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The events and conversations in this book have been set down to the best of the author's ability, although some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals. The book is focused on the authors personal experiences, the sole purpose of this book is to inspire and motivate the reader to work on his/her spiritual development. The results you attain may be very different from what the author attained. Further the author is not a medical professional, you should consult medical professionals before you undertake any such practices.

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Experiments in Consciousness

Have you ever pondered what is the purpose of your existence ? Why and how was this universe created ? Is there life beyond death? What are the possibilities in human evolution ? What happens when you enter the deep meditative states that ancient mystics have described throughout history ?

These questions baffled me throughout my childhood, but then a few incidents occurred, which pushed me beyond the edge and thus followed a fascinating journey across three decades, that was beyond anything I had expected!

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About the Author

I was born in a small town called Udhampur, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, northern India. My early schooling happened in the town of Kishtwar, and I went to a boarding school in the city of Jammu for my high school education. My dad was a government employee, an extremely rational, scientific person who did not have much patience for temples, gods, or meditation. My dad's extended family were priests who once owned a pristine *Shiva temple in Bhalla. We were much closer to my mother's family - my maternal grandmother was an especially saintly person, and I spent lots of time reading Indian mythology, such as the *Ramayana, the *Mahabharata and the *Gita to her when I was around 10 years old.

As a kid, I often wondered why we were here and what the meaning of life was. I was a typical kid, good at studies and average at sports, and spent all of my spare time reading comic books and drawing superheroes. I was lucky to be exposed to spiritual practices early on. One of my maternal uncles was a physics professor and a yogi; he would stay in deep meditation for hours as I watched with fascination, and survived only on milk for almost two decades, while maintaining great health. Under his supervision, I would sit cross-legged and meditate, but I did not have the conviction that this would go anywhere.

When I was around 15, I happened to spend my summer vacation with him in the town of Naushera (Rajori District). Those were the good old days, with no iPads, iPhones or Netflix. I was extremely bored and often spent time browsing through his vast collection of books. On one of those days, I got hold of the famous book, *Autobiography of a Yogi, by *Paramhansa Yogananda. With nothing better to do and the only alternative at hand being books on theoretical physics, I started reading the book. That was the beginning of my spiritual journey - I found myself unable to stop reading the book, until I had read it cover to cover numerous times.

All terms tagged with a '' are defined in the Glossary.

During and after I had completed my education, I searched extensively for someone who could demonstrate the wisdom of Yogananda, and took every chance to meet and talk to holy men, wherever I went. I met a variety of people - some were great healers, some could read my mind like an open book, some could read my past and make some fairly accurate future predictions, some could demonstrate physical feats (such as surviving with almost nothing in sub-zero temperatures), but no one seemed to have reached the states that Yogananda described. They had great theoretical ideas, could quote from ancient Indian literature and could talk for hours, but as far as I was concerned, they did not seem to have travelled the path themselves.

Around 1997, I met a small business owner residing in Jammu city. His name is Janak Raj, and people called him Prabhu Ji. I met him for the first time in his tiny shop, and in the first five minutes, before I had a chance to say anything, he gave me a complete map of my current struggles and future possibilities that I was trying to move towards. I was shocked to witness this level of capability, from a person who demonstrated almost no external signs of 'typical' holy men. There was no ego, no pretense, no showing off - this was something that I hadn't witnessed in my entire search.

I was used to starting on a skeptical note when I met holy men, but he felt extremely genuine and trustworthy, so I stayed in constant contact with him as I moved to the United States to pursue my career aspirations. We came to know each other well over these years and, as I started going deeper into meditation, he was able to provide me customized instructions on my next steps. Somehow, he always knew what stage I was in, and always seemed to have an answer to my questions before I asked them. He was very patient with me. In my early career, I was overly focused on work, and spiritual progression would often take a back seat. He never pushed me too hard; in fact, he encouraged me to do well in professional life, so that when I would meditate, I would start from a satisfied, fulfilled state. When I look back today, I realize that more than 20 years ago, he was already far ahead of where I have reached today after 30 years of practice. I am extremely grateful to have had such close guidance and support from someone who is probably on par with spiritual giants such as *Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

I absolutely love my work. I get to lead and manage large teams, to work with the most cutting-edge technologies on the planet, such as Blockchain and Artificial Intelligence, and in my career I have been able to create a decent impact on almost every role I have undertaken.

At times, my work can be extremely stressful - there are deadlines to meet, clients to manage and employees to care for. Every day is a balancing act and I often need to take part in difficult conversations.

When I consider my journey, almost everything that has happened has helped me fully prepare for the challenges of today. Not only is the ability to maintain a calm, positive composure a basic need to be successful in modern jobs, but leadership in such roles depends heavily on your ability to understand your teams and colleagues, to motivate and drive them through difficult challenges, and to find a simple, clear path in the face of overwhelming complexity. Having an intuitive perception of people around you gives you an almost unfair advantage, especially in building and maintaining precious relationships.

I believe I still have a long way to go - there seems to be no end to what you can achieve in this area, but over time I have realized that helping others gain these insights could possibly have a cascading positive effect on society at large, as well as our individual communities. With that in mind, I usually conduct small group sessions, or one-on-one coaching sessions, where I can spend time to gain a deeper perception about the participants and help them with customized advice.

I am very thankful to my family, teachers, colleagues, and friends who have enriched my life in so many ways. With this book, I hope to provide them a glimpse of what they have enabled, and I invite you to try a few of these experiments yourself. Wherever possible, I will try to help and support your progression and hopefully learn more from your experiences.

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Preface

Why did I write this book?

I spent around 30 years exploring various facets of meditation, reading hundreds of books, trying dozens of meditation techniques, and talking to hundreds of self-styled experts. As an engineer and a manager by profession, it feels like the path of trial and error was a rather inefficient path to follow. Most guidelines laid down in the ancient books or prescribed by spiritual gurus felt completely out of line with modern life - the day-to-day pressure of earning a monthly paycheck, paying mortgages and keeping up with social responsibilities.

For most of my early years, I stayed under the radar. I was not sure that I was going to find anything interesting, and the prime objective of my meditation practice was to stay in a positive space and balance health and career. Most of my colleagues and friends were unaware of my interest and effort, as my meditation was mostly confined to a thirty-minute to one-hour session late at night, immediately before I went to sleep.

I also kept my initial experiences to myself, unsure whether this was a real experience or my imagination gone wild. As I approached the advanced stages, I was able to conduct several successful experiments and prove to myself that I was experiencing something beyond my own imagination. I also realized that people around me were struggling with the extensive stress that modern life has brought on us. Many of them were trying their best to adopt meditation techniques learned from classes or read in books, with little or no success. I tried to help by providing guidelines based on my experience, and was pleasantly surprised at the extremely enthusiastic, positive response. More recently, as my own meditation has matured, I have been able to provide much more precise, customized guidelines.

I was lucky enough to find my way through trial and error and through guidance from some individuals that I least expected to be experts in this area. This book is my effort to simplify the complexities created around the topic of meditation and provide a practical, rapid way to move through various stages of meditation.

These are entirely my own experiences, and may or may not work for you. I am hoping that you will be able to use my experiences to polish your own path. I also hope to meet many of you and learn from your experiences. My dream is to someday make self-realization a mainstream topic in our education system, to enable us to build future leadership that is not only competitive and smart, but also operates from a much larger life perspective, which I have often found to be completely missing.



Prologue

How did all this start?

Bnaderwah, also known as “Small Kashmir”, is a small town, around two hundred kilometers from Jammu city in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, India. The town is in a small valley, surrounded by fantastic mountain peaks, many of which retain some snow throughout most of the year. My maternal grandmother’s house is situated in Mathola village, which was, at that time, around a one-hour uphill walk from the town center. Life used to be simple - villages were mostly self-sufficient, with a variety of corn, vegetables and fruits grown organically; cattle, chickens, dogs, cows, and sheep raised in every home. This was a dream summer vacation for any kid.

Each house used to have their own goddess; our goddess was known as Chandi Mata. There was a small temple in the house where, every evening, my uncles would spend half an hour burning incense and singing devotional songs. The best way to correct kids from doing mischief was to point to the goddess, who would be watching us and could punish us for misbehavior. We kids did not really believe that, but just in case we were wrong, we would mostly stay in line!

Walking on Fire

We got used to this environment and did not think much about it. But when I reached high school, I would watch these ceremonies carefully, trying to make up my mind, one way or the other.

