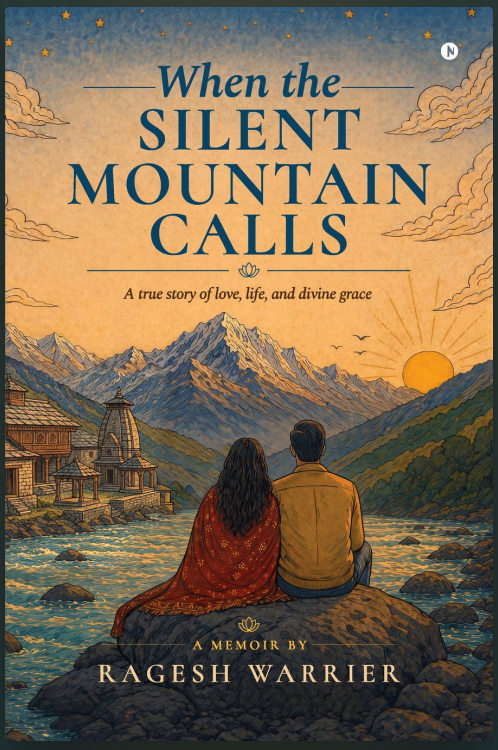
THE OPENING PAGES AND CHAPTER 1 · FREE TO READ



When the Silent Mountain Calls

A true story of love, life, and divine grace

Inside: the dedication, the Foreword by Smaran Haridashwa, the Author's Note, the contents and the whole of Chapter 1, At the Brink of Surrender. A memoir by Ragesh Warrier.

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Arunachala Shiva

Humble prostrations to the sacred Arunachala mountain,
for showering us with boundless compassion and silent grace.

Heartfelt reverence to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi,
for revealing the most direct and simple path to Self-realisation.

Eternal gratitude to Pujyasri Ramanacharanatirtha (Nochur) Swami,
for expounding the timeless wisdom of our scriptures with clarity, depth,
and boundless love.

Foreword

By Smaran Haridashwa

Tiruvannamalai
18 June 2026

One who conquers himself is mightier than one who conquers thousands upon thousands, a thousand times over, on the battlefield. Of all the expeditions one can undertake, the journey beyond oneself—to one's True Self—though devoid of distance, is seemingly the most arduous. Not because the road winds endlessly before the traveller, but because the destination belongs to the mysterious realm of the pathless. The mind is schooled in moving forward, not inward; in acquisition, not abidance; in becoming, not Being. And so, one wanders through the shimmering mirages of worldly pursuits, carrying the very treasure one seeks, like a thirsty man bearing bottles of water in his bag unbeknownst to himself.

It is Grace alone that jolts us awake from our ancient sleepwalk of illusion, arriving in the most unexpected of ways—a fleeting encounter, a chance sentence, a compassionate glance, or now and then, as a book that quietly glides its way to you. The modern world we inhabit stands flooded with books, saturated with philosophies, procedures, practices, and promises. Yet only a rare few possess the strange power to lead the reader inward while still engaging the heart. The spiritual memoir you are holding right now is one such work shaped by Grace.

Ragesh, the author, and Anjali make a wonderful couple immersed in the blessings of a multitude of deities and saints. The Divine has led them to the liberating shade of Pujyasri Ramanacharanatirtha Swami, through whom they have experienced the grandeur of spiritual life. The luminous majesty of Arunachala—the Supreme

Consciousness clothed in stone—and the effervescent silence of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi have also graced their lives. Having witnessed their journey firsthand over the past few years, it fills my heart with joy unspeakable to pen a foreword for this memoir. That this beautiful book found its way into my hands as a birthday gift from Ragesh feels less like coincidence and more like the gracious design of the Divine.

What unfolds within these pages is not merely the chronicle of a man travelling through picturesque landscapes, but the far more formidable journey of a spiritual aspirant weathering the tides of life amidst the wilderness of his own mind. Though the garments may differ, human sorrow is stitched from strikingly similar threads. The questions that haunt us, the fears that visit us in the dead of night, the ache for meaning, the longing to belong, the crushing weight of carrying oneself through the rigour of mundane existence—these are ancient companions of human existence.

Destiny may tailor our circumstances differently, but our tears taste much the same. It is perhaps for this reason that this memoir resonates so intimately. The precise facts of the author's life may not belong to us, yet the flavour of his seeking certainly does. We recognise fragments of ourselves—in the excitement and the exhaustion, in the joy and the jeopardy, in the yearning and the becoming, and in the stubborn hope that refuses to die even when light is nowhere within reach.

In his gripping narrative, composed like an exquisite symphony of intricate detail, one chapter melts into another with the inevitability of rivers finding the sea. Moments of inward revelation arise not as grand spectacles, but as soft, fragrant blossoms in the garden of experience. He draws his words not from figments of imagination but from the richness of immersion. Paradoxically, through the narration of personal accounts, the reader is gently led towards the Impersonal.

