night there. Darkness was quickly falling and clouds were gathering. The climb was exhausting and I could see the Kathmandu valley spread out before me. In the gathering dusk I was informed by the villagers that the lodge at Mulkharka had closed down. I would have to continue trekking to the next village of Chisapani.

Darkness was rapidly falling and I was walking fast, desperate to reach Chisapani. The trail was long and the village was nowhere to be seen. Soon the last of the October day light was gone and I could barely make out the trail ahead. I had packed in a flash light but like often in life when I needed it most, the flash light would not work. I was cursing my fate and thinking of bivouacking by the side of the trail under a pine tree. Unfortunately the clouds opened up and a light drizzle began to fall, adding to my misery. I took out my rain coat but was not sure how I would fare in the long night ahead. Unfortunately the rain started getting heavier and it was beginning to get really cold. I was at my wit's end.

The darkness was now thick. The forest was quiet. I could discern a light in the distance. The light slowly started approaching me and the beam cut through the darkness. I could see a man behind the glare walking fast in the darkness. I was never gladder to see another human being. He asked me what had happened and I explained my condition. He told me that the village of Chisapani was less than five minutes walk down the forested ridge. He requested me to follow him and I would soon be there.

I could soon see the lights of the lodges of Chisapani spreading their welcome warmth through the cold night. I thanked my benefactor and invited him to share a cup of tea in the lodge but he stated that he still had a long distance to go and would like to continue. After thanking him once more I settled down snug and warm under the quilt in my room. The rain continued through the night. I counted myself very lucky to have escaped a cold and wet night in the forest and before drifting off to sleep, once again thanked my benefactor in my mind.

Through this short piece I would like to thank these two benefactors who helped me at critical moments during my trek. But the Nepalese are a very friendly and hospitable people and in future I will share stories of other good Samaritans I met on my travels through this wonderful country.

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