Sometime in the late 1980's, when I was still in the high school, we were at grandmother's house for summer vacation. This is probably one of my earliest and most fascinating memories. One late evening we all went to the local *Nag Devta temple. Nag is supposed to be the head of snakes. There was some elaborate puja planned for that night. Usually, kids did not get to stay late and watch everything, but I guess that, as we grew up, our privileges were getting extended, so we would get to stay late today and watch most of the ceremony.

The environment was full of Bhajan, hymns being sung in the honor of various deities. The major attraction that everyone was waiting for was a group of priests who would perform some unusual feats. This was very exciting, we had been raised with stories of extraordinary miracles that spiritual masters could perform, but never had a chance to see one, so we would not miss this for anything.

After long anticipation, a bunch of fragile old looking men appeared carrying heavy iron chains, tied together to make it look like a bunch of metallic stuff, tied to a comfortable handle. A small area was selected, firewood was evenly distributed across that small area, maybe approximately a twelve foot by twelve foot-sized square. The fire was lit, and the iron chains were put directly on the fire. We were a bunch of curious kids, watching everything with fascination and some fear: myself, my younger and elder sisters and many similarly aged cousins.

The priests were coolly sitting at one side enjoying a good smoke and in between would move in odd ways, signifying that they were slowly going into a trance. After what seemed like a very long wait, they got up and removed their shirts. The flames were out but you could see the red glow from the burned firewood. This was getting scary. The priests started deepening their trance state - they would shake uncontrollably, sing some hymns in half audible voices and move around, as if trying to muster the courage to jump on the fire.

All of a sudden, all of them jumped on the simmering fire! This happened with no warning. They all simply walked onto it, casually, in an absent-minded state, starting at one end and going to the other end. The walk was not too slow or too fast, it felt a little hurried and unconcerned, the way you would walk while contemplating something important, but not paying much attention to the surroundings. My younger sister screamed very loud and ran away, shouting that the priests are going to eat us next, we need to run for our lives! We had to catch her, so she wouldn't get lost in the forest.

The scene continued; the priests picked up the iron chains and started hitting their backs with the iron chains, while mumbling some hard-to-understand words. Everyone stood around with hands folded and deep reverence for these holy men. This kept going for a while, and it soon became too much for us, so our elders pulled us from the audience and we went back to grandmother's home.

Later that evening, we heard more stories about those priests from elders; the priests would remain unaffected by the fire. Their backs or feet would have no scars, they never consulted doctors after these sessions and would resume normal activities the next day, as if nothing had happened. At that time, we were probably too young to draw any inferences, but these incidents definitely caught our attention.

Chandi the goddess

The year was probably 1990, I had finished high school and joined college to pursue my bachelor's degree. I was probably home for another summer vacation. We got to attend a full ceremony at the local Chandi Mata temple, where one of my maternal aunts also acted as a priest. I was old enough for my parents to let me go and stay in the temple the entire day and late into the evening, it was good to help with the arrangements, such as cooking, serving food and other chores. Hundreds of people would come here from far villages and other towns, so there was a lot to do.

There was a large hall and at one side lay a large idol of Chandi goddess, with numerous other idols, pictures and other things stacked around, decorated in red colored cloth. There was the sweet and uplifting smell of incense being burned all over the place, lots of oil lamps lighted, and people were scrambling to get a chance to sit near the front, as the devotional songs would never stop.

After a while the head priest came in and sat at the corner. He seemed to be a middle-aged person, sitting quietly, with a positive glow on his face. People from a variety of places would enter and leave some incense near the main goddess idol. There would soon be a heap of incense accumulated in the front.

To my amazement, sometimes, the priests would randomly pick one incense pack and call the person who brought that pack by providing a rough description of him or her. Something like “There is a person who came from a specific village, who has an elderly woman at his home who is not keeping well. Please come forward”. Then the priest would ask random questions, which would convey the impression that the priest could read the other person’s mind or could see events that have happened with eyes closed. Something like “You went to this temple and committed to do something; you did not do this?” When people would hear such precise questions, some of them would start crying. The solutions offered were rather simple, such as ‘take some prasad (consecrated/blessed food) and give it to the person’. All healing or solutions were delegated to the goddess, the priest would specifically say that the goddess will heal the devotees, not him.

I was absolutely stunned - the entire experience seemed to be mocking my rational little brain, which had been too busy absorbing periodic tables and Newton’s laws of gravity. I intently watched the ceremony the entire time, not speaking, not asking any questions, just observing what was going on. The priest was in some kind of a trance - his body would shake randomly, his eyes were sometimes fixated upwards, and he would speak in some archaic language, difficult to understand.

I carefully observed the people coming in and going out. There were hundreds of random villagers from all sorts of places - it would have been impossible to stage this entire thing. There was no pattern - some people were randomly called, some scrambled to the front and asked questions, but the priest would ask counter questions that would indicate that he was somehow able to know things that he should not have known. Some people even tried to hide information, which he was able to easily reveal.

I also took my chance and went to the front, not sure what to ask. The priest read my mind very accurately and said, “All this is a drama, you do not need to believe any of this, what you get comes to you from your faith, not from me or my solutions”. This was definitely what I was expecting.

Was this real? Was it possible to achieve stages where you could peer across time and space and read another person’s mind and thoughts? Was the diagnosis really healing the participants? Was there some reality in the goddess concept? The questions were always there, but they

were now pushed to the forefront. My curiosity had gone through the roof, but I did not know what should I do with this curiosity.

Healing Kid Fakir

In 1992, I joined the Master's in Computer Applications program at Himachal Pradesh University (HPU) at Shimla. Shimla is one of the top destinations in India. Situated in the Himalayas, the city was a summer capital in British India and hence carries lots of history in terms of buildings, roads, and traditions from those days. Our university campus was situated at Summerhill, another lush green hill, probably thirty to forty minutes' walk from the Mall Road, where most tourists usually congregate. I lived in the Himkreet Hostel, which was on the campus of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. The hostel was nothing more than a horse barn converted into a dormitory. By today's standards I am not sure how we survived there, but in those days it seemed like luxury.

Life was amazing, living in some of the best summer weather that you could get in India. Studying Computer Sciences was fascinating, a rare opportunity to learn something new, and the friendly classmates and faculty made the experience amazing.

Obviously, life is not meant to be smooth sailing, and I guess I was having it too well. I often went to the lawns of the campus early in the morning and practice a few martial arts techniques that I had learned in college. I had taken Gojuyu Karate lessons and participated in a few competitive fights. There was a lack of adequate sports facilities, and the diet was almost nonexistent, so I did what I could to stay in shape.

I think this was in 1993, I cannot clearly recollect how this happened. I did lots of flexibility exercises and practiced kicks for hours. I was nearly done, when there was a soft popping noise in the front right stomach area and suddenly a weird feeling struck me, as if my stomach was protruding out of my skin. I was horrified and hurriedly looked down; I could see nothing from outside. I sat down, hoping it was nothing and would go back by itself, as one often thinks at that age. Unfortunately, after a few hours the feeling was still there. It was not painful, it was just a very odd sensation, but I was afraid that if I were not careful, it could turn into something worse.

There was a small medical center in the university, and I went there next morning. The doctor did a thorough check and could find nothing. He gave me a few medications and sent me back to class. I was slightly relieved - if the doctor could find nothing, at least I haven't caused any major damage. I took the medicine for a few days hoping the feeling would disappear, but the sensation stayed, there was no change. Meanwhile, I had to stop all my physical activities. The condition worsened if I did anything more than slow walking. This went against everything I was built for; I was a kid who used to enjoy executing flying kicks and somersaults for no reason, so this was like a punishment.

When there was no improvement, my roommate consulted with his friends studying at Indra Gandhi Medical College (IGMC), Sanjauli, and arranged appointments with specialists. This place was around a one hour walk from our university campus. I had a thorough checkup, including X-Rays and a specialist looking into it, but they could find nothing. The symptoms matched some kind of hernia, but we could not detect the damage, so there was no prescribed course of action. I did not know what to do.

Another classmate suggested we ask his family physician, who used homeopathy. I travelled to the city of Jalandhar with him and presented myself to the homeopathic doctor. He did a thorough check and prescribed some medicines. Again, there was absolutely no change. It was depressing; my physical activity had completely stopped and I could not even run to catch a bus. I put on a brave face.

Back on Shimla campus, I spoke to another student studying at IGMC. He took me to another specialist, who was probably the best known in the region. The specialist spoke in a very kind manner. I was not sure why, but after the session, my friend confided that he was trying to look for any psychiatric clues. Maybe the pain was being manufactured by my brain, maybe there really was no underlying problem! I did not know what to say!

