

July 16, 2013. I am slowly working my way down the dirty brick streets of *gucheng*, the old city, in Dali, China. It is one month into my second ever trip to China, a trip dreamt up some five months before, during my freshman spring. I wanted to learn of Mandarin and my heritage; I wanted adventure and to escape the routine of the school year. I did not know, however, that on this trip, I would learn the importance of having faith in my decisions.

After spending an eyeopening month in Fuzhou, learning to speak workable Mandarin and living with my relatives, I am on the most anticipated segment of my trip: 22 days of solo travel across the country. This trip came about through a romanticized notion of the lone traveler, constrained by only his own whimsical desires and free to shift as the wind. Now, only one emotion reigns within, an emotion that I haven't experienced in the longest of time; **I am afraid.**

I stop on occasion to carefully compare the complicated characters on my phone to those on the street signs, fearful of losing my way. I compose myself and prepare my sentence before approaching a street vendor to purchase water. It is my greatest fear that I will attract attention because of mispronunciation, and so I speak quickly, produce the necessary money, and continue on until I find the hostel.

Safe and alone at last, I enter my room, collapse onto the hardwood bed, and curl into the fetal position. I am overwhelmed by the fact that I am *alone*. I wonder how I ended up here, a 5-hour plane ride from my nearest Chinese relatives and half-way around the world from anyone that I actually *know*. I question my decision to come here; in the face getting lost in this foreign land, in the face of the journey ahead without anyone to catch my mistakes, in the face of my continued solitude, I curse my own stupidity.

Whenever I—whenever *we* face relentless and visceral doubt and fear, our response is to bury ourselves in work, in the company of others, in learning, in *something* that will distract us from the discomfort of actually searching for a solution. Perhaps, because our fears are so

genuine and legitimate, we don't actually believe there is a way to escape them. But in this moment, my solitude leaves me no option but to confront my fears head on.

And so, sitting up, I force myself to meditate and reflect. I realize that I am not trusting in my prior decision-making capacity, that I have lost sight of the larger picture that grounded me and set me traveling in the first place. I decided to come here because I felt called. Doubting myself only takes away from the limited time that I have. In short, I learn to have faith in my decision and the outcome of my trip. And with that, something clicks, and my fear evaporates, but not through rationalizing. In the end, it is an act of the heart, an act of faith, that sets me free to experience the journey ahead.

On that trip, I continually looked back to that moment of clarity in that hostel in Dali, and then forward to the journey in front of me with the courage to proceed without doubt. I can honestly say that the embrace of my decision to travel through China changed my outlook and the way I traveled, freeing me from fearfully following the well worn path and allowing me to make my most treasured memories of that trip, like biking ~130 km alone around *Erhai* lake, climbing up *Huashan*, one of the sacred mountains of China, and standing atop the summit of the towering dunes of Dunhuang, feeling the sandy wind powerfully gust past.

If you hang around me, you'll quickly realize how important faith is to me. I strongly value faith in God's providence, and looking back at last summer, I see that I also need to have faith in myself and my decisions. Yes, it is immensely valuable to reflect and make good decisions, taking the big picture into account. However, I realize that, once decided, there's so much more for me, indeed for *anyone*, to experience through setting aside doubt and fully believing in the value and meaning gained through following that choice—through looking forward rather than backwards. It just takes a little faith.