What lends this work its distinctive beauty is its unwavering, radical honesty. The author does not write from the lofty certainty of one who claims attainment, but from the trembling sincerity of one who has suffered deeply, questioned intensely, loved fully, and surrendered repeatedly. The prose itself carries a meditative cadence—at times devotional, at times philosophical, at times startlingly tender—mirroring the very states it seeks to describe.

The odyssey of spiritual life is akin to the growth of a tree. Growth cannot be compelled. It can only be nurtured by providing the right atmosphere—the sunlight of knowledge, the fertile soil of firm faith, and the waters of devotion—for the flowers of fulfilment to blossom. When one finally beholds the Light, one laughs at oneself, realising that all the tribulations endured were but temporary tempests in a teapot. The Goal, as the sages have tirelessly proclaimed, had ever been travelling with us, nay, within us, all along.

The clarity with which the tenets of Vedanta have been presented in this book stands testimony to the fact that the author's heart has deeply absorbed the teachings while sitting at the feet of his Guru—Pujyasri Ramanacharanatirtha Swami, an Acharya of Vedanta who is not only well-versed in the scriptures but also bears the light of the Supreme in his heart. The essential cream of the teachings of Ramana Maharshi—the Sage of Arunachala—has likewise been presented with clarity and profundity.

सांख्ययोगौ पृथग्बाला: प्रवदन्ति न पण्डिता:।

sāṅkhyayogau pṛthagbālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ।

"The immature, and not the wise, speak of Sankhya (the path of Knowledge) as distinct from Karma Yoga (the path of action)", declares Bhagavan Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (5.4). This memoir embodies Krishna's teaching as it beautifully illustrates the

coexistence of action filled with devotion and non-dual wisdom without contradiction or philosophical rigidity.

Life is to be embraced as a whole, for any division of it into the sacred and the ordinary is ultimately artificial. The sacred emerges not in exclusion of worldly life, but through it—through love, marriage, joy, despair, fatigue, friendship, devotion, and the unbearable moments when all certainties fall away. It neither belongs exclusively to caves and monasteries, nor should it be earmarked for the twilight of old age.

This book is not an exposition of dry doctrine, but a warm invitation: to pause, to look inward, to listen more deeply to the silence beneath the noise. Perhaps, that is all that true spiritual literature has ever done. It places into our parched hands not conclusions, but a lamp that illumines the path inward. As the aircraft of life soars through uncertain skies, this memoir gently offers the reader a ticket towards a shoreless island—the I-Land—where the seeker finally discovers that what was sought was never elsewhere.

I conclude with prostrations to the Primordial One, seeking His boundless Grace upon all those who turn this page and embark on an inward pilgrimage.

शिवाय गुरुरूपाय नमः पूर्णाय शम्भवे ।
सर्वदेवस्वरूपाय सर्ववेदस्वरूपिणे ॥

Salutations to Śiva, the Auspicious One, who manifests as the Guru;
To the Complete and Perfect One, the eternal Bestower of Bliss;
To the One who is the underlying Reality within all Divine forms;
To the One who shines as the living essence of all the Vedas.

Arunachala Shiva!



Author's Note

There are many secrets hidden in plain sight.

Not secrets guarded by time or tradition, but truths veiled by familiarity. Life speaks constantly, through people, places, failures, coincidences, and longings, but we rarely pause long enough to hear it. We rush to interpret, to judge, to fix, missing the quiet intelligence that moves beneath events, arranging encounters with remarkable precision.

A spiritual journey does not promise answers in the conventional sense. What it offers is something subtler and far more enduring: a shift in perception. When the seeker begins to recognise patterns instead of accidents, guidance instead of randomness, presence instead of absence, life reveals itself as an ongoing dialogue with the Self.

Our beloved Guru, Pujyasri Ramanacharanatirtha (Nochur) Swami, with his benevolence and blessings, guided Anjali, my wife and me through such a journey, leading to spontaneous discoveries and subtle insights. Between 2018 and 2025, we found ourselves on what could only be described as a spiritual treasure hunt, where esoteric truths and spiritual principles appeared before us in ways that felt guided. From bustling cities to sacred mountains, from doubt to devotion, from surrender to silence, each journey carried its own revelation. Some arrived as moments of revelation, others as long stretches of confusion that only made sense in retrospect.

It is perhaps the will of the Divine that our revered Swami Ji asked us to capture this essence, to document the unfolding of our spiritual evolution in the form of this book. What you now hold is

not merely a memoir, but a heartfelt sharing of the grace Anjali and I were blessed to experience. These stories shine a light upon seven principles of spirituality, each a step guiding the seeker closer to the truth of Self-realisation. Revealed through grace, they trace the path of awakening to our true nature, leading us home to the eternal 'Self.' Together, these journeys reveal a simple yet profound truth: that awakening is not reserved for monks or mystics, nor confined to temples or scriptures. It unfolds quietly, in the midst of ordinary life, for those willing to look deeply and listen honestly.

