

The Summit Within- Introduction

Major H. P. S. Ahluwalia was a member of the first successful Indian expedition to Mount Everest in 1965. In this lesson, he has talked about his experience of climbing the world's highest summit. He tells the readers how the physical conquest changes one on a personal and spiritual level. After talking about climbing the physical summit, he has also talked about the task of climbing the summit within.

The Summit Within- Summary

The Summit Within begins with the author expressing how he felt as he stood at the summit of Everest. Despite the physical exhaustion, the serene view made him feel multiple emotions, the dominant of which was humility. He believes that a man who has been to the mountains is never the same before. He further talked about climbing the summit of the mind once he had climbed the summit of Everest. As soon as he got rid of his physical exhaustion, his mind started wondering as to why people climb mountains. Most people would simply say, "Because it is there" but the author had a more personal answer to the question. He had always been fascinated by the mountains and would get miserable on being away from them. He mentions how the obstacles in climbing a mountain are physical. A climb to a summit means endurance, persistence and will power. He talks about another question that is, "Why Everest?", simply because it's the highest and mightiest. No wonder how difficult the passage is upwards, the sense of fulfillment, excitement, joy and satisfaction while standing on the top of the summit is incomparable. The experience is other-worldly. He says that there is no perfect answer to the question as to why he climbed Everest. He compared it to why people breathe. He explains how fellow climbers help each other in fulfilling this conquest. Famous climbers have left records of help without which they would have given up. Standing on the summit makes you realise that the struggle was worthwhile. The view motivates you to rise above your current situations. It provides a means for communion with God. on the highest peak, he explains how you bow down and make your submission to the God you worship. The group had left pictures and relics of the Gods they believed in. He then continues talking about the other summit, the summit within which is harder to climb. But any climb, regardless of physical or spiritual, holds the capacity to change you completely. He expresses that having successfully climbed the Everest has given him the strength to face life's problems and that climbing a summit, internal or that of a mountain, is a worthwhile experience.

The Summit Within- Lesson and Explanation

Of all the emotions which surged through me as I stood on the summit of Everest, looking over miles of panorama below us, the dominant one I think was humility. The physical in me seemed to say, 'Thank God, it's all over!' However, instead of being jubilant, there was a tinge of sadness. Was it because I had already done the 'ultimate' in climbing and there would be nothing higher to climb and all roads hereafter would lead down?

Surged- arose suddenly and intensely

Summit- the highest point of a hill or a mountain

Panorama- view of a wide area

Humility- the quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance

Jubilant- very happy because of success

Tinge- race; shade

The author begins the story by telling the readers about the rush of multiple emotions he felt as he stood on the highest point of Mount Everest. The huge panorama below them made them feel little and modest. Climbing up to the top had made him so tired that his physical strength was glad it was over. However, rather than feeling proud and joyous of having climbed the highest peak, he could feel some sadness within him. The only probable reason for this feeling could be that he had now become proficient by climbing the highest point and all the roads from that point will only lead downwards.

By climbing the summit of Everest you are overwhelmed by a deep sense of joy and thankfulness. It is a joy which lasts a lifetime. The experience changes you completely. The man who has been to the mountains is never the same again.

As I look back at life after climbing Everest I cannot help remarking about the other summit — the summit of the mind — no less formidable and no easier to climb. Even when getting down from the summit, once the physical exhaustion had gone, I began asking myself the question why I had climbed Everest. Why did the act of reaching the summit have such a hold on my imagination? It was already a thing of the past, something done yesterday. With every passing day, it would become more remote. And then what would remain? Would my memories fade slowly away?

Formidable- strong and powerful

Remote- distant

The author writes that whenever he thinks about having climbed the summit of Everest, he can not help but think about another significant summit, which is of the mind, which is not easier to climb either. It is not any less challenging. Once he had climbed Everest, returned and recovered from the physical exhaustion, he began to ask himself the reason as to why he climbed the highest peak. It was quite difficult to understand why the accomplishment had such an impact on his imagination all the time, even when it was a thing of the past. He knew that as each day passed, the experience would get old. At that very moment, he was unsure if the memory would remain or fade away slowly.