As the doctor visits became more and more frustrating, well-wishers started suggesting that I consult spiritual healers. I went to all kinds of people, hoping for a miracle, but alas, there were no miracles for me. Every spiritual person I visited had a different diagnosis, many said that someone was using black magic on me and that needed to be cured. I had very limited faith in any such possibilities - none of them seemed to me a realized being who could exert any such magical healings, so I gave them a halfhearted try and, obviously, nothing happened.

I completed my master's and moved to Jammu City. The injury had happened in 1993. By 1995, it had drained and depressed me. Somehow, I had kept a brave face and kept moving. One week, I was at Bhandarwah town enjoying a few nice vacation days, when my mother suggested that I visit a child who was known for his healing abilities.

The story went something like this: there is a small village called Kurshari. You had to drive around five to six kilometers from Bhandarwah, park your car on the side of the road, cross the river Niru using a pedestrian bridge, and walk about fifteen minutes to reach this village. This was a small, beautiful village nestled at the base of the large mountain, with the sight of the refreshing Niru river flowing close by. At that time there may have been fewer than a hundred houses in the village. In the village, there used to live two close friends—one was a Hindu saint and the other was a Muslim. Both were very close - their friendship was so deep that the village elders still talked about them. As they got older, the Hindu saint advised the Muslim friend. After I am dead, I will come to you in trances, please build a Mazar and help people heal, you will be able to heal all kinds of people.

As the saint had said, after he died, the Muslim friend would go into some kind of trance when doing his Namaz and heal whoever came to him. This continued for a while, until the Muslim friend also died. What was interesting is that, after the death of the Muslim friend, his son started going into the trance state and his blessings would heal anyone who would request healing. The kid did not remember anything that he spoke after the session was over.

I had nothing to lose, so I thought I'd give it a try. My mother and I went to the kid's house at Namaz time, around late evening. The kid seemed like a normal kid. I could not make out any extraordinary abilities looking at him, but his trance state did not look like other trances I have witnessed, and there was a group of people come to receive his blessings. When I got my turn, I humbly bowed to him, not knowing what else to do, he gave me some mustard seeds and uttered a few words.

“Put them in a fire and inhale the smoke. Do this every day for fourteen days. You will be okay!”

I wasn't sure what to think of it - I had been through this too many times and nothing had helped. Somehow it seems that the kid read my mind.

"You need to have faith. The faith will heal"

I was not sure what to make of it, but my mother seemed to have great faith, as she had been healed by similar Sufi saints in the past. So, I took the advice seriously. For next fourteen days I burned the mustard seeds on a room heater and inhaled the smoke, while praying to the fakir to heal me. This almost felt funny, but I had exhausted all my options. I had been humbled enough, so I quietly, sometimes reluctantly, prayed and completed what was asked.

For two years, I had not been able to walk fast; I could not squat without the odd feeling coming back and making me uncomfortable; running was out of question; there was no martial arts practice; I had to be careful even while climbing the stairs; the feeling would return immediately when I bent myself to do anything.

The healing did not happen in a sudden miracle as we see it in the movies. It happened over a month or two - every day I was able to take one more step that I could not do before. One day I could run to catch the bus and not feel anything; another day I carried some more weight without feeling the injury; the next day I could do a squat; another day I was pushing a piece of furniture, and did not get the ugly reminder to stop. In two months, I was executing squats in the gym and pushing a four-hundred-pound Enfield Motorcycle around without feeling anything.

Unless I remind myself of the two-year context, where every diagnostic method and attempted cures had miserably failed, it was hard to convince myself that this healing was caused by the little child fakir. It felt like natural healing, but I know very well it was not. The problem never returned. I started lifting heavy weights in the gym, and would often squat many hundreds of pounds, and the problem absolutely never returned.

The First Premonition

This was probably sometime in 1996. After completing my master's degree, I started a job as an associate professor at Jammu University. I was young, extremely enthusiastic, and loved riding my Enfield Bullet 350 motorcycle. Jammu City is ideal for motorcycle riders - the city is at the edge of north Indian plains, and if you ride a few kilometers north, you start climbing the hills, and a hundred-kilometer ride would lead you to Patni Top, a tourist's paradise. Navigating these beautiful roads on a powerful motorcycle was fun and extremely fulfilling.

By now, I had adopted a regular meditation practice. I would wake up early in the morning and ride to a nearby Shiva temple, and one of my cousins would often accompany me. We would sit cross-legged for thirty minutes, use the 'Om Namoh Shivaya' chant, and practice deep meditation. This was a small temple, with a good-sized *Shivalinga in the center, a domed roof, and space for three to four people. The priest used to be happy to provide us with the keys, and we would be left undisturbed.

One of those days, I woke up early, with memories of a very strange dream. In the dream, I encountered several sages, who seemed to be suspended in the air and were in deep meditation. I folded my hands with reverence, and watched them for some time. Somehow, their presence made me feel calm, and my thoughts did not intrude. After some time, one of them opened his eyes and blessed me; the message given was -

'Your helmet will be unbreakable'.

And the sage went back into meditation. I got pulled out of the dream.

I did not know what to make of this dream, but it was clear this pointed to my motorcycle riding. I was conscious of the message for a few hours, but very soon, it faded away.

Around noon, I felt hungry and decided to ride to a nearby restaurant for lunch. As I rode onto the main road, a slight drizzle started.



The restaurant was just a ten-minute ride, and I decided to speed up to reach the restaurant before the rain hit. I overtook one vehicle and approached a white Jeep, planning to overtake it. The road was almost empty, so this was a safe maneuver.

There was a left turn ahead, and plenty of space for me to get by him. Suddenly, the Jeep started skidding. The Jeep's driver slammed on the brakes, which did not stop the skidding, but instead started rotating the Jeep. It now seemed that there would not be any space left for me to pass.

From here on, time seemed to slow to a trickle. I could see the Jeep slowly rotating, and I was accelerating towards it. My foot moved to the brake, but by the time I reached the Jeep, it would have completely blocked my path. I knew there was no escape. If I braked, I would never stop within this short distance, but I had no choice. So, I applied my full brakes and the motorcycle started skidding. Hitting the Jeep was imminent. I wasn't wearing my helmet, and I needed to avoid a direct hit, so I tilted my handle very slightly to the left - not enough to destabilize me and fall flat, but just enough so that my motorcycle hit slightly sideways. By that time, the Jeep had rotated and positioned itself for a perfect sideways hit. Obviously, I didn't want my body to hit the Jeep, so I moved up slightly on the seat, and as I hit, I was thrown clear, over the Jeep's bonnet. I hit, and I started flying, hitting the ground several feet from the collision, doing a few somersaults, absorbing the momentum. The ground was clear, and after two or three somersaults, I ended up standing on my feet. Looking around, I saw that my motorcycle was a big mess, but as I checked myself, there was not even a scratch!

A crowd gathered around me. Everyone seemed to be amazed that I was standing there without any injuries after that terrible accident. Some helped me find my glasses, others helped straighten the fender so I could ride to the garage - everything seemed like a movie I was watching, and as the scene unfolded, all I could think about was the Yogi in the dream. Was it he who had saved me from certain death? Or was this just a coincidence? Did my meditation have anything to do with this? This was too much to be classified as a mere coincidence. I stayed quiet the whole day, not knowing what to make of the entire incident, but somewhere deep in me a firm resolve had already formed, that I needed to get to the bottom of this. I was not going to leave this unsolved, no matter what it takes, no matter how much time it takes, no matter the price, this mystery needed to be solved!

The Hypothesis

Where are we headed?

When I started meditating, I did not have an exact structure to guide my journey, but in high school, we had learned the basics of conducting sound scientific experiments. You develop a hypothesis, you design experiments, the experiments either prove your hypothesis or help you further tune and correct the hypothesis. My approach was generally guided by this mindset, so I would conduct extensive research on a specific topic, reading all kinds of both mystic material and scientific research around a topic as I experimented.

In the early stages there wasn't much to analyze, so I did not document much, but as I started moving deeper, I kept notes of various experiences and thoroughly analyzed them, hoping to make some strong conclusions. By the last few years, I was exhausted of taking notes, and from then on I would only make notes around specific, deep experiences. The major challenge was my ability to stay focused on a single topic and remain focused enough to reach a good conclusion, while somehow avoiding getting distracted with almost infinite possibilities that lay in front.