This is not the story of how we found the truth. It is the story of how the truth slowly dismantled everything that was not. There was nothing to attain, only something unreal that had to fall away. This book is a record of that learning. And an invitation for the reader to begin, continue, or culminate their own exploration. It is neither a manual nor a doctrine, nor an attempt to persuade. It is an invitation to walk alongside us through landscapes—both outer and inner.

Many secrets await recognition—not because they are hidden, but because we have not yet learned how to see.

Ragesh Warrier
Badrinath, 2026



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Chapter 1

At the Brink of Surrender



Chapter 1

At the Brink of Surrender

It was the winter of 2006.

Dubai shimmered with its usual year-end spectacle, glittering lights, lavish celebrations, and the collective excitement of a new beginning. But beneath the city's dazzling facade, I was silently collapsing. While the world danced towards another year, I was sinking deep into my fourth relapse of clinical depression.

At twenty-five, I found myself at the edge once again. This wasn't just a passing low. It was the return of something far darker than ever, something I had hoped I had left behind. But here it was again, coiling itself around me with familiar cruelty.

Depression is not mere sadness. It is a slow, suffocating erosion of self. Days blur into one another. Each moment feels unbearably heavy. The mind becomes a prison, riddled with fears, strangled by self-doubt, and haunted by an endless fog of hopelessness. Even the smallest acts, getting out of bed, showing up at work, eating a meal, feels insurmountable.

Conversations drained me, while silence suffocated me. I was exhausted and on the verge of mental collapse, locked in a battle I no longer had the strength to fight. How do you fight something that lives inside you? The more I resisted, the tighter it gripped. I wasn't just lost, I was trapped in myself. The world sparkled. But the light refused to ignite the inner recesses of my clouded mind.

And then came the moment all who suffer deeply know. The moment where exhaustion overtakes resistance. When the mind, bruised and broken from too many inner battles, simply collapses.

The questions stop. The struggle ceased, and my life took an unprecedented turn.

Like Arjuna, standing paralysed on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, crying out to Krishna, *'Na yotsye'* ('I shall not fight'), I too collapsed in utter helplessness. It wasn't a prayer to any particular god, it was a raw, desperate cry to the cosmos. I stood at the edge of self-destruction. And then… the unimaginable happened.

Long before I knew how to seek Him, Krishna reached out to me.

Without effort, without warning, my sorrow dissolved. No ritual, no philosophy, no technique, just grace. The crushing turbulence of the mind gave way to the stillness of divine bliss. What emerged was not just the absence of suffering but the luminous presence of peace. A joy untouched by thought. An embrace I didn't seek, but one that saved me.

Like the Gita revealed on the battlefield, something eternal unfolded within me.

Krishna had arrived.

Did He appear before me as the majestic *Shankha-Chakra-Gadhadhari*, adorned with a conch, a discus, and a mace? Or as the cosmic *Virat Purusha*, spanning the heavens and earth? No. There was no grand vision, no celestial spectacle. His presence was subtler yet infinitely profound. He arose within me as the *Antaryami*, the indwelling witness, the silent guide seated in my heart. Not seen, but unmistakably known. As real and intimate as the breath flowing through me. I was immersed in a deep and abiding serenity in His embrace, a peace that surpassed all understanding.

Eighteen years later, I can begin to comprehend the immensity of what unfolded. But then, I was standing at the threshold of something vast and unspeakable, stunned, unable to grasp the weight of the blessing being poured into my life. I felt like a

bewildered beggar, ushered into a palace and seated before a royal feast, too stunned to eat, too humble to ask why.

And yet, the blessing was real. The divine does not always startle you with an appearance. Sometimes, it arrives like the wind changing direction, like a river carving a new course. Quiet, unseen, but irrevocably transformative.

I did not see Him with my eyes, although I knew He was present. A subtle current stirred within me, soft and sacred, dissolving every hardened edge of my being. A silence so vast, so absolute, that the noise of my mind crumbled at its feet. Like the hush before the first light of dawn, His presence melted the weight of a thousand sorrows in a single breath. I was no longer someone sitting in time. I was the wind that moved without asking, the river that flowed without seeking. The past loosened its grip, like a knot gently undone. The future, once a cruel, teasing mirage, faded into stillness. And before me stretched the eternal now. Luminous, infinite, whole.

And oh, how the world bloomed!

The trees no longer stood as lifeless silhouettes in the background of my hurried existence. They breathed and sang. The leaves, oh, the leaves! They were not merely green; they were alive with a radiance I had never known. A thousand shades of emerald dancing in the wind whispered to me, 'See? You were blind before.'

