THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE



A Journey Through Darkness, Awakening, Shadows and Grace

A New Chapter Is Always Unfolding

"The story of a man whom life continues to teach."

DINESH NATHANI

Global Life Energy Success Coach
Inspirational Speaker & Author

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A Journey Through Darkness, Awakening, Shadows and Grace

A memoir in eleven chapters

The story of a man whom life continues to teach

October 2026

DEDICATION TO MY PARENTS



LATE
VISHNU NATHANI
(DAD)



JASSU NATHANI
(MOM)

To the roots from which my journey began.

To Dad, whose values and quiet strength remain with me beyond his physical presence.

To Mom, whose love, patience and prayers continue to be a source of comfort and courage.

You were my first teachers, not through words alone, but through the lives you lived. Through darkness, awakening, shadows and grace, I have carried your blessings within me.

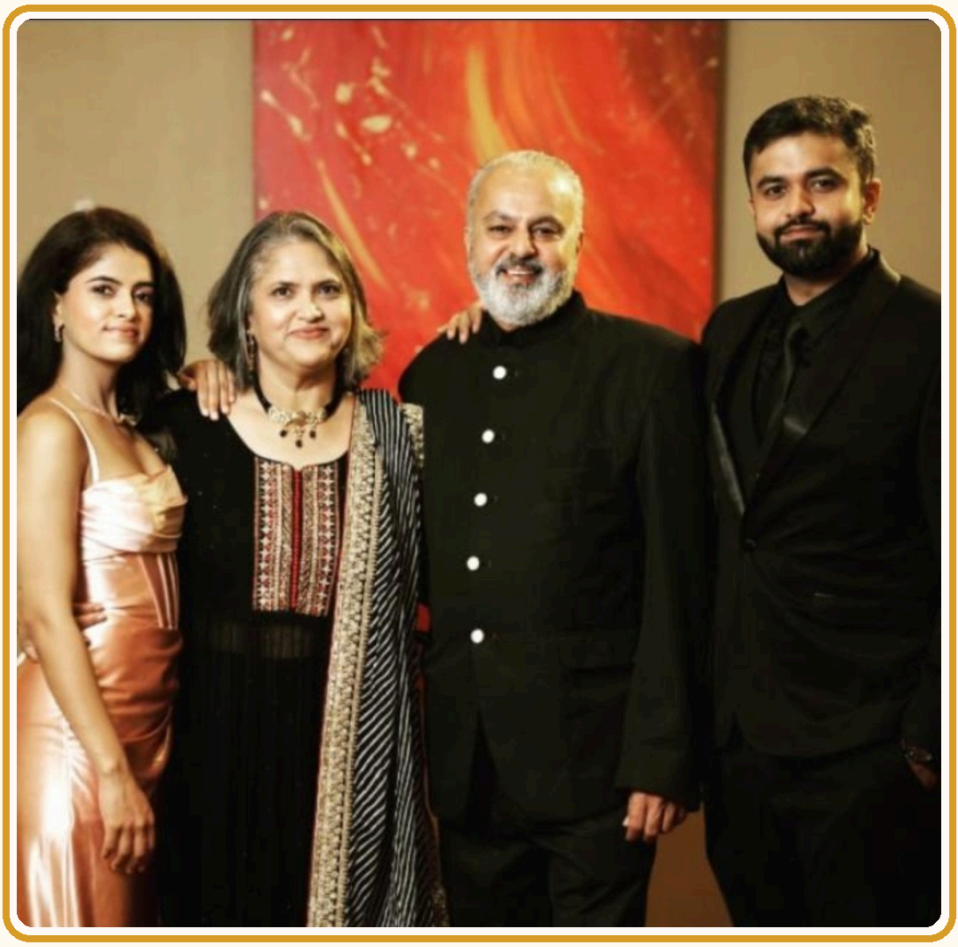
This journey, with all its imperfections and learnings, is also a reflection of the roots you gave me.

With love, reverence and everlasting gratitude,

— Dinesh

DEDICATION TO MY FAMILY

To the hearts who walk beside me



KANAL • KARAN • SHREYA

To Kanal, my companion through the changing seasons of life —
for your enduring patience, strength and love.
To Karan and Shreya, my children, who continue to teach me
about responsibility, understanding and growing with grace.
You are my roots in the present and my love for tomorrow.

With all my love — Dinesh

GRATITUDE TO MY FAMILY

A heartfelt gratitude to my family — my roots, my strength and my safe space. Through their love, patience and constant support, I have been able to walk this journey of life, learning, healing and awakening.