Let's start from what modern science knows about the brain and consciousness and try to develop a basic hypothesis about our existence. I am not a medical practitioner but, with my deep curiosity about the self, I've read dozens of books and had tens of conversations in the neurosciences area. Looking at all the material available on this subject, there is a perception that modern science knows a lot about the brain, but a deeper analysis says otherwise.

The Fascinating Brain

There are numerous studies where scientists have been able to roughly understand which parts of the brain are responsible for what kind of activities, but it seems that the conclusions are not black and white. For example, when you look at complex functions such as vision processing, in addition to a specific area, the entire brain shows activity.

Neuroplasticity is an interesting area of study. It has been observed that when an area of the brain is damaged, over time, other parts of the brain can take over the functions of that part of the brain. This further dilutes our understanding of the brain; there seem to be multiple things it does, but where those things happen and how they collaborate among themselves seems to be flexible.

Further, scientists have been able to investigate the deeper chemistry of the brain; that is, how information is carried using neurons, in terms of electrical and chemical activity. So, to summarize, we know what the brain is composed of and how it behaves under a given circumstance, but beyond these basics, much of the brain's work is a mystery.

Let's start with a simple question, how does the brain derive meaning? The brain uses billions of neurons to carry signals from our senses to specific brain areas that light up in response to a given stimulus. Perhaps the structure of those brain areas gets reinforced by repeated exposure to a given signal, which probably constitutes learning. I could easily simulate the neural structure of a brain using Artificial Intelligence Deep Neural Networks, and I could also simulate the strengthening of the neural structure from repeated exposure. But strengthening and restructuring the neural structure would make processing a stimulus faster - we would be able to identify a cat as a cat much faster, but how do we jump from the abstraction, 'a bunch of neural activity' to 'That is a cat!?' How do we derive meaning from the signal? We know what region of the brain is lighting up, but we know nothing about the mechanisms that derive meaning.

Memory

Coming from a technology background has its advantages when studying the brain. On a very high level, the processing unit and the memory are two most important parts of a computing system. As the amount of data increases, the memory required to retain the data also increases, and the mechanism to search for that data needs to become much smarter. Further, we very clearly know that memory in computers is stored in terms of bits, represented as zeros and ones. A given pattern of zeros and ones represents a basic piece of information. A combination of these zeros and ones maps to computer language and the processor is built specifically to process constructs of that language.

How exactly is memory stored in the brain? While the studies can identify which part of the brain lights up when a specific activity is done, how exactly that memory is stored is not clear. There are many cases where a person with an injury to a specific part of the brain is no longer able to form memories of a given type, so we know what parts of the brain are associated with what kinds of memories, but how that memory is stored and retrieved is not clear.

Many experiments have been conducted on ‘Genetic Memory’. If a herd of cows gets electric shocks by touching a fence, their next generation will instinctively avoid that fence. Or consider how mice in a laboratory, trained to associate a specific smell with pain, end up passing that learning to the next generation. Such observations point towards aspects of memory that cannot be limited to the physical brain structure.

Consciousness

Let’s move one step deeper – let’s accept that somehow the brain uses its neural structure to process a signal and somehow access a memory, concluding, ‘this is a cat’. Now, how does the brain decide, or initiate an action? How do I decide that I should pick up the cat?

When we build AI models, such as a model for vision processing, given a picture of a cat as an input, it can use the deep neural network, to conclude that this is really a cat. But once the determination is made,

we need another program, that would guide the action. If I had to build a robot, I would have to specifically program a robot, to 'Pick up the cat'. In this case, the robot would only pick up the cat - it would not do anything that is not programmed to do.

Even if I built AI models that learn, we would have to provide some basic goals, such as 'Clean the room' as a basic goal, and the model would theoretically take new, unprogrammed action, such as 'pick up the cat and put it outside of the room', that would result in a cleaner room. But unless I provide the program to take the action, or a program that provides a goal, the robot would do nothing. The question arises, where is such a program in a human brain? To use rather simplistic language, where is the brain that controls the brain? Who directs the brain to process the signal, who directs the brain to make a conclusion and take an action?

If there is a part of us that is directing the brain to act, that carries memories and learnings across generations, that can contemplate the self and make free choices, that could be a good definition of our consciousness. The next question to ponder would be 'where does consciousness reside?' Is consciousness a result of the physical brain or does it exist despite the brain? Can we access consciousness and work with it? Can we prove the existence of consciousness in a laboratory? How can we go deeper into the study of consciousness?

Hypothesis

A great way to approach any complex problem is to go through well-proven scientific methods. You build a hypothesis, you plan experiments and expected results, you carry out the experiments to support the hypothesis. If the experiment succeeds, you add more experiments to increase confidence. Your understanding of the concept increases with iterative experiments. And as you learn, you develop technological applications, which further increase your understanding.

Further, let's not recreate the wheel – instead, let's leverage what we already have. Eastern mystics have done considerable experimentation on consciousness and written volumes on the subject. Let's start with a simple assumption that, in addition to the physical body, there exists a subtle energy body, that we could term as a Soul. Let's assume that the Soul is what represents the consciousness, that directs the physical

brain and body and that carries memory in some way across birth and death. We could associate certain characteristics, possibilities, and capabilities with the Soul, and we could try to experiment with those capabilities. If our experiments are successful, that would point towards our hypothesis being correct.

Let's start by assuming that the Soul is the source of intelligence and memory, and the brain is a processor, an interface, linking our energy body with the physical body, and in our daily existence, we are, knowingly or unknowingly, leveraging our consciousness. The integration between these different mechanisms of the body is so complete that it is hard to notice or differentiate between the two, or maybe we have not tried to look deeply enough, like a muscle which we have never used. Is it possible to learn to use this muscle? Is it possible to train the brain to look back into our energy body, our Soul, and understand its capabilities? Is it possible to control and leverage our energy self, and if we could do so, what additional capabilities could we master? We could make some assumptions and design experiments to test these possibilities.

Experiments

It took some time to organize my thoughts into formal experiments, but looking back, most of my work had intuitively followed a structure. Some of the possibilities were inspired by scores of ancient Indian mystical stories we had heard as kids, and others came naturally, as I immersed myself in modern education and my professional career. Below I have listed seven possibilities which, if proven, would strengthen and improve the above hypothesis.

- 1. Communication with Self - If there exists an energy self, which we would call the Soul, and if this energy self was intelligent enough to guide us to our current evolutionary state, we can infer that there is already a communication channel between the soul and our brain. The communication is probably one sided, the Soul guiding the brain, but it should be possible to reverse the communication, it should be possible by practice to communicate back and communicate more intentionally with the energy self.*

Achieving Desired Results

How to apply this learning in your daily life.

Over the last few years, I've had scores of conversations with career professionals juggling life, family and work, who were at various stages of meditation and have asked me hundreds of questions. I have summarized the most common questions and answered them in this chapter.

What is Meditation?

Let's revise our definition of what meditation really is, based on our work this far.

In the deepest states I have attained, there were three things that were critical to get into and sustain the state-

- *Awareness of context – Maintain complete awareness of who I am in Physical life. In much deeper states, you would also need to maintain some awareness of your Astral state. For instance, you need to know in the back of your head that 'I am lying on my bed in my upstairs room' (Physical context) and 'I am in deep meditation' (Astral context). If you lose the context, you lose the ability to drive and the memory of the experience.*

- *Observer mindset – Do not let the thoughts or emotions stay around, do not get attached to anything that is shown, absolutely no reaction to any stimuli, wear the hat of a neutral observer. Even the least possible reaction will end the experience - you will get thrown into a normal dream state and you will wake up.*

- *Forward momentum – Maintain forward movement, maintain a certain force that keeps you moving deeper. I used the mantra chanting to maintain the forward momentum. This is especially important once you start experiencing Astral Realms - you could get too engaged in the experience and forget to drill deeper.*

It took me about a decade to balance these aspects of meditation. Maintaining awareness of context was the first struggle. In a wakeful state, it would be hard to get any deep experiences, but if I became too calm and comfortable, I would go to sleep. You do not need to keep everything about your context in mind. For instance, in the early stages, I needed to know that 'I am lying physically in a room', to maintain context. In later stages, merely knowing that I have a Physical Body was sufficient.

The observer mindset comes with practice. An easy way to jumpstart the observer mindset is to use a mantra. When you are partially busy chanting, you are less likely to indulge too deeply in any experience. The difficulty comes in extending the time span of any experience. Unless you are completely detached from the experience, you will not be able to have a complete experience. Getting a half-baked experience will probably do wonders for your ego, but no real value would come from it.