Flowers did not merely bloom, they unfolded with ancient secrets, petal by petal, as if the cosmos had finally begun to reveal its well-kept mystery. The air shimmered with a fragrance I could not name, a scent that felt like coming home to something I had always known but forgotten. Every corner of existence pulsed with a sacred presence, as if the world had always been radiant, and I was only now remembering.

Had the world changed? Or had I?

Then came the knowing. Not as a thought, or a belief, but as Truth:

Krishna has never been confined to the verses of the Bhagavad Gita. He isn't a distant deity to be worshipped from afar. He is not someone to be sought, not a goal to be achieved.

Krishna is the heartbeat of the universe, the hush between my breaths, the space between my thoughts. He is the stillness of the lake, the warmth of the sun, the pulse of eternity. He is the dance of the wind, the laughter in the rain, the rhythm of life itself. Krishna is the very love that makes this universe breathe.

And I? I have never been separate from Him. I have not found Krishna. Rather, Krishna had beheld me and blessed me. Yes, Krishna is to be felt. And where there is love, where there is life, there is Krishna.



With this revelation, I began to see Krishna in all His infinite dimensions, a divine mirror reflecting the heart of each devotee according to their *bhava* (emotion). To some, He was the playful *Makhan Chor*, the mischievous child stealing butter and hearts alike. To others, He was the dearest friend, unwavering in loyalty and boundless in affection. To the wise and the renunciates, He was the *JagadGuru*, the Supreme Teacher, whose wisdom shattered the illusions of the mind like a thunderbolt of truth.

Yet, He was not merely a teacher; He was the ultimate paradox. The King of kings who chose to be a charioteer, the diplomat who sought peace yet stood fearless on the battlefield as the master strategist, rewriting destiny. He walked the earth as an ideal householder, a perfect lover, a yogi beyond comparison and a humble servant to his dearest devotees, each role played with effortless perfection.

To witness such a symphony of divinity in a single being was nothing short of astounding. Was there ever, or would there ever

be, another like Him? No wonder the scriptures declared Him a *Paripoorna Avatar,* the perfect, complete incarnation of the Divine. A being so full, so vast, that no *bhava* could define Him, yet He fit into the heart of every devotee in the form they loved most.

This is Krishna. Beyond limits, yet intimately personal; beyond form, yet tenderly tangible; beyond time, yet forever near. The unfathomable mystery, and yet, the only truth I ever needed to know.

To me, he was the most affectionate friend, my *Sakha*, always near, always attuned to even my smallest needs. Krishna has this extraordinary way of slipping into the hearts of his devotees, meeting them in the intimacy of their own longing. He delights in the bonds we weave with him, in the casual call of a friend or the desperate plea of a seeker. I found that I could reach out to him with any question, and miraculously, the answers would arrive, sometimes revealed through a stranger, a line in a book, or the unfolding of an ordinary moment made luminous. Yet always precise, timely and unmistakable.

For the first time in my life, the scattered fragments of my existence began to realign into a coherent design. What once appeared as random events driving me to the brink of utter chaos now rose in harmony as a cosmic symphony, a script I had been unknowingly living all along. A silent revelation unfolded within me: *had Krishna been guiding me all along?*

This newfound connection consumed me. I felt irresistibly drawn to Krishna. It was a pull so intense, it seemed to rewire the very core of my being. His name, his form, his *leelas*, each awakened a forgotten longing within me. I would lose myself in Krishna *bhajans* on YouTube, surrendering to melodies that carried my heart into the intoxicating depths of devotion. My colleagues at the advertising agency where I worked cast curious, amused glances my way, perplexed by my sudden immersion in devotion.

But how could I explain? How does one describe the joy of rediscovering what the soul has longed for across lifetimes? Such are the unfathomable ways of the divine. The celestial gates had opened, and from them, flowed a continuous stream of nectar, redeeming my past, dissolving my pain, and flooding the barren chambers of my heart with an inexplicable bliss.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna had declared to Arjuna:

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जना: पर्युपासते।

तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

(Gita 9.22)

Those devotees who incessantly meditate on
Me without their thought going to the 'other',
I take care of their spiritual and worldly well-being.

Had I truly earned this gift? Did I possess the depth of devotion that Krishna speaks of? Was my spiritual practice worthy enough to deserve such exalted bliss?

No. I was just an ordinary seeker, fumbling through life, neither devout nor disciplined enough to warrant such love coming my way. Yet, Krishna, in his boundless compassion, had chosen to uplift a mediocre soul like me and gather me in his embrace. For the first time in my life, I encountered something beyond human love, love that neither demanded nor bargained, love that neither measured nor wavered. Unconditional. Eternal. Infinite.

What had I done to deserve such love? Perhaps nothing. Perhaps love had never been about deserving; it had always been about belonging. And I realised, I had always belonged to Him. This newly found connection with Krishna helped me navigate through my mundane life better.

Call it family tradition or the call of duty for every Keralite, an annual touch-down to Kerala is a must. And so, I went back to

Kerala. But this time, it was different. And must admit, I wasn't prepared for what Krishna had in store for me.