All these thoughts led me to question myself as to why people climb mountains. It is not easy to answer the question. The simplest answer would be, as others have said, "Because it is there." It presents great difficulties. Man takes delight in overcoming obstacles. The obstacles in climbing a mountain are physical. A climb to a summit means endurance, persistence and will power. The demonstration of these physical qualities is no doubt exhilarating, as it was for me also.

Endurance- tolerance

Persistence- the fact of continuing in a course of action in spite of difficulty

Exhilarating- very exciting

All the thoughts that came into the author's mind made him ask himself as to why people climb mountains. It is not that easy to answer in the simplest way possible could be "Because it is there". Climbing a mountain poses great challenges and we all know that overcoming these obstacles brings pleasure to climbers. In climbing a mountain, these obstacles are physical such as tolerance, will power and determination to keep you going. The exhibition of these physical qualities and one's awareness towards them, on the other hand is thrilling and same was the case for the author.

I have a more personal answer to the question. From my childhood I have been attracted by mountains. I had been miserable, lost, when away from mountains, in the plains. Mountains are nature at its best. Their beauty and majesty pose a great challenge, and like many, I believe that mountains are a means of communion with God.

Majesty- magnificence or great beauty

Communion- the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level

The author seems to have a more personal answer to this question as to why he wanted to climb mountains. He had been immensely attracted to mountains since his childhood. He used to feel lost and unhappy in the plains, when he was away from the mountains. He feels mountains are nature in its best form. Although their magnificence and beauty pose a significant challenge, the author along with a lot of people believe that mountains provide a platform for sharing personal thoughts and feelings directly with God.

Once having granted this, the question remains: Why Everest? Because it is the highest, the mightiest and has defied many previous attempts. It takes the last ounce of one's energy. It is a brutal struggle with rock and ice. Once taken up, it cannot be given up halfway even when one's life is at stake. The passage back is as difficult as the passage onwards. And then, when the summit is climbed, there is the exhilaration, the joy of having done something, the sense of a battle fought and won. There is a feeling of victory and of happiness. Glimpsing a peak in the distance, I get transported to another world. I experience a change within myself which can only be called mystical. By its beauty, aloofness, might, ruggedness, and the difficulties encountered on the way, the peak draws me to it — as Everest did. It is a challenge that is difficult to resist.

Defied- frustrated; resisted

Brutal- unpleasant or harsh

Glimpsing- catch or get a sight of

Mystical- inspiring a sense of spiritual mystery, awe and fascination (other-worldly)

Aloofness- distant

Ruggedness- roughly irregular, heavy or hard in outline or form

Once having found out why to climb mountains, the question “Why Everest?” remains. Probably because it’s the highest in the world and has resisted many attempts of people trying to climb it. To reach the summit of Everest, it asks for every bit of energy in one’s body. It is a harsh struggle with ice and huge rocks. Once you have taken this hard challenge, there is no option for you to give up midway even if life is at stake because the passage backwards poses the same difficulties and challenges as the passage upwards. When finally after overcoming all these obstacles, one reaches the summit, there are feelings of accomplishment, excitement, joy, victory and happiness. There is a feeling of having fought a battle and won. The author mentions how looking at another peak transported him to another world. He experienced a change within himself which can only be called mystical. The peak attracted the author to itself with the help of its greatness, beauty, serenity and the difficulties it poses on the way. He says it was a challenge “difficult to resist”.

Looking back I find that I have not yet fully explained why I climbed Everest. It is like answering a question about why you breathe. Why do you help your neighbour? Why do you want to do good acts? There is no final answer possible. And then there is the fact that Everest is not just a physical climb. The man who has been to the mountain-top becomes conscious in a special manner of his own smallness in this large universe.

The author looks back and discovers that he had not yet revealed why he actually climbed Everest. He compares it by asking a question as to why one breathes or why one helps their neighbour or why one does a good deed. It is impossible to find an answer to these questions. He also mentions the fact that Everest is not just a physical climb but it changes the person in a way that makes him aware how small he and his problems are in this infinite universe.