When you start experiencing the Astral Realm, the possibilities are infinite, and you might tend to get distracted spending too much time exploring the area. Even a minor tendency in your mind, a little curiosity will send you all the way down the path of exploration. It will take extreme willpower to stay calm and instead drill down, dig deeper in meditation. But if you can do that, the rewards are immediate, the effort required to transition from the Astral to the Causal Realms is insignificant compared to the effort to move from Physical to Astral regions.

I did a lot of research on how the ancient literature defines meditation. The best definition of meditation comes from Yogasutras of Patanjali. Meditation (Samyama) is defined as a combination of three things –

1. **Dharana – Fixing of concentration at one point.*
2. **Dhayan – Continuous flow of attention at the same point.*
3. **Samadhi – Loss of self-awareness, subject becomes object*

It seems that Patanjali has based the definition of meditation on the process rather than the description of the state. I was doing exactly what he has described in his book, but I was thinking about it very differently. The terms Dharna and Dhayana map the process to follow to reach the state that I have described. The term Samadhi is something that needs elaboration. Samadhi here would mean the process of losing self-awareness and becoming one with the object of meditation. He has not mentioned anything about retaining the context. In his time, this process was probably common enough for him not to bother providing such details.

If you were to focus enough on an object, and become one with that object, how would you bring the memory of being the object back to yourself? Also, while being the object of meditation, how would you keep yourself detached from the emotions and thoughts of the object, so as to do some meaningful work? If I combine the definition of Samadhi, ‘Focus deep enough so that you become the object of meditation’ with my third point, ‘Maintain complete awareness of context’, my definition of meditation becomes more complete. Maybe Samadhi already encapsulates the need to maintain context in deeper states.

As I have said before, it seems that there is nothing new I have discovered. Patanjali wrote his book a few thousand years ago, and the book has a lot more than what I have been able to put in practice.

I want to reiterate that the goal of meditation is not peace, love, and compassion. These are by-products. When you understand your larger picture across multiple births, love and compassion come by default. Peace comes automatically when you know that you are deathless and are literally a god. But to get to these knowings, you need to experience these stages. Theoretical knowledge does no good.

these stages. Theoretical knowledge does no good.

Reinventing the wheel to define how meditation should be conducted is at best an exercise in ego and will only lead to more frustration. The tens of Yoga styles prevalent today have only added to the confusion. The ancient methods mentioned in Indian literature are extremely effective. Deep breathing, Straight Spine, Focus on Forehead or Heart, and chanting

‘OM’ is enough for most. You can try all kinds of complicated techniques, but at the best they will provide some variety; their value beyond that will be fairly limited in the initial stages. In more advanced stages, you could probably use precise chants and invoke specific personalities or deities to do specific work.

*Asanas (poses) are helpful to keep your physical body in good shape and build better focus. Beyond that, any more thinking on the poses is not useful. Most classes on yoga seem to spend too much time on physical postures. I preferred to go to a gym and lift weights most of my life. I did add around 15 to 20 minutes of stretching exercises to my workouts, which helped me stay in good shape. I think physical fitness enormously helps your spiritual growth. A body that demands attention every few minutes is not going to be of much help when you are trying to enter deep states.

“Meditation for peace, joy and happiness is like boarding a train to experience a comfortable seat. You are missing the possibilities of looking out of the window, interacting with other passengers, and reaching amazing destinations”!

Why Meditation?

When I started meditating, I sought guidance from a variety of people who seemed to be working in this area. This was a broad spectrum of people. Some were wandering ascetics, some were intellectuals, some claimed they could perform a few miracles, some had a decent following, some were priests in the local temples. What I heard was something like this –

‘Do not have any goals, if you meditate with goals in mind, you will never make it’.

‘You need to have complete faith; you are not able to move forward because you don’t have faith’.

‘If you do not have faith in me, I cannot help you’.

‘Give everything up, dedicate yourself completely to the guru, leave everything on the god, things will happen by themselves...’

Most of this was extremely discouraging advice. I was aware of the many types of fraud and scandals happening around me in the name of religion and was determined not to make mistakes.

After having gone through three decades of struggle, I have realized that those were old, obsolete ways of thinking. You need to be crystal clear about why you are pursuing meditation, and you need to take the appropriate path that best suits your goals. Of course, once you have put together your goals, when you sit for meditation, we will talk about separating yourself from literally your entire physical reality. But before we go there, let’s focus on the larger framework.

Let us start with a rather simple structure and build our way forward. Most people I’ve helped fall somewhere in the following three categories.

- 1. Stress management, recovering from difficult life events.*
- 2. Support healthy living goals, build positivity, and tap into your greatest potential.*
- 3. Strong desire to know the self and understand the mysteries of life.*

I always had the third goal in mind, but did not believe that the goal was achievable, so in the early days I kept my focus on the second goal, while always staying open to any experience that pointed towards the third. I started practicing sporadically as early as fifteen years old and established a good momentum around my twenty-second year. I maintained strong discipline, meditating at least three to four days a week, while at the same time never compromising on other facets of life.

Now my focus has shifted entirely to the third goal, and I intend to keep it that way for the rest of my life. I have seen many people who started at the first or second goal and then, at some time in life, moved towards the third.

Recovering From Difficult Events

Most of you are probably dealing with work stress - you are worried for your jobs in this difficult economy, worried about your savings and retirement, or juggling children and aging parents. Life can become extremely stressful, even if you are an accomplished professional earning six figures. Some of you may have gone through difficult life events, or lost a loved one, experienced a career setback, or had a health incident. It would be natural to explore meditation as a technique to bring some positivity into your life.

In fact, most people who I see seriously pursuing this path seem to come from this category. Life throws something at you that shocks you out of your slumber. You start questioning everything around you and come to realize that everything that you thought was important for your happiness does not matter anymore. So, you try to seek something higher, something hopefully much more permanent. Especially if the shock is loss of a loved one, the trigger is very strong.

The first thing to remember is that meditation is not going to miraculously turn things around. In fact, it may push you in quite the wrong direction. This is especially true if you are in a negative state and try to drop everything and focus on controlling your thoughts; chances are that the stressful thoughts will come back with a vengeance. Establishing control over thoughts takes years, if not decades, of work. Expecting

“In the initial stages, meditation will magnify your existing state of mind. In the advanced stages, it will provide the capability to completely disassociate from the existing state of mind”.

a person to do that in a matter of weeks or months, especially when he/she is already dealing with difficult things in life, is not practical. Meditation tends to greatly magnify your existing state of mind, thus pushing you back into the negative state you are desperately trying to escape.

I have found two techniques that seem to work well in these circumstances –

- *Do some pre-work before meditation. Find an activity that will take your mind off the stress, such as a simple workout, that will slow down thoughts and provide a positivity boost. Thereafter, sit quietly and practice deep breathing. If you feel you are sliding back into negative thoughts, break the cycle, get up, and do something before you try again.*

- *Time the entire activity, so that after completing your meditation, you can immediately go to sleep. The goal is to maximize the time during which your system is removed from stress. Start with a workout, transition into meditation, and maintain the deep breathing and thought control as you lie down and go to sleep.*

The key is to bring yourself to a sufficiently positive state before you start meditation, and then build on that positivity using meditation. Meditation is the practice of making your mind more and more sensitive, to the extent that it can penetrate the subconscious itself. Such sensitivity is not going to help unless you are an experienced meditator, who has learned to break all bonds with Physical Reality.

Living a Good Life

If your goal is to build positivity, longevity and health, and you are not interested in going into deeper aspects of self-realization, a combination of physical yoga and meditation is a great way to attain your goals. Physical yoga probably provides something equivalent to stretching exercises, and meditation builds on top to help keep the mind calm and stress-free.

Even small sessions of stopping your regular activities, deep breathing and focus will reap some benefits. Especially in the middle of a tiring, stressful day, such breaks will prove precious. However, this strategy will, at best, counteract the stress and keep you in a healthy state; it won't carry you forward in your evolution.

For most people who are living a normal life, this is a good place to start and familiarize yourself with the deeper concepts of meditation. It is good to do some study. Tons of literature have been written on this subject, and you can join some classes where you can learn the basic posture and breathing techniques, and even do some advanced reading for fun. I know many people who maintained an active interest for years and, once they had achieved basic financial security and kids were out to college, their interest increased substantially, and they started diving deeper.

At some stage in your life, you will most likely start moving towards the third category. The thought of exploring the greater truths and mysteries of life will come in. It is okay to move between these two goals, but you have to understand clearly that the third category is a marathon. Despite working on that lane for decades, you may not get satisfactory results, so it is important to manage expectations.