During that vacation in Kerala, I sensed a profound shift within me. There was an unshakable stillness, a quiet security I had never known before. One particular moment stands out in my memory: I could effortlessly perceive the intentions and emotions of those around me. It wasn't a conscious attempt on my part; it just happened.

It felt as if Krishna had briefly lifted the veil, offering me a glimpse into the undercurrents of people's minds. Their words became secondary; I could feel the intention hidden beneath their speech. It was both exhilarating and unsettling, leaving me unsure whether this was a blessing or a burden. This revelation left me humbled, alert, and slightly afraid of my own sensitivity. In a few days, the heightened awareness gradually softened into something even more beautiful, a deep sense of peace and belonging. For the first time, I wasn't trying to control or resist life. I was simply present, and that was enough.



There are moments in life when time ceases to be linear, when the air grows thick with something unspoken, and the soul, long before the mind, recognises the shift in its destiny. There was one such moment in my life too. At a cousin's wedding. That evening, beneath the golden glow of wedding lights, as laughter and music wove their way through the gathering, a close relative traced the lines of my palm, predicting that love was waiting to blossom in my life. I smiled, unconvinced, ignorant of the cosmic orchestration at play. And then, as if summoned by destiny, she walked into my world.

Draped in an electric blue skirt and an elegant orange kurta, she walked past me, unaware that a single glance had left my inner

world in disarray. Her presence was luminous, as though the very air around her had taken notice, slowing its pace to accommodate the grace with which she moved. A certain recognition surfaced within me, an invisible thread pulling at the depths of my being. The world around me blurred, the crowd became an afterthought, and for a fleeting second, only she existed. I had no words for what stirred within me, only the strange, weightless feeling of something falling into place, an inexplicable knowing as if the universe had just exhaled a secret into my soul.

I did not yet know that this radiant girl, who stood out in the crowd, was the one who would alter the rhythm of my existence forever. She represented the love that would transform my life, hold my hand through every joy and storm, and reveal to me different dimensions of love that I was oblivious to. And so she passed by, unknowingly carrying my future within her radiant presence, while my heart, unaware yet kindled, stood at the threshold of its greatest journey. The heart often knows before the mind does; somewhere in the silent corridors of time, the script of our story had already been written. In that instant, my life, unknowingly, began to change beautifully.

From the very first meeting, an unspoken bond wove itself between us, intimate, undeniable, and complete. Love did not arrive with hesitation or doubt; it flowed effortlessly, like a river meeting the ocean, drawn by an unseen force. We spontaneously chose to commit to each other. Along with Krishna, Radha had entered my life too.

During my Kerala vacation, I fell into a strange yet comforting rhythm, waking at 2:30 or 3:00 am when the world lay silent and undisturbed. At first, I thought it's love. It was. But not just that. I began to see a stillness that descended on my conscience. In those wee hours, I would wander through the quiet streets, music playing softly in my ears, lost in thought with nothing much to do

but entertain myself. It was an unconscious ritual, until one day, I received a message from my mother's cousin, Girija *Cheriyamma*. With her characteristic warmth, she pointed out what I had failed to see:

"This is nature's way of calling you to meditation. Embrace these holy hours of *Brahma-muhurta*, and you will find what you are truly seeking."

Her words struck a chord deep within me, and what was once a habit of passing time suddenly felt like an invitation to something far greater. But what can be better than love?

Meditation. The recommended path to reach The Truth. A path that is revealed only to those who are ready for the upending journey. Someone who has put in a lifetime of work. Maybe a few lifetimes of it. Upon returning to Dubai, I found myself naturally slipping into deep meditative states, as if a subtle force was guiding me inward. These sessions were both beautiful and intense, often accompanied by the gentle yet unmistakable stirrings *of Kundalini Shakti* (didn't know what it was then but now I recognise it), a force rising from the base of my spine to the crown of my head, filling my being with an indescribable bliss. With no *Guru* to offer direction, I joyfully embraced the experience, sitting in stillness for long stretches, letting the sacred current move through me. When the energy became overwhelming, I would ease into *Shavasana* (Corpse Pose), resting on the ground, allowing my body to integrate the waves of ecstasy into peaceful stillness.

Krishna had declared to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita,

O Mahābāhu (the mighty-armed one)! Sattva, rajas and tamas—these gunas born of Prakṛti bind the indestructible Self to the body.

(Gita 14.5)

Tamas, being inertia and dullness, had long held me captive, and so had *Rajas*, with its restless activity. But Krishna, in His compassion, lifted me directly into *Sattva guna*, bestowing upon me the clarity of peace, purity, and meditation. It was a spontaneous and effortless transformation, a gift from the Lord, unearned by any particular practice or *Sadhana*.