MY PARENTS
Late Vishnu Nathani (Dad) & Jassu Nathani (Mom)



MY SIBLINGS
Bunty Nathani & Monika D. Manglani



MY FAMILY
Me, Shreya, Karan & Kanal Nathani



NIHAD & SHREYA
Nathani Jivani — My Son & Daughter



KARAN & DISHA
Kapur Nathani — My Son & Daughter



BUNTY'S FAMILY
Bunty, Anuya, Abhinav & Aarya Nathani



SHARMA FAMILY
Gautam, Pyarelal ji, Late Sunila Pyarelal Sharma (Amma), Kanal & Me



MONIKA'S FAMILY
Monika, Hemant, Baani & Zaveer Manglani

A Note to the Reader

This is not the story of a man who mastered life. It is the story of a man whom life continues to teach.

These pages are drawn from my memories of family, work, emotional struggles, spiritual experiences, wrong turns and new beginnings. I have tried to tell them as faithfully and humbly as I can. Where time has softened exact details, I offer them as my sincere recollections.

I write in the first person because this journey is deeply personal. The spiritual experiences described are how I perceived and understood them. They are offered as reflections, not as proof that every reader must share my beliefs.

My experiences of mental and emotional health are not a substitute for professional care. I hope instead that sharing them openly may make room for understanding, empathy and conversation.

May you find, somewhere in these chapters, a moment that helps you look at your own journey with a little more awareness, acceptance and kindness.

Dinesh Nathani

MY MASTERS • A CIRCLE OF GRACE



A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO
LAXMIKANT–PYARELAL

Melodies of Meaning, Motivation & Humanity



500+	3,000+	7
FILMS	SONGS	FILMFARE AWARDS

From 1963 to 1998, Laxmikant–Pyarelal gave Hindi cinema melodies of courage, devotion, love and humanity. Their music continues to inspire generations.



A PERSONAL FAMILY TRIBUTE

Through my wife, Kanal, Maestro Pyarelal ji and Late Sunila Pyarelal Sharma, whom we always called Amma with love, became my family. What began as a connection through marriage blossomed into something far deeper—a bond of affection, trust, acceptance and belonging. With them, I have always felt at home.

To me, they are family in every sense, and I am family to them. Beyond the extraordinary melodies that have inspired generations, I cherish the warmth, wisdom and grace of the journey we have shared. This bond is one of life's most precious blessings.

*With love and reverence — **Dinesh Nathani***

11 TIMELESS INSPIRATIONS

Musical reflections from Laxmikant–Pyarelal

CLICK A TITLE TO FIND ITS AUDIO ON SPOTIFY

1	**Ruk Jaana Nahin** *Imtihan* • *1974*	01 SPOTIFY
2	**Zindagi Har Kadam Ek Nayi Jung Hai** *Meri Jung* • *1985*	02 SPOTIFY
3	**Gaadi Bula Rahi Hai** *Dost* • *1974*	03 SPOTIFY
4	**Zindagi Ki Yahi Reet Hai** *Mr. India* • *1987*	04 SPOTIFY
5	**Zindagi Imtihan Leti Hai** *Naseeb* • *1981*	05 SPOTIFY
6	**Jeevan Chalne Ka Naam** *Shor* • *1972*	06 SPOTIFY
7	**Ek Pyar Ka Nagma Hai** *Shor* • *1972*	07 SPOTIFY
8	**Yeh Jeevan Hai** *Piya Ka Ghar* • *1972*	08 SPOTIFY
9	**Aadmi Musafir Hai** *Apnapan* • *1977*	09 SPOTIFY
10	**Ek Banjara Gaaye** *Jeene Ki Raah* • *1969*	10 SPOTIFY
11	**Mere Desh Premiyon (Aapas Mein Prem Karo)** *Desh Premee* • *1982*	11 SPOTIFY

Music that inspires resilience, reflection and humanity.



Louise Hay



Carl Jung



Dr. Joe Dispenza



Joyce Meyer

GRATITUDE TO INSPIRATIONAL TEACHERS



Joel Osteen



Tony Robbins

With gratitude to the voices, wisdom and teachings that enriched my journey.



Robin Sharma



A.I.R. (Atman in Ravi)
Ravi Melwani



Vijay Vikram Singh
Podcast Host &
Bigg Boss Narrator



Vishwamitra
Yogeshwar Ji



Prof. (Dr.)
E B Khedkar
Vice President,
Ajeenkya D Y Patil
University & Group



Laxmi Maa
Mother



Guru Bhai
Rajesh Aidasani

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GRATITUDE, PRAYER & CLOSING

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With a Heart Full of Gratitude

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A New Chapter Unfolds

CHAPTER ONE

A Conversation with My Ten-Year-Old Self

Healing begins the moment we stop abandoning the child within.



CHAPTER ONE

A Conversation with My Ten-Year-Old Self

The 15th, 16th and 17th of October 2026 were significant days in my life.