Desire to Know the Self

For a few of you who are deeply interested in the mysteries of life and who are open to devoting the time needed to conduct an exploration, get ready for the ride of your lifetime. From what I have seen, no two people follow the same path to self-realization, and my hope is that you will be able to use my experiences as data points as you blaze your own path.

If you want to go all the way on your spiritual journey, I strongly recommend finding a master who can guide you and find a group of supportive friends who you can have some open conversations with. This is a long marathon; you need all the support you can get. Always keep in mind that every teacher you will get will provide you with a colored flavor of the ultimate reality. Do not stick to anything, adopt their most logical advice, and throw away what makes no sense, rather ruthlessly.

I cannot stress enough that you must plan early on to stabilize your material, financial and personal life. These are not the ancient times, when you could leave everything and live the life of a renunciate and achieve your goal. You need to get to a satisfactory level in your life to minimize distractions and attachments. A balanced approach will not only increase the probability of success, but it will also ensure that your loved ones, community and society can benefit from your efforts.

What Can I Accomplish?

You are a career professional, working to build a life for yourself and your family, trying hopelessly to save something to make your retirement comfortable. You have no time to think of self-realization or mysticism, and you are not sure where this is going to go.

You may have gone through a few yoga and meditation sessions, read a few books, practiced conscious living (at times), you've had lots of discussions with colleagues and friends, and you do your VTO (Volunteer Time Off) hours.

What is there for you beyond that? What outcomes can you achieve? Will this be worth your time? Will this be time wasted? Ancient sages have spent lifetimes moving towards meeting the self, so what chance do you have?

All is not lost, as there is a lot you can achieve with minimal effort. The key is to accept your current state and find the best way to optimize self-discovery within your own schedules and constraints. Let's not think about extreme steps such as leaving the material world, compromising on your career, compromising on family responsibilities, or living the life of a monk. You can make significant gains if you are prepared to accept life as it is and add the necessary pieces on top to balance it.

The summary of my thirty-year struggle indicates that most of my time was utilized fighting self-created barriers. My lack of faith in the possibilities, overthinking career and life, too many attachments with a given target, experience, or person, too much fear of unknown. If I had been able to lighten up and calm myself down, it probably would not have taken this much time. A strong desire to be seen as a successful person in material life always held me back and, when that desire receded, my progression accelerated.

At the minimum, you will end up building a balanced, non-reactive, positive personality, which is the key to success in the modern world. Almost all aspects of your material life will benefit, even if you are still in the basic stages and have not spent an enormous amount of time on meditation. In the advanced stages, your interest in measuring material benefits will probably vanish. You will become more focused on building the larger understanding that has been lacking your entire life, but there will still be enormous material benefits. For instance, your intuition about people may become very strong, or you may start getting precise guidance from your higher self about important life decisions.

How do I Start?

If you're a career professional, chances are your days move lightning fast and you typically go through several stressful deadlines, decisions, and conversations every day. By the time you reach home, you're too burned out to think of meditation. You're probably lucky if you reach the gym. Waiting for an ideal day to start anything will never work - you will have to blend meditation into your routine.

Breathing is the key to thought control and stress management. I used my drive to work and back to train myself in deep breathing. On average, that was around an hour of daily deep breathing practice. I avoided taking calls in the car, and noticed that my thoughts slowed down to a trickle as I learned deep breathing. As I got used to this routine, I purchased a few CD's with relaxed 'OM' and other chants, and used them to further calm my mind while driving.

“There are multiple paths to calming your mind, bringing peace, happiness, and positivity into your life, but if your goal is to explore the deeper mysteries of life, you must master basic posture and breathing, and set aside dedicated daily time to dive deeper”.

The metro train rides were something I looked forward to, especially when I would get a place to sit. I also travelled a lot; I used to fly to meet clients and teams nearly every week. My seat on the plane became a place to practice deep breathing and meditation. A quick walk after lunch outside your work building is another chance to practice deep breathing.

Once you get into the habit of including deep breathing in your daily routine, learn to do the same immediately before you sleep. If

you had no time to sit down cross-legged and specifically meditate, it is okay to start by practicing deep breathing when you go to sleep. To ensure that you do not fall asleep too soon, make the pillow a little uncomfortable and try to remain in that state for fifteen minutes.

If weekdays are too difficult to work with, you may want to start with one or two days on the weekend. Sit comfortably on a chair, and start deep breathing with your favorite chant. Typically, chanting ‘OM’ should be enough. Plan for around fifteen minutes of focused time. If your back hurts because you were already sitting in the office the entire day, you can do this while standing, or while doing a stretching pose. You could do this lying on a sofa. A straight back is helpful, but not necessary.

The key is to start embedding these practices into your life and make them your default habits. These habits will start laying a foundation for you to take larger, more aggressive steps.

Building Momentum

Keeping up momentum can be hard. You may see some immediate results - maybe you will feel positive and more energetic and your sleep will improve, but any experiences beyond that could take years to start. How do you keep the momentum going?

Reading is probably one of the best ways to keep your self-motivation. There is an ancient technique that is extremely helpful in this regard. Read some deep spiritual material, but read it with frequent breaks. Read one page or a few paragraphs, stop, go into deep breathing and chanting mode, spend a few minutes in that state, then get back to the book, read another paragraph and repeat. You should be able to spend thirty minutes reading only one or two pages. In the meditation, focus on the meaning of the paragraph; try not to think, just be with the paragraph.

Discussions with colleagues, friends, and family who share similar interests can be extremely helpful in keeping your momentum. I was incredibly lucky to have people around me who had a deep interest in this area, which helped me maintain my enthusiasm, despite my terribly slow progress.

Looking back, the major reason for my slow initial progress was the overload of thoughts that an active software development career brought in. Once the day was over, I was unable to fully disconnect from the day's events, so the accomplishments were as disturbing as the failures. I would notice myself rethinking a given scenario, my reactions, counter-scenarios, worst case possibilities and so on, endlessly. I wondered if everyone around me was doing the same. On the surface, no one seemed to be suffering from my lack of thought control, but upon further investigation, I realized that they were not only in the same boat, but they were also mostly ignorant of their own state.

Due to this thought overload, it used to take around fifteen to twenty minutes of meditation to just remove the day's impressions and get started on meditation. By the time it was thirty minutes, I had hardly gotten started on real meditation! At times, I lengthened the session by several hours, but this was impractical. I had to work out at the gym, I had to get some sleep and get ready for another day. To summarize, it seemed that in the early days, my time spent on real, deep meditation was probably very small - most of my time was spent

“In the early stages, learning to disconnect yourself from the day's accomplishments and disappointments in advance of meditation will greatly accelerate your progress. Do not waste your precious meditation time to achieve this disconnect”.

just cleaning up the mess.

These days, transitioning from full work mode to deep meditation mode takes nothing more than a flip of a switch, but it took a long time to acquire that ability. If I had to repeat my early days, I would devise several ways to completely disconnect at least an hour before my meditation time, which I believe would have drastically accelerated my development.

Surviving Rough Patches

Rough patches will happen - you may lose a job, or much worse, a loved one; you may be facing a health issue - life has a way of throwing things at us when we least expect them.

The worst thing to do when you hit a rough patch is to double down on meditation. I have seen many people who tried this approach and ended up in a worse spot. At this stage, you are more vulnerable and may end up trusting the wrong guides.

You need to realize that meditation does not automatically bring peace of mind. Meditation is a way to flex the muscles that are used to control your thoughts, emotions, and unconscious energies, and in the process, move you into new possibilities. Peace of mind is an awesome byproduct, but not the primary goal.

The best way to handle a bad patch is to do something that makes you feel better - maybe spend time in the gym, take a vacation, be with your family, friends and loved ones, rework your plan and try again, do anything that makes you feel better. Once you are feeling uplifted, carry that feeling into meditation and further into sleep. Meditate after you have uplifted yourself, because meditation acts as a magnifying glass. It will further remove you from the circumstances and increase the positivity. But if you try to sit in meditation with a lot of negativity in your mind, it can have quite the opposite impact.

In the long run, adopting a meditation practice will better prepare you to face such rough patches. The ability to completely disassociate yourself from your circumstances, to be able to clean your thoughts and emotions to almost nothing every day, can make you very versatile and productive. In mystic language, you die daily, and you are reborn every morning. The negatives of a day mostly end by nightfall and, in the

morning, a new person is born, enthusiastic, motivated, and ready for adventures. Life completely transforms, and a few rough patches here and there will not disrupt your rhythm.

Tracking Progress

There are many ways to track your progress.