Eighteen years later, I still marvel at this quiet shift. The heaviness of tamas loosened, revealing a life of balance and stillness. As the Antaryami, Krishna guided me gently, revealing the nature of the gunas and leaving the choice of lifestyle to me. For someone once steeped in darkness, this shift to a *sattvik* life felt nothing short of miraculous.

Over time, I found that non-vegetarian food and alcohol lost their appeal. I shunned noisy parties, and as my social life saw a decline, solitude became my constant companion. Friends noticed the change, but met it with quiet acceptance. Though I spent less time at the office, my creativity soared and my work flourished. As an art director, I delved deeply into the world of colours and design, delivering some of my career's most memorable and impactful work. Krishna's guidance was clear: He wanted me to make the most of my talents and strengths that I was gifted with. Limitations, which felt like barriers earlier, began to give way. I felt whole. My life was not defined by fear but by choice. It was freedom, gently revealed.

In the stillness, something had already begun to stir. The tides of life, unpredictable as ever, soon carried me into a new phase of uncertainty. By the end of 2008, the global economic meltdown swept through the business corridors of Dubai, and I found myself without a job. Recession hit me harder than depression did.

Just when life felt settled in Dubai, as Anjali and I were planning our future, our wedding eight months away, everything changed drastically. Losing my job due to the recession was a blow I had

anticipated, but the timing shook our world. Our carefully laid plans unravelled, forcing us to pause and reexamine what truly mattered. It felt as if Krishna was gently pulling us out of worldly comfort, inviting us into the unknown.

But rather than plunging into fear, I felt a strange undercurrent of trust, perhaps it was Krishna's presence silently orchestrating the next steps of our journey. Anjali had just completed her bachelor's in fashion design in Bengaluru and was in Kerala, while I remained in Dubai, sitting with the uncertainty of what lay ahead. Though distance separated us, there was a shared clarity that did not need words. Both of us sensing a deeper calling, decided to leave behind the fast-paced world of Dubai and settle in Mumbai after marriage.

That was the beginning of a very different journey.

When uncertainty stands before you, and something deeper holds you steady, you find the courage to step into the unknown. Despite the turmoil in our lives, in January 2009, I chose to travel to the Himalayas alone. I was hoping to find an inner stability that the outer world could no longer offer.

Amidst all these happenings, my mind was whirring with our life plans. We were planning to start a design agency. Though entrepreneurship felt daunting—especially in 2009 when the startup wave had barely begun. With no mentors and no roadmap, we felt adrift. But not afraid. Though I had reached a creative high as an art director, stepping into business was another world. Freelancing, meetings, chasing leads, I quickly realised that a CEO's mindset was far from my own. Still, through each detour, Krishna was silently guiding. What seemed like a disruption was, in truth, a deeper alignment.

Eager to grow, I bought warm winter clothes and, on a whim, picked up a book, How to Think Like a CEO, at Dubai airport. With youthful exuberance and a silent resolve, I flew to Delhi. Born and

bred in fast-paced Mumbai, I felt Delhi's blend of old-world charm and understated authority was intriguing. Yet in that unfamiliarity, a sense of adventure bloomed. I found a modest room for the night, ready to catch the early morning bus to Haridwar.

As I approached Haridwar—Hari-dwar, the gateway to the Gods, a quiet awe arose within me. I didn't know what to expect, yet something deep inside felt at home. Witnessing the famed Ganga Aarti at Hari Ki Paudi was beyond anything I had imagined. Lamps swirled in unison, chants echoed across the ghats, and incense mingled with the river breeze. *Bhakti* was in full bloom.

Uttaranchal had just been renamed Uttarakhand, a symbolic renewal. At a roadside shop, I bought a foldable map and marked out austere places with childlike wonder, though the Char Dhams were shut for winter. Still, I resolved to explore all that was accessible.

One such journey led me to Tungnath, the world's highest Shiva temple, perched at 12,073 feet. Guided by a kind local, I trekked through snowstorms and silence. Each step through the white wilderness brought me closer to something ancient and intimate. Legend says Lord *Rama* meditated here and was blessed by Lord *Shiva*. For me, the climb became both a trial and a revelation, an initiation into the soul of *Dev Bhoomi*, the Land of the Gods.

Another timeless site, Triyuginarayan Temple, left a lasting imprint. It is believed that Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati were united here in marriage, with Lord Vishnu performing the *kanyadaan* and Lord Brahma presiding. The holy fire that bore witness to their celestial wedding is said to still burn in the temple's courtyard, an eternal flame that has never been extinguished. To stand in that courtyard was to feel the pulse of the cosmos echo through the Trinity. There, love, power, and wisdom converged.

Later, near Gauri Kund, I came upon a temple unlike any other: Mundkatiya Ganesh. According to legend, it marks the place

where Shiva, in a moment of wrath, severed young Ganesha's head, unaware that the child was Parvati's son. The idol enshrined here depicts Ganesha, headless, in human form—a stark, haunting reminder of that mythic moment and the rebirth that followed.

