

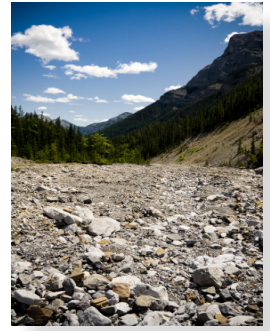
The Perilous Journey:

*A short story of
pilgrimage, hope, choices and
The Spiritual Journey
that awaits us all.*

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The world as I knew it had been destroyed. Rubble, trash and debris was scattered everywhere, all landmarks and previous knowns that guided me were gone. Looking around, I was unable to get my bearings, unsure of what to do next. In the midst of my confusion, a man came by and told me there were about a thousand people who had survived. In order to be with them we had to trek west to the mountains. There were at least a couple of dozen or so individuals with this man, and he told me I was welcome to join them. Not knowing what else to do, I decided to travel with them. The trip was a long one and took many days. Hungry, tired and confused, we walked endlessly over the rubble that led towards the mountains.



Upon reaching the base of the mountains, a group of men approached us. Looking out over the landscape, I saw what looked to be the beginnings of a village, much like pictures I had seen of old mining camps with tents and buildings. People were milling around, going about their business - cooking, washing clothes, building shelters, carrying water. The houses were shanties, poorly built and providing minimum cover. The Leader of the group welcomed us and offered us food and shelter. He acknowledged that these people were survivors too, and were working to get this community established. He invited us to stay and asked what skills we had prior to the destruction. He explained that whatever we did prior to the destruction, they would utilize our help in that area. I thought I could probably clean or cook, maybe help build some of the shelters. The gentleman beside me said he had been a mechanic and would be glad to stay and help get some of the vehicles running. Several of the people I had ventured west with nodded their heads and said they would stay and plant gardens, build roads, stock supplies - carrying on as they had before.



The Leader went on to explain there was another place we could go, but it required a longer trek, including a bus ride up over the mountain pass. The road was treacherous and they had received word that several times the buses had not made it. Because of how dangerous the pass was, sometimes during bad weather the bus would slide off the mountain, or perhaps the driver was careless or didn't pay attention and they would crash. The buses were not in the best mechanical condition as they salvaged what they could after the destruction. This Leader didn't know much about what lay on the other side of the mountain, but urged us to decide with care and know that it would be a perilous and risky trip.



Looking around at the camp, I considered staying thinking I could earn my keep while helping these men build their community. Many people in my travelling group decided to stay rather than chance a perilous trip over the mountain. After much thought, I decided that I needed to make that trip. I wasn't really sure why, other than I didn't feel that I needed to stay where I was. Several others decided to take the trip as well, and it was a personal decision for each of us. For those who decided to stay, the group of men began handing out assignments based on the skills my fellow travellers had prior to the destruction. They assigned them house numbers and gave them their work schedule. My travelling friends who decided to stay seemed pleased they had a place to sleep, food to eat and familiar work to do.

The Leader summoned the bus driver to take the half dozen of us over the pass. The bus pulled up and the door opened. I felt so much fear that I nearly decided to stay, but I knew I had to get to the other side of the mountain. We boarded the bus, and began the long passage.



The weather was bad, and the road was worse. It appeared our driver was capable as he was very deliberate and cautious. Wiping dirt and grime off the window, I peered out only to see the straight drop down the side of the mountain. All I could do was close my eyes, swallow and breathe. We bumped along hour upon hour, many times unable to see anything out the windows. None of us spoke to one another, as we were all so terrified. We either kept our eyes closed or looked out our own window. The weather got worse and it grew darker. We rounded a hairpin curve when there was a brief ray of light that

came through my window. I looked out but couldn't see anything. We continued to bump along for what seemed like eternity, when I felt us finally reach the top. As the driver headed the bus downward, I looked out my window and saw the valley below. It was beautiful, lushly green and full of light.

It didn't take long to reach the valley floor and I saw a crowd of people waiting for the bus to arrive. After welcoming us, they asked what we each wanted to do. I thought I would clean like I would have done in the other community since I had no great skills to speak of. But I noticed a man I know before the destruction

who was an expert in horticulture, and he told me he was there to teach and help anyone who wanted to plant gardens or orchards or farms. I realized that I could do anything I desired to do - even if I had never done it before - and there would be someone there that would teach and help me. There would be a carpenter to teach me to build a house, a fisherman to teach me to fish, a chef to teach me to cook or a musician to teach me to play music. I didn't know what I would ultimately be doing, but I knew I was glad to be there and thankful to have made the trip.