You could ask your colleagues and friends. If they see you as a much more patient, sensitive, relaxed, and positive person, you have started making progress.

A certain sensitivity and intuition start building up as we go deeper. A new person you meet will probably act exactly as you expected; an event that your inner self is revolting against will not turn out well; a friend who you were talking about this morning will appear out of nowhere; a person you are thinking about will call you at the same time; a dream you had will turn out to hold a meaningful message. You will not be able to say for sure if these were your intuitions. They will seem like coincidences, but you will have a whole lot of them happening around you.

Typically, your dreams will transform well before your physical personality. Your sleep will improve, you'll wake up in the morning much more refreshed, and if you wake in the middle of the night, you will be able to go back to sleep much more easily.

Another way to check your progress is to watch your breath. If the number of breaths per minute go way down, and you can stay comfortably in that state for a long time, that is a sign that your being is adapting and moving forward.

Achieving Advanced Stages

Of the hundreds of people I have spoken to, very rarely have I seen people who were able to attain the higher states of consciousness. Typically, people can demonstrate some limited, narrow capabilities - someone is a psychic, someone is a spiritual healer, another person becomes a successful medium. It seems that when people attain an ability, the ego gets in the way. The tendency to demonstrate that capability takes the person deeper into that capability. The person becomes good in that area, but is not able to progress holistically. It is like you learned to multiply two exceptionally large numbers in seconds and you spend your entire life demonstrating that capability, while there are higher disciplines such as algebra, calculus and trigonometry waiting to be discovered.

Progression into higher states demands that the person be extremely balanced. Use your experiences to gain a better grasp of your abilities. Use them like weights in the gym, strengthen a specific muscle using a specific dumbbell and move on. Don't carry the dumbbell with you, or it will drag you down. There are endless experiences to be discovered. If you move forward, there will always be another better, more interesting experience waiting for you. There is no end - the question is how far you will be able to go.

A desire to gain these experiences is probably the biggest barrier to gaining these experiences, which is why most people will fail to reach these stages. Meditation is an effort to systematically loosen the bonds that tie our consciousness to material aspects of life, so that we can freely leverage the consciousness to do much finer work. Tying ourselves to such goals or, if we have already attained some of these goals, tying ourselves to those abilities, will defeat that purpose and block progress.

Learning to interpret these experiences takes its own time. What, exactly, does an image convey? You will have to learn by trial and error - in my case, most communication was visual, a scenario was conveyed that would approximate my state of mind. For instance, if there was a difficult presentation I was preparing for, it would be conveyed as an examination; if there were monetary gains to be made from a strategy, it would be conveyed as a large plate full of expensive food; and a disappointment on a project would be conveyed as a car crash.

“In the early stages, ego can be your worst enemy. Experiences are there to help you gain focus and momentum, to accelerate your movement towards the final goal. Too much focus on these abilities will do a lot to please your ego, but your progression will be slowed down. Experiment with all these areas to have some fun. After all, this is a marathon and you deserve some fun, but do not get stuck anywhere, keep moving forward”.

In the beginning, it is hard to separate what you are shown from your own reaction. For instance, if I receive an image of a car accident with myself in the car, my natural reaction would be to jump out, save myself, or be scared. That would completely disrupt the meaning of the communication, especially as the meditator seems to be the subject of many of those scenarios. It takes time to sit there quietly, watch the accident happening, question the details, sometimes allow the scenario to be repeated - let the experience continue and look at the complete picture. Without that kind of precise control, you may well come out with a half-baked meaning that will not be helpful in any way. It is critical to keep striving to learn more instead of being satisfied with the first glimpse of experience.

“Interpreting experiences takes a long time to learn. If you start having experiences, do not be too happy too soon! Diligently repeat the experience, remove your reaction systematically, and master the language, until you can recreate the experience at will and explore it thoroughly”.

I tried to build more accuracy by transforming the communication into letters, numbers, written material, and mathematical equations. If that is your goal, go for it, but realize that it may take several years to perfect the art of grasping the exact content. Further, it will take some time to understand the context of communication - you will have to be able to enter the same experience multiple times to thoroughly investigate it. And throughout this time, you will have to be extremely careful not to let your reactions cloud the scenario!

It is perhaps okay to repeat the point that these are all distractions on your path to self-discovery. If I had to go back and redo my strategy, I would probably pick one or two topics and spend around twenty percent of my meditation to explore those areas and dedicate eighty percent of my time to keep moving into deeper states.

Impact on your Profession

This is a topic where I greatly deviate from the advice churned out by many self-styled experts. Maybe, thousands of years ago, the possibility of leaving everything to become a wandering monk made sense. Those concepts are simply obsolete in modern times.

In our modern world dominated by technology, technical and business skills are easy to acquire. You could acquire them from any school, and you would probably do well. The most critical leadership skills that are needed to build today's complex organizations are the ability to motivate our teams, effectively manage stress, and collaborate across a large spectrum of business areas. The ability to effectively work with people from different domains, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives is absolutely essential for modern leaders.

Deep meditation can be leveraged precisely for enhancing these abilities. It provides you tools to manage stress; your perception of people is enhanced; you bring a lot of positivity to the group; you bring compassion for all; you have a much better capability to hear and absorb different perspectives; your ability to digest failures and build on them is enhanced; it takes away your complexes and you become fearless and open to taking risk - there is so much more we could add to the list. To summarize, meditation is an expressway to achieve the soft skills that modern day leaders desperately need to remain relevant in the increasingly competitive business world.

Over more than two decades of my career, I've had the opportunity to solve some significantly large, complex challenges. What I consistently observed was that the core of the problem would typically be simple and easily solvable via leveraging any standard methodology, but the problem would often become extremely complex due to the human emotions, opinions, and interests that overlaid the underlying business or technical challenge. If you had the ability to separate these emotions from the core problem, finding the solution would become simple, and more importantly, if you could help the other players disassociate themselves from the emotional aspect of the problem, executing the solution would become exponentially easier.

Most modern professions have transformed from manual jobs to highly technical problem-solving exercises that can severely tax your brain power. Building software is primarily a mind game, for example. You have a set of tools in hand along with a set of best practices, and your creativity, energy, and motivation will determine whether what you build will be a point solution for a specific problem or the next big thing in the market. These dynamics are going to significantly accelerate as we make advances in fields such as Artificial Intelligence, Neural Networks, Robotics and Quantum Computing. I can see a time on the horizon where your primary differentiator will be your creativity and ability to leverage human assets, and the soft skills you can acquire using meditation will become more and more critical.

Leveraging a Teacher

You need to know how to leverage the teacher, if you ever decide to get one.

Almost anyone who has done some work in this area can teach you the basic breathing techniques and postures. Physical yoga is an awesome way to keep your physical body in great shape - any gym in your community should have scores of classes teaching physical yoga and breathing. Take full advantage of those facilities.

If you intend to go into deeper states, you will need some custom guidance. A teacher's theoretical knowledge may not be able to drive you to your end goal. It is like a theoretical physicist trying to help you build a nuclear reactor. A physicist can write down great equations, but will not know anything about the nuts and bolts, and you can forget

about installing a centrifuge. You need a person who has built nuclear reactors, who may have forgotten the equations, but who has the blueprint of the building in his mind. An easy way to recognize the ideal teacher who has traveled the path, is to see if he can demonstrate strong intuition. He should be able to answer your questions before you ask them.

I searched for years before I found someone who I can call a teacher, and even in his case, it took me significant time to accept him as a teacher. There were two things I gained from my teacher.

First, he was a great listener. He would never push, demand, or command. He wanted me to progress at my own pace. He did not require me to slow down my physical, professional, or any other activities. Instead, he taught me how to integrate each aspect of my life, while still moving ahead on self-discovery. In difficult times, he was a great support to lean on - he would always bring positivity and future possibilities. He invariably brightened my days - one conversation with him would leave me completely energized.

Second, he seemed to not only know the path, but was also able to perceive my current state, could tell me what I was doing, what I was thinking, what was worrying me, and provide adequate guidelines. As I went into deeper states, I realized that he was always many steps ahead, so he was able to warn me of future challenges and help me prepare appropriately. I am extremely grateful for such amazing instruction. Without such guidance, I am not sure where I would have ended up.

“I believe spiritual progression is best carried out along with strong material progression, as leaving the material world to follow a spiritual path may create too many regrets, building barriers that could become insurmountable. The best path to follow would be Lord Krishna, a perfect example of how the two aspects of life can integrate”.

