

Alert Navpad Oli Essay

As I reflect on this Navpad Oli and the importance of the Sadhu Pad, one experience stands out to me on one of my visits to India. As excited as I was to see family that I hadn't seen in a long time, I was really looking forward to the tirth-yatra (pilgrimage) to various sacred Jain temples. Our last stop was Shatrunjay, located in the town of Palitana. We arrived in the afternoon and planned to start climbing the following morning.

We decided to do Darshan at the Tardeti, the temple located at the base of the mountain. As my parents and I were walking back to the Dharmashala (lodging center) we saw an old Sadhvi heading towards the Tardeti to do her nightly prayers. She was alone, in her 80s, and could barely walk. She carried a stick to support her weight and kept taking breaks to catch her breath after every few steps. I stopped in my tracks and bowed down at her determination. As we walked closer, my mom realized that it was her Guru from when she was younger, it was such a coincidence! After my family sat and spoke with her some, I volunteered to help her walk to the Tardeti.

After watching her do Darshan for a while, I came and sat down right next to her. My mind was filled with questions I had been wanting to ask for years. After debating with myself I finally turned to Sadhvi and asked "Sadhvi, may I please ask you a few questions? I only wish to understand and I hope that my questions do not offend you." She turned to me with a slight smile on her face and went "Yes, you may ask me anything."

It seemed as though her permission opened the floodgate of questions I had, I didn't know which to ask first. "Why leave a life of comfort to lead a life that seems so difficult? Why deal with the heat when you can use A/C? Why walk barefoot everywhere when you can just wear shoes? The world relies on technology and electricity, why can't you do the same? Why leave your family and friends who love and adore you?" Sadhvi's brows were drawn together in thoughtful consideration of these questions. Several minutes passed and I was getting nervous, worried that I may have offended her.

After a few minutes of silence she goes "Before I answer any of these questions, I will ask you a few in return. "Are you happy?" I was taken aback, unsure of how to answer. Sadhvi continued, "Is that happiness consistent? Or does it come and go? What does this happiness depend on? Does it depend on how much money you make? How much have you traveled? How many friends you have? How much your family loves you?" I hesitantly admitted that my happiness was dependent on chasing the aforementioned things and that it wasn't consistent. She explained that she'd never known true happiness and peace until she took Diksha. It was up to us to make good use of this rare human birth. She emphasized that you take nothing but your karmas with you when you pass; chasing these materialistic and external pleasures was all an endless race towards futility. Real happiness lies in true Dharma and Jin Vani (teachings of the Jina). I sat there with tears streaming down my face, in awe of the worldly life Sadhus and Sadhis gave up for a more fulfilling and righteous one.

Many people spend their entire lives searching for the 'secret to peace and happiness'. They will look up to teachers, coaches, celebrities, CEOs as their role models, hoping to find these answers in them. The thing is, it is no secret, one only needs to look at our Sadhus and Sadhis to find the answer. We should use them as a constant reminder on how to conduct our daily lives and hope to one day lead the same life as them. The next morning I woke up early and looked up towards the peaks of the Shatrunjay mountain. Feeling changed and determined, I began my climb, both literally and figuratively.