Each place revealed stories older than time, charged with energy, drawing me deeper. Though the Char Dhams were closed, the Himalayas gave more than I ever imagined. After a month of soulful explorations and satiating my spiritual thirst, it was time to return to Mumbai, where my roots lay. I still recall a sadhu who handed me an apple and said, 'Come back only once your purpose is fulfilled.' His words stayed with me, both as a blessing and a prophecy as I prepared to return to face my life's chaos.



After our marriage in Kerala, we began to live with my parents in Mumbai. In January 2010, we launched The Sign, a Strategic Branding and Design Company, with Krishna's blessings and high hopes. The journey was far tougher than imagined. Each small win came with immense effort. We were passionate but naive, still learning the language of business. Despite the struggles, building something of our own brought immense joy.

During that vulnerable time, R. Parshuram, or Parshu as we fondly called him, entered our lives as a mentor. His wisdom reshaped our understanding of entrepreneurship. One of his most profound lessons was around money. Coming from middle-class backgrounds, we were uncomfortable discussing finances. Parshu helped us break that taboo, teaching us to see money not as something to fear, but as energy for growth. He encouraged openness around billing and ensured cash flow remained steady, planting the seeds for a healthier financial mindset.

In 2010, Landmark Education (now Landmark Worldwide, an American company that provides personal development programs)

brought a paradigm shift in our lives, offering life-transforming courses. Its teachings brought structure to our dreams, clarity to our purpose, and voice to what lay unspoken. I immersed myself, and in that process, something within began to align.

Mumbai mirrored our inner world, restless, raw, full of possibility. But in this inner world also resided Krishna, our beacon of hope, gently guiding each step. After The Sign was founded, success came but at a considerable price, both financially and emotionally. Bills loomed larger than blessings, and many days felt like a tug-of-war between faith and fatigue. Spiritual practice often took a back seat to business demands. The glimpse of stillness that Krishna had blessed me with now appeared as a distant star, beautiful but unreachable. He seemed to tell me: 'I've shown you this state. Now, attain it through your own merit.'

At times, Anjali and I felt crushed under the burden of building our business. Like Arjuna in Kurukshetra, I struggled to reconcile inner stillness with outer chaos. Spirituality, once luminous, faded beneath deadlines and cash flow worries. Sadhana gave way to survival. Mumbai's pace was relentless. Each day demanded commitment to excellence and enormous patience. And even when the divine felt distant, Krishna's quiet presence remained, gentle and unwavering.

With steadfast support from my parents, my younger brother, Rajeev, and my uncles, we endured. Slowly, through grit and grace, our dream took shape. Over the next few years, thanks to their generous encouragement and assistance, we gradually built the business we had long envisioned, and with it, a sense of rootedness we had never known. Stability wasn't given. It was earned. Yet we did not wait for miracles, in business or in life. The inner search remained alive, and somewhere along the way, I found myself drawn to *Yoga*.

My journey into yoga Sadhana began at the Yoga Institute in Santacruz East. At that time, I was just a wide-eyed spiritual aspirant, captivated by the institute's serene aura that stood in stark contrast to the bustling chaos of Mumbai. Founded in 1918, it is the world's oldest organized yoga centre.

The seeker in me had found a sanctuary. Eager to begin, I asked a radiant instructor,

'How soon can I learn yoga?'.

He smiled, eyes luminous: 'Perhaps in a moment. Or even a lifetime may not suffice.'

I had hoped for a practical answer, but his words carried a deeper invitation, one my soul recognised, even if my mind didn't.

I enrolled for their course and started my yoga sadhana, hoping it would take me deeper within. The space overflowed with warmth, volunteers guided with humility, and the teachings touched something timeless within me. Though daily commutes from Borivali to Santacruz grew tiring, the fire within had been lit. Trusting Krishna's guidance, I sought a place closer to home, where I could continue my yoga journey.

With His blessings, Anjali and I soon came under the guidance of Shri Rawal Ji, who became our yoga guru. He has been instrumental in carrying forward the Bihar School of Yoga tradition in our family: My father had sat at his feet for years; now, it was our turn.

Guru Ji introduced us to the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga, a path not merely of posture but of inner transformation:

1. ***Yama*** (Moral restraint)
2. ***Niyama*** (Personal discipline)
3. ***Asana*** (Physical posture)
4. ***Pranayama*** (Breath control)

5. ***Pratyahara*** (Withdrawal of senses)
6. ***Dharana*** (Concentration)
7. ***Dhyana*** (Meditation)
8. ***Samadhi*** (Absorption in the Self)

Guru Ji gently reminded us that without Yama and Niyama, moral and personal disciplines, our Sadhana would lack foundation. These principles, he said, take lifetimes to master but must be earnestly embraced from the start.