“Everyone has teachers and guides in the Astral and Causal Realms. In the early stages you cannot perceive them, but as you move into advanced stages, you will realize that they were holding your hand and guiding you almost the entire way”.

I understand that not every one of us will be fortunate enough to get a dedicated teacher. It seems that all of us have several guides and mentors in the Astral and Causal Dimensions. If you strive enough, they will figure out a way to guide you. Be open and continue your progression - when the time is right, you will receive the guidance you need from one channel or another.

A note of caution: If you meet someone who thinks you must give up on your life to make spiritual progression, run as fast and as far as you can. I have never seen this go well. The greatest Yogi ever to have existed, as per ancient Indian epics, was Lord Krishna. Read his stories and go through the *Bhagwat Gita; these stories will provide some ideas on how to integrate spiritual progression into your daily life. There are always exceptions, but I believe spiritual progression is best carried out alongside strong material progression. To achieve deeper states, you need a calm, satisfied state of mind, free of any past regrets, and giving away your material progression could easily become an insurmountable barrier.

When should I Start?

In the advanced stages, meditation is not just a passive activity, where you sit in silence. It is literally perfecting the art of death. You literally die many times and are reborn with a new perspective, enhanced wisdom, and compassion. It takes a lot of courage to get rid of your attachments, assumptions, dependencies, fears and complexes. It is a cleansing process, whereby you make your mind as clean as your soul to the extent that, in the end, both are indistinguishable from each other and work in tandem.

If you want to reach a good stage, you need to start as early as you can. Use your potential and energy constructively to move forward at a rapid pace. Once you have lost that energy, you may not be able to demonstrate the horsepower to penetrate the barriers.

It took me a long time, around thirty years, to reach a comfortable stage, where I feel the returns have been worth the investment. I am sure that, if you follow a more efficient process, you will be able to reach the same much faster. Once you reach that stage, you will realize how much you were missing. Having your higher self guiding you through the ups and downs of life is priceless.

Working with Children

Children are much more perceptive than adults and will reap the benefits much faster, but asking a child to sit in meditation for thirty minutes is probably not going to work.

There are several ways to get children started on this path. The easiest way is to let them try physical yoga, but increase the breathing period in between, to help them get in the habit of slowing their thoughts. They really enjoy the difficult poses and, with a little bit of motivation, will start enjoying the deep breathing as well.

Another way is to teach them the right way to sleep. You could ask them to take twenty-five to fifty slow deep breaths every time, before they sleep. Frequently ask them about their dreams and constantly remind them that they are supposed to fully control their dreams. The goal is to make it natural for them to be able to transition between a

wakeful meditative state and a conscious dream state.

As they adapt, get them to sit for fifteen minutes, in a cross-legged position or a chair, and do structured meditation. Provide them with specific goals. For example, repeat 'OM' one hundred and one times, or recite the 'Gayatri Mantra' seven times. Make sure this becomes a habit, just like working out at the gym. At some stage of life, they may develop the interest to move deeper. If we can familiarize them with the basic techniques early on, they will know how to move forward when the time is right.

Children are very receptive to stories. Providing them comic books on the life of Lord Krishna or *Bhagwat Gita would provide them exposure to these concepts. The extensive exploration of consciousness done by ancient Indian sages is the key to our civilization's long-term prosperity, and exposing children to these concepts is an important step in that direction.

About My Teacher

I plan to write a separate book about my teacher in the future, but for now I will provide a quick introduction.

Known to most of us as Prabhuji, his real name is Janak Raj. He was born in a remote village in the Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir state. In 1962, his parents moved to the Talab Tilo area of Jammu city. He completed his early education at the Government School Talab Tilo.

In 1980, he went to visit Kashmir. There, a known contact, who was a senior officer in the CID police, hosted him and helped him get a temporary job at an insurance company. Afterwards, around 1983, he was able to secure a more stable job at Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India Ltd, in the Indian Airlines Cargo office.

Prabhuji had a natural inclination towards deep meditation from his early years. He would experience intuitions and premonitions about things that would come true, which would sometimes scare him. In Kashmir, he travelled across the valley, visiting most of its popular destinations, such as Kheer Bhawani and Amarnath.

In 1989, when armed militancy started in Kashmir, terrorists started targeting valuable locations with bomb blasts to create an atmosphere of fear and push the minority population out of Kashmir. The first location targeted was a bank and the second location was the airline cargo office where he was employed. The second night after the blast, terrorists gathered in that area and made a lot of noise, further scaring the minority. With great difficulty, Prabhuji and a few colleagues escaped to Jammu city.

After escaping from Kashmir, he joined the Cargo Office at Delhi, where he served for around nine months. In 1990 he left the job, returned to Jammu city and started a small business, a shop selling stationery products.

Prabhuji was married in 1985, had his first child in 1986 and a second child in 1990. The second child faced severe medical issues, which sent him into a state of shock. The business was not doing well, which further complicated things. Around this time, his intuition told him to go and sit at a place that had nothing there. Soon, someone approached with an interest to build a small temple at that location. Temple construction took a long time; Prabhuji would often sit in that location for hours and hours, until his extremely worried family would forcibly bring him back home.

This is where Prabhuji's spiritual journey underwent a huge acceleration. He went through numerous experiences, which opened the entire universe to him like an open book.

He still runs his small shop, but he has changed the business too many times, Starting with stationery, moving to sweets, utensils etc., but as he has crossed too deep into advanced meditative states. His lack of focus on the material world means that the business doesn't do that well. People come to him from everywhere, to receive his advice and wisdom. He also actively participates in many social service events, helping and supporting his community in spare time. If you ever happen to visit his shop, you will find a loving, peaceful, calm person, half awake, half absorbed in some divine world, who will suddenly shock you with insights into your deepest aspirations – it's no surprise people refer to him as Prabhuji!

Acknowledgements

None of us succeed on our own. We stand on the shoulders of many others who have built the platform on which we stand today.

My first thanks are to my close family, who raised me to be a rational person. I was taught to question everything, but also to keep an open mind to all possibilities. Especially the extended family on my mom's side, who were so loving and caring, and my maternal grandmother, who incited my curiosity about ancient Indian mythologies and who later helped me with my first out of body experience.

My maternal uncle, D. C. Raina, a Physics Professor and a Yogi, who was a great influence. Looking at his vigorous efforts to attain self-realization and having access to his library helped me jumpstart my own meditation practices early in life.

My special thanks to Mr. Janak Raj, a small businessman and a realized soul, who has been a consistent guide and support. He is the only person I could find who has travelled the path himself and can guide you through each turn, obstacle, and possibility. Without his precise guidance, it would have been hard to continue my progression through the ups and downs of life.

My close friends and colleagues, who have provided a beautiful, open environment for my spiritual progression, with a special mention of Naresh Kumar Chauhan, my classmate and a deep meditator, with whom I have shared many of my experiences and who has been a great motivation and support.

My wife Anita Sharma, who has stood by me for the last two decades, and my ten-year-old daughter Evya Sharma, who curiously listens to my boring meditation talks and asks hundreds of questions, and who has demonstrated extraordinary intuition numerous times, as well as helping me draw many of the illustrations in this book.

There seems to be a whole lot of help I have received from guides in Astral and Causal states, many of whom I only have a slight perception of. I do not know their names, but they seem to have walked with me for many lives. I do not have enough words to express my appreciation for their support.

Thanks to everyone else who has contributed to my journey. The list would be too long to include here, but I am indebted to you for your support, and I wish you good luck on your spiritual evolution.

Afterword

Iwould be delighted to have conversations around your experiences and compare notes. Please feel free to check my website for details, or email me. I will try my best to directly respond or will answer the most common questions on my blog or in my books. I would also be open to working with advanced practitioners on further experiments, to explore more possibilities and polish my approach.

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Future Books in the series

The titles mentioned below are already in works, feel free to subscribe to the website www.gsharma.org to stay upto date with the release of these titles. Also if you would want the author to include your experiences in these titles, feel free to reach out at gs@gsharma.org.

100 Steps to Nirvana

A summary of best practices that will allow you to integrate the learnings from deep meditation techniques into your daily life with scientific and spiritual explanation behind each such practice.

No Mans Land

Stories about deeper realms, that defy logic. Amazing possibilities leveraging the golden knowledge and understanding that can be gained from these realms. An effort to put some structure around a complex reality that is beyond words and language.

A Realized Soul

Life stories, visions and experiences of Janak Raj, also known as “Prabhujī”. With commentary and explanation of each such vision. An opportunity for us to experience the life and work of a realized being, who can effectively leverage his Physical, Astral and Causal self in each action.