The physical conquest of a mountain is only one part of the achievement. There is more to it than that. It is followed by a sense of fulfilment. There is the satisfaction of a deep urge to rise above one’s surroundings. It is the eternal love for adventure in man. The experience is not merely physical. It is emotional. It is spiritual.

Conquest- conquering

The overcoming of physical barriers is only one bit of the accomplishment. There is a lot more to it like the sense of accomplishment, the satisfying urge to rise above the current circumstances. It is the never-ending desire for adventure in a person. So, the experience is not just physical, but emotional and spiritual too.

Consider a typical climb, towards the summit on the last heights. You are sharing a rope with another climber. You firm in. He cuts the steps in the hard ice. Then he belays and you inch your way up. The climb is grim. You strain every nerve as you take every step. Famous climbers have left records of the help given by others. They have also recorded how they needed just that help. Else they might have given up. Breathing is difficult. You curse yourself for having let yourself in for this. You wonder why you ever undertook the ascent. There are moments when you feel like going

back. It would be sheer relief to go down, instead of up. But almost at once you snap out of that mood. There is something in you that does not let you give up the struggle. And you go on. Your companion keeps up with you. Just another fifty feet. Or a hundred, maybe. You ask yourself: Is there no end? You look at your companion and he looks at you. You draw inspiration from each other. And then, without first being aware of it, you are at the summit.

Firm in- make yourself firm

Belays- fixes a rope

Grim- harsh

Ascent- climb

He begins evaluating a usual climb to a summit where you are sharing the rope with another climber. As you make yourself firm, he moves ahead as he carves the hard ice with his feet only to further fix the rope to help you inch your way up. It is a difficult climb that puts pressure on every nerve as you take a step forward. He mentions how it has been recorded by some famous climbers for having taken help from others and how it was the only thing they needed at that moment to move forward. Else, they would have given up. It is indeed very difficult to breathe at such high altitudes and cold temperatures. It is so hard that you curse yourself for signing up for this and you start questioning why you undertook it at all in the first place. It pushes you to give up and the idea of going back looks relieving at that moment. Then almost instantly you are out of that mood. You feel something in yourself that does not let you give up and you move on. Your companion is always there with you. As you climb and look at the distance left, you feel as if there is no end. You and your companion, both look at each other in search of motivation and then suddenly, without even realising it at first, you are already at the summit.

Looking round from the summit you tell yourself that it was worthwhile. Other silvery peaks appear through the clouds. If you are lucky the sun may be on them. The surrounding peaks look like a jewelled necklace around the neck of your summit. Below, you see vast valleys sloping into the distance. It is an ennobling, enriching experience to just look down from the summit of a mountain. You bow down and make your obeisance to whichever God you worship.

Ennobling- give someone a noble rank or title

Obeisance- deferential respect

As you look around once you reach the summit, you tell yourself that it was worth all the struggle and hardships. You can see other peaks through the clouds and if you are fortunate enough, there may be sunlight on them. The peaks nearby look as a "jewelled necklace" around the neck of your summit. As you look down, you can look at the vast valleys from a distance. To look down from the summit of a mountain is an honourable and enhancing experience. As you are on the top of a mountain, you bow down and pay your respects to whichever God you worship.

I left on Everest a picture of Guru Nanak. Rawat left a picture of Goddess Durga. Phu Dorji left a relic of the Buddha. Edmund Hillary had buried a cross under a cairn (a

heap of rocks and stones) in the snow. These are not symbols of conquest but of reverence. The experience of having climbed to the summit changes you completely

Relic- artefact

Reverence- deep respect for someone or something

On Everest, the author left a picture of Guru Nanak Dev, his fellow climbers Rawat and Phu Dorji left pictures and relics of Goddess Durga and Buddha respectively. Edmund Hilary built a cross under the heap of rocks in the snow. He mentioned that these are not symbols of accomplishment but of respect and admiration. This is because the experience of having climbed the summit changes you completely.

There is another summit. It is within yourself. It is in your own mind. Each man carries within himself his own mountain peak. He must climb it to reach to a fuller knowledge of himself. It is fearful, and unscalable. It cannot be climbed by anyone else. You yourself have to do it. The physical act of climbing to the summit of a mountain outside is akin to the act of climbing the mountain within. The effects of both the climbs are the same. Whether the mountain you climb is physical or emotional and spiritual, the climb will certainly change you. It teaches you much about the world and about yourself.