Yamas: *Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha*

Niyamas: *Shaucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Ishwara Pranidhana*

At first, these teachings felt vast, almost unreachable, given the pull of worldly ambition. But slowly, under Guru Ji's care, the practice softened us. The body learned stillness, and the breath, reverence. The practice of *asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara* helped to ground us amid the external turmoil. With yoga, we learnt to balance our emotions and live with dignity and equanimity.

Eventually, Guru Ji encouraged us to share what we had received. We began offering yoga sessions in government schools to pass on the spark kindled within us. In giving, something deeper awakened within us. It was no longer just *sadhana*; it was also *seva*, a humble offering of the path that had nourished our lives.

The practice of yoga brought much-needed balance to our lives. As we expanded our business, investing in a larger office and building our team, Landmark Education became a catalyst, reshaping our mindset and approach to success. A key breakthrough came when we secured an international client on retainer, easing cash flow and helping us streamline operations.

Under Anjali's leadership as the COO, our team blossomed. From 2014 to 2017, The Sign found its rhythm, earning global recognition,

including a cherished trip to Paris in 2014 to receive an award for innovation in designing our company website.

Outwardly, we were thriving. But within, a subtle longing was simmering. Though the world applauded, a voice from the depths of my soul echoed, 'This is not all,' and pulled me towards something more enduring than success.

For months, Anjali and I had nursed a vision, to create something meaningful that would help people live fuller, more balanced lives. That aspiration finally fructified into the birth of ZonesPro, an app that guided users across seven key life areas: Work, Health, Relationships, Finance, Travel, Hobbies and Self-Development. It felt less like a business idea and more like a calling.

We poured our hearts into its creation, learning the language of technology, analytics and product development, all the while balancing this new venture alongside our design company. Within two years, we launched across iOS and Android, reaching users in over a hundred countries. But fate had other plans: Investors, who had earlier promised their support, suddenly changed their tune. So far, our personal savings had funded this venture, and slowly, the financial pressure grew heavy.

And yet, Krishna's presence endured, quiet but constant, reminding us to walk in faith: 'Keep going. This, too, is part of your journey.'

To keep the dream alive, we channelled every rupee of profit from The Sign into the app. But the costs were relentless. Running a tech platform proved to be far more demanding than we had anticipated. As funds ran dry, we leaned on loans, hope, and inner strength, trusting that somehow, Krishna wouldn't let this journey be in vain.

We had set out to help others find meaning, but in truth, we were the ones being shaped. Every setback deepened our resolve. Every

silence asked us to listen more closely. And through it all, we realised, that the real product wasn't the app—it was the devotion, the dissolving of resistance, and the transformation unfolding within us.

The Sign, our branding company, continued steadily, almost on autopilot. Anjali's radiant energy kept the team inspired and the work flowing. But I grew complacent, mistaking momentum for stability. Our mentor Parshu had gently cautioned us to never depend on only one client. Nevertheless, we didn't act in time.

Then the inevitable happened. At the start of 2018, our worst fear materialized: We lost our key client account due to changes in their management. It felt like Krishna was reminding us that nothing in this world is truly ours. Not clients. Not comfort. Only the lessons remain.



Time rolled on. After eight years of relentless striving, Anjali and I reached breaking point. Loans weighed heavy, our tech startup floundered, and our branding business, once steady, now struggled to stay afloat. Despite receiving support from our families, the path ahead was unclear. We were breaking down—emotionally, financially, and in spirit.

Letting go of our office, our creative sanctuary for eight years, was a heartbreak we hadn't prepared for. We honoured our team by ensuring fair exits, and trimmed every cost, hoping to keep ZonesPro alive. But investors and banks turned away. Only one option remained, an NBFC (non-banking financial company) mortgage loan against our Mumbai home.

That home was precious. My parents had toiled for decades to build it, a place where countless dreams had taken flight. To place it on the line for a failing startup was a decision that shook

us to our core. Yet, without hesitation, my parents, brother, and sister-in-law stood beside us, offering not just their trust but their legacy. It broke something inside me. My family's quiet courage in supporting us humbled me deeply. I had unknowingly risked their peace for my dream.

From this difficult phase, a truth emerged. Taking a loan was necessary, but I knew I could not continue to pursue ambition at the cost of my family's security. I promised myself that I would bring stability and comfort to my ageing parents and family, who had stood by me unconditionally. I gave myself a final deadline to raise investment for ZonesPro, through the mortgage and, if possible, through venture funding. If I failed, I would step away from entrepreneurship and take up a job. We were physically and emotionally spent. We had nothing left to offer but our last thread of faith.

In September 2018, while waiting for the loan to get cleared, Anjali and I felt a pull, sudden and strong, to journey to the Himalayas, to the holy Char Dhams in Uttarakhand. We thought we were escaping the chaos. But in truth, we were being called. Little did we know that through this trip, the universe was conspiring to forge mystical connections with divinity and alter the course of our destiny.

The gods had watched in silence long enough. Now, they were ready to reveal themselves. Through a set of guiding principles.



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