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Contemporary Jataka

VG Siddhartha, founder of Café Coffee Day and an astute investor himself, learnt his first lessons in investing from the late Mahendra Kampani. Siddhartha had arrived in Mumbai after a 24-hour bus ride from Bangalore, checked in to a shanty hotel with a shared toilet, to go the next day and ask a man who didn't even know him, to be taken under his tutelage. The next day, Siddhartha arrived at Mahendra Bhai's office only to be flustered seeing people queue up in front of the elevator. The boy from Chikmagalur had never seen an elevator before.

Afraid that he would embarrass himself, Siddhartha walked up the six floors and managed an audience with Mahendra Bhai. The latter was so taken aback with the village boy's persistence that he was signed up to join the next day.

After a year-and-a-half, Siddhartha went to Mahendra Bhai to tell him that he would now return home and that he owed the man so much! Mahendra Bhai dismissed the statement and told him a Buddhist tale to explain that Siddhartha didn't owe him anything; that everything in the Universe is connected in a timeless web and that Mahendra Bhai must have owed a debt to Siddhartha in the previous life that he was simply squaring up.



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Owning up to adversity

During my encounters with the many path-creators, I sometimes met creative entrepreneurs, like Aamir Khan, who told me about the wrenching pain he had experienced after separating from his first wife, Reena. For a few years, he stopped working altogether and simply brooded. People worried that he was over. In tinsel town, used to two, sometimes more movies for a superstar per year, here was someone gone completely out of circulation. But eventually, Aamir returned. Ostensibly, not to brood. But Aamir told me that it was critical to brood because if a relationship has been important to you, how can you not brood? You have to give yourself time to heal. To illustrate that point, he told me something commonsensical. If you are hit by a car and get a fracture, you don't pretend nothing has happened. You do not get into denial. You get a plaster and you allow your limb to heal. But when it comes to a mental hurt, we pretend nothing has happened, we say we are alright but inside we have not healed. It is like having a broken leg and hobbling around with it.

Think Different

Five takes on life from MindTree Chairman Subroto Bagchi

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Home truth

Gopal and Venu Srinivasan had started a retail grocery chain business in 1988. The two brothers did a public listing to raise money for it. Thanks to the reputation of the TVS Group, investors enthusiastically responded to the issue.

But the business model was ahead of its time. The reason was there, but the season hadn't arrived. The business tanked, the company closed down and the two brothers moved on. Until one day, their mother, Mrs Prema Srinivasan, who had nothing to do with the family business, called them and said the following, "I don't know but I hear that you have done something very wrong. You shouldn't have done it", she was referring to retail investors losing their money because her sons had failed in their business.

Chastised by the matriarch, the two brothers simply diluted their stakes in another profitable business and gave the equity to the investors of the failed business.

What modern day regulators cannot do

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Purpose behind power

Along the way, I met the Dalai Lama. It was a day after his 74th birthday. If you recall, he had fled Tibet at the age of 16. So, for 58 years, the man had failed in his original mission: that of freeing Tibet. Yet, every morning, the Dalai Lama gets up and smiles at his followers, at the waiting television crew, at the heads of state and a world that thinks he stands for human dignity and not just Tibet. In contrast, people like us suffer a mental breakdown if we don't meet our numbers for one quarter! So my query to the Guru was simple: from where does he get the power to smile? The monk told me that people who just work for money, fame or simple curiosity are more likely to give up in the face of an adversity. A scientist who is working for the benefit of humanity would persist because the larger sense of purpose keeps him going. He told me that your purpose determines your power!

today, a mother had done, giving her two sons a lesson that went beyond legal obligations and the so-called corporate governance.

Grace under fire

Dr Devi Shetty's father ran an Udipi hotel in Mumbai, leaving behind a brood of nine children in Mangalore. From that humble beginning, Dr Devi Shetty eventually found his way to London to learn cardiac surgery. During his medical college days, he used to teach karate.

Every six months, a new batch arrived

and batch after batch one thing was consistent: the kids who had the finest movement and grace and the talent in the beginning simply dropped off somewhere midway. The average ones always persisted, got better at their work and eventually rose to the top.

And it is not just in karate, too many talented people in every single profession simply drop off as they go along. It is a sad but hard reality.

Dr Devi Shetty also told me the story of Dr Christian Bernard who did the world's first heart transplant. He had crooked fingers from rheumatoid arthritis from a very young age. But he persisted and became one of the finest surgeons in the world.