Akin- similar

He talks about another summit, the summit within one's own mind. He further explains how there is a mountain peak within each person's mind and how he must climb it to attain complete awareness of oneself. It is fearful and can not be measured. Moreover, no one except you can climb it. He further explains how physically climbing a mountain is similar to climbing the one within. The effects of both the climbs are also the same. It changes you completely irrespective of the nature of climb being physical, emotional or spiritual. It teaches you a lot about the world around you and the one inside you.

I venture to think that my experience as an Everester has provided me with the inspiration to face life's ordeals resolutely. Climbing the mountain was a worthwhile experience. The conquest of the internal summit is equally worthwhile. The internal summits are, perhaps, higher than Everest.

Ordeals- painful experiences

Resolutely- with determination or firmness

The author goes about thinking that his experience as an "Everester" has given him both the strength and inspiration to deal with life's painful experiences with determination and firmness. Just like climbing Everest was a worthwhile experience, conquering the summit within is equally worthwhile. Moreover, internal summits are higher than the physical summit of Everest.

The Summit Within- Question and Answers

Comprehension Check

1. Standing on Everest, the writer was

- (i) over joyed.**
- (ii) very sad.**
- (iii) jubilant and sad.**

Solution-(iii) jubilant and sad.

2. The emotion that gripped him was one of

- (i)victory over hurdles.**
- (ii)humility and a sense of smallness.**
- (iii)greatness and self importance.**
- (iv)joy of discovery.**

Solution- (ii) humility and a sense of smallness.

3. “The summit of the mind” refers to

- 1. great intellectual achievements.**
- 2. the process of maturing mentally and spiritually.**
- 3. overcoming personal ambition for common welfare.**
- 4. living in the world of thought and imagination.**
- 5. the triumph of mind over worldly pleasures for a noble cause.**
- 6. a fuller knowledge of oneself.**

Solution- (6) a fuller knowledge of oneself.

Working with the Text

1. Answer the following questions.

(i) What are the three qualities that played a major role in the author’s climb?

A. The three qualities that played a major role in the author’s climb are endurance, persistence and will power.

(ii) Why is adventure, which is risky, also pleasurable?

A. An adventure which is risky in nature poses great challenges and obstacles in its path. Human beings attain immense pleasure and satisfaction in overcoming these obstacles.

(iii) What was it about Mount Everest that the author found irresistible?

A. The author could not resist climbing Mount Everest because it is the highest and the mightiest. It has defied many attempts. It demands one's last ounce of energy.

(iv) One does not do it (climb a high peak) for fame alone. What does one do it for, really?

A. It is true that one does not climb the highest peak for fame alone. It is a test of one's endurance, persistence and will power. One reason is simply because it exists and the other reason is because it holds the capacity to change a person inside-out. It transforms the climber spiritually and emotionally. The man who has been to the mountains never returns like he did before.

(v) "He becomes conscious in a special manner of his own smallness in this large universe." This awareness defines an emotion mentioned in the first paragraph. Which is the emotion?

A. "He becomes conscious in a special manner of his own smallness in this large universe." This awareness defines the impact of "humility" on the person after having climbed the highest peak.

(vi) What were the "symbols of reverence" left by members of the team on Everest?

A. As leaving symbol of reverence on Everest, the author left a picture of Guru Nanak Dev, his fellow climbers Rawat and Phu Dorji left pictures and relics of Goddess Durga and Buddha respectively. Edmund Hilary built a cross under the heap of rocks in the snow.

(vii) What, according to the writer, did his experience as an Everester teach him?

A. The author goes about thinking that his experience as an "Everester" has given him both the strength and inspiration to deal with life's painful experiences with determination and firmness.

2. Write a sentence against each of the following statements. Your sentence should explain the statement. You can pick out sentences from the text and rewrite them. The first one has been done for you.

(i) The experience changes you completely.

One who has been to the mountains is never the same again.

