

## Me, a Backpack, and a Destination

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The chilly morning air burns my face when a sharp and powerful gust sends my hair flying in all directions. I don't mind it; the weather is cold now but won't be for long and by the time midday hits I'll be wishing for the chill.

I didn't feel prepared for this trip, but no one is really prepared for a life-changing journey. Life-changing journeys are defined by their unpredictability; the change that takes place does so because we are taking our first, tentative steps into uncharted territory, exposing ourselves to the elements of the unknown, and we can do little more than hope the consequences won't be too dire.

Sure, I spent the night before agonizing over what supplies to take and leave behind, and I did everything I could to ensure that my journey would go smoothly. But, at the end of the day, no one has any way of knowing what will happen once they step out into the nebulous world of [personal growth](#). All we can do is put one foot in front of the other, make use of our senses, and keep our wits about us.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I take my own first steps up the mountain path, hands clenched tightly around the straps of my backpack in both excitement and uneasiness and begin the long climb ahead of me.

My destination? The summit. Obviously.

It seems fitting that I would get to watch the sun rise as I walk, as if to further drive home the point that this is a new beginning. The old me had never seen a sunrise before; I preferred to wake up after the day had already begun. I see now, however, the benefits of waking up earlier. Not only did I have more time to prepare for my journey, I have the privilege of viewing the breathtaking spectacle of the sun as it crests over the distant horizon, cradled between two far-off mountain peaks. I stop despite my desire to press onward, compelled to watch what feels like a show put on just for me.

Closing my eyes, I inhale deeply, fully taking in the sensory delights around me that exist outside of my vision.

I hear birds chirp in the distance and can just faintly smell the cool, clean water of a nearby creek. The mountain air is crisp on my tongue. Through my boots I feel the slightly squishy ground beneath me, saturated from evening rain and morning dew. It is beautiful here. I know I shouldn't dilly dally, however, and soon I am off again, up the mountain path.

There are many paths to the top of the mountain, I've been told. Some prefer the most direct route, scaling up the treacherous mountain walls fearlessly. These people will reach the peak long before I do, but they'll see little more than the craggy rocks and cliffs that support their climb, and I wonder if it's truly worth the time saved.

Others wander aimlessly at the mountain's base. Perhaps they planned to climb to the top once, but the plan fell by the wayside, bogged down by the distractions Mother Nature has to offer.

They become content never reaching the destination they'd once been so excited about. Or, perhaps, their fear got in the way, and they chose to give up rather than risk failing.

There is no guarantee I will reach the top, either.

Much could go wrong on my long and perilous journey upward and I am painfully aware of each hazard I pass, doubts gnawing at the back of my mind.

What if I fall and get hurt? What if it starts raining and I get trapped in a flood, or worse, a mudslide?

But I press onward, one footstep at a time, because that is all I can do. I cannot control the weather. I cannot prevent an avalanche or mudslide. I cannot control the unstable rocky ground beneath me. I can only control my own thoughts and actions, and right now my only thought is to keep moving forward until I reach the mountain top.

That isn't to say, however, that I can't enjoy the sights along the way. There is so much to see, after all. I pass a family of deer grazing in a meadow, mindful of my presence but not fearful, and stop to admire their grace and beauty. I am taken aback by the majesty of a powerful waterfall just off the beaten path, one I may have missed had I not paused to explore it. I hear the songs of all sorts of birds and drink in their music with reverence. Even if I never reach the top, I know I will have no regrets. No one could regret such a remarkable adventure.

They say life is what happens when you're busy making other plans. I didn't always understand that, but I think I do now.