(ii) Man takes delight in overcoming obstacles.

(iii) Mountains are nature at its best. _____

(iv) The going was difficult but the after-effects were satisfying.

(v) The physical conquest of a mountain is really a spiritual experience.

Solution-

(i) The experience changes you completely.

One who has been to the mountains is never the same again.

(ii) Man takes delight in overcoming obstacles.

The obstacles in climbing a mountain are physical. A climb to a summit means endurance, persistence and will power. The demonstration of these physical qualities is no doubt exhilarating.

(iii) Mountains are nature at its best.

Mountains are a means of communion with God.

(iv) The going was difficult but the after-effects were satisfying.

The physical conquest of a mountain is only one part of the achievement,, There is more to it than that. It is followed by a sense of fulfilment.

(v) The physical conquest of a mountain is really a spiritual experience.

There is the fact that Everest is not just a physical climb. The man who has been to the mountain-top becomes conscious in a special manner of his own smallness in this large universe.

The Summit Within- Grammar Exercises

1. Fill in the blanks in the following dialogues choosing suitable phrases from those given in the box

At hand	At once	At all	At a low ebb	At first sight
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(i) Teacher: You were away from school without permission. Go to the principal _____ and submit your explanation.

Pupil: Yes, Madam. But would you help me write it first?

(ii) Arun: Are you unwell? Ila: No, not _____ Why do you ask?
Arun: If you were unwell, I would send you to my uncle. He is a doctor.

(iii) Mary: Almost every Indian film has an episode of love _____.
David: Is that what makes them so popular in foreign countries?

(iv) Asif: You look depressed. Why are your spirits _____ today? (Use such in the phrase)
Ashok: I have to write ten sentences using words that I never heard before.

(v) Shieba: Your big moment is close _____.
Jyoti: How should I welcome it?
Shieba: Get up and receive the trophy.

Solution-

(i) Teacher: You were away from school without permission. Go to the principal at once and submit your explanation.

Pupil: Yes, Madam. But would you help me write it first?

(ii) Arun: Are you unwell? Ila: No, not at all. Why do you ask?
Arun: If you were unwell, I would send you to my uncle. He is a doctor.

(iii) Mary: Almost every Indian film has an episode of love at first sight.
David: Is that what makes them so popular in foreign countries?

(iv) Asif: You look depressed. Why are your spirits at such a low ebb today? (Use such in the phrase)
Ashok: I have to write ten sentences using words that I never heard before.

(v) Shieba: Your big moment is close at hand.
Jyoti: How should I welcome it?
Shieba: Get up and receive the trophy.

2. Write the noun forms of the following words adding -ance or -ence to each.

- (i) endure _____
- (ii) persist _____
- (iii) signify _____
- (iv) confide _____
- (v) maintain _____
- (vi) abhor _____

Solution-

- (i) endure + ance= endurance
- (ii) persist + ence= persistence
- (iii) signify + ance= significance
- (iv) confide + ence= confidence
- (v) maintain + ence= maintenance

(vi) abhor + ence= abhorrence

3. (i) Match words under A with their meanings under B.

A	B
remote	Difficult to overcome
means	Most prominent
dominant	Be overcome/ overpowered
formidable	method(s)
overwhelmed	Far away from

Solution-

A	B
remote	Far away from
means	method(s)
dominant	Most prominent
formidable	Difficult to overcome
overwhelmed	Be overcome/ overpowered

(ii) Fill in the blanks in the sentences below with appropriate words from under A.

(a) There were _____ obstacles on the way, but we reached our destination safely.

(b) We have no _____ of finding out what happened there.

(c) Why he lives in a house _____ from any town or village is more than I can tell. (d) _____ by gratitude, we bowed to the speaker for his valuable advice.

(e) The old castle stands in a _____ position above the sleepy town.

Solution-

(a) There were formidable obstacles on the way, but we reached our destination safely.

(b) We have no means of finding out what happened there.

(c) Why he lives in a house remote from any town or village is more than I can tell.

(d) Overwhelmed by gratitude, we bowed to the speaker for his valuable advice.

(e) The old castle stands in a dominant position above the sleepy town.