I had travelled to Delhi to attend the Times of India Healing India Forum Awards, where I had been nominated in the category of Soul Coaching and Spiritual Mentorship. On the 16th, I recorded my first-ever podcast with Truth and Social Publications for Zee News.

The podcast went very well. It was a humbling experience. As I spoke, I felt that the words were flowing through me with a grace that was not mine alone. That is how I experienced it: as the flow of Divine Grace.

After the recording, I was travelling back to my hotel in a cab when my thoughts took me somewhere unexpected. Not towards the future, but deep into my past.

I began thinking about a little boy of nine or ten.

That little boy was me.

Where was he in his life? What was he feeling? What was he thinking? What was happening within him that nobody could see?

And I recognised how much pain that child was carrying.

At approximately ten years of age, I was sexually abused by one of the security men in the building where we lived. I did not understand what was happening to me. I had no way of knowing whether it was right or wrong, good or bad, pure or impure.

There is something especially difficult for me to share, but it is part of my truth. My body experienced sensations of pleasure and sexual release, even as I had no understanding of the abuse itself. That physical response confused me for years. I could not reconcile what my body experienced with the fear, hurt and distress I felt within.

Today, I understand what that little boy could not: a child's physical response does not mean consent. It does not make the child responsible for what an adult has done.

I wish someone had been there to explain this to me then.

And it did not end with that first experience.

During my years at boarding school, particularly in the eighth, ninth and tenth standards, I was subjected to further sexual abuse and bullying. There were also experiences involving cousins and relatives. I was repeatedly exposed to situations I neither understood nor knew how to stop.

As the years passed, I found myself increasingly confused. On one side, there were physical sensations I could not make sense of. On the other, there was a growing sense of hurt, shame and anger.

Why was this happening to me? Why couldn't I fight back? Why didn't I have the courage to say no? Who might take advantage of me next?

I began withdrawing into myself. I became cautious, apprehensive and afraid. Somewhere along the way, I felt I had lost my identity.

When I completed my schooling and returned to Mumbai, to attend college, I found myself drawn more towards the company of girls and women. I had male

friends too, but I remained wary because of what I had experienced.

I made many female friends. I fell in love, fell out of love, and sometimes found myself attracted to someone else even after I had developed feelings for another person.

Was this an expression of my inner angst? Was I searching for affection, comfort or safety? I cannot say with certainty. I do not want to invent an explanation now for everything that happened then.

What I do know is that those early experiences left deep impressions on me. They affected how I felt about myself, how I related to other people and how I moved through the world.

On the 17th of October 2026, my fifty-ninth birthday, I was returning home from Delhi. I was entering the sixtieth year of my life.

And I found myself returning, in another sense, to that ten-year-old boy.

I wanted to speak to him. I wanted to make him feel safe and comfortable. Above all, I wanted him to hear something he had needed to hear all those years ago.

My child, what happened to you was not your fault.

You did not know what was happening. You were too young to understand the actions of those who hurt you. You did not invite those experiences, and you were not responsible for them.

Even if your body responded physically, that did not make the abuse your choice. You deserved safety, affection, protection and understanding.

I wanted to hold that child close and let him know that I finally recognised his pain.

At fifty-nine, after a life of falling and rising, I am beginning to look at those experiences with a different understanding.

For me, this is where Awareness begins: seeing what happened, recognising the emotions attached to it and acknowledging how deeply it affected my life.

Then comes Acceptance.

Acceptance does not mean approval. It does not excuse what anyone did to me. Nor does it require me to pretend that the hurt was small or that it has disappeared. It means acknowledging that these experiences are

part of my history, even though I would never have chosen them.

And through awareness and acceptance, I experience what I call Ascension: a gradual expansion of my understanding, a rising of consciousness and a gentler relationship with myself.

These are my experiences and my understanding of my spiritual journey. I do not ask anyone else to see them in exactly the same way.

I do not wish to spend the remainder of my life holding on to hatred or judgment. But neither do I wish to deny what happened. There is a difference between releasing hatred and erasing the truth.

Today, I want to embrace that little boy. I want to hug him and seek his forgiveness for all the years in which I could not fully understand his pain.

I want him to know that I am no longer turning away from him.

I am married. I have two children. I have a family, and I have lived through love, suffering, success, failure, spiritual

awakening and grace. Yet somewhere within me, that ten-year-old boy is still present.

His pain, his hurt, his confusion and the unanswered questions of those years remain part of me.

I will not discard him.

I will not isolate him.

I will not separate him from the person I am today simply because his memories are difficult to face.

If there is one thing The University of Life has taught me, it is that becoming more whole does not always mean leaving the past behind. Sometimes, it means turning towards the part of ourselves we have spent years avoiding.

And embracing it with understanding.

So today, at fifty-nine, I want to tell my ten-year-old self:

My child, I see you.

I recognise your pain.

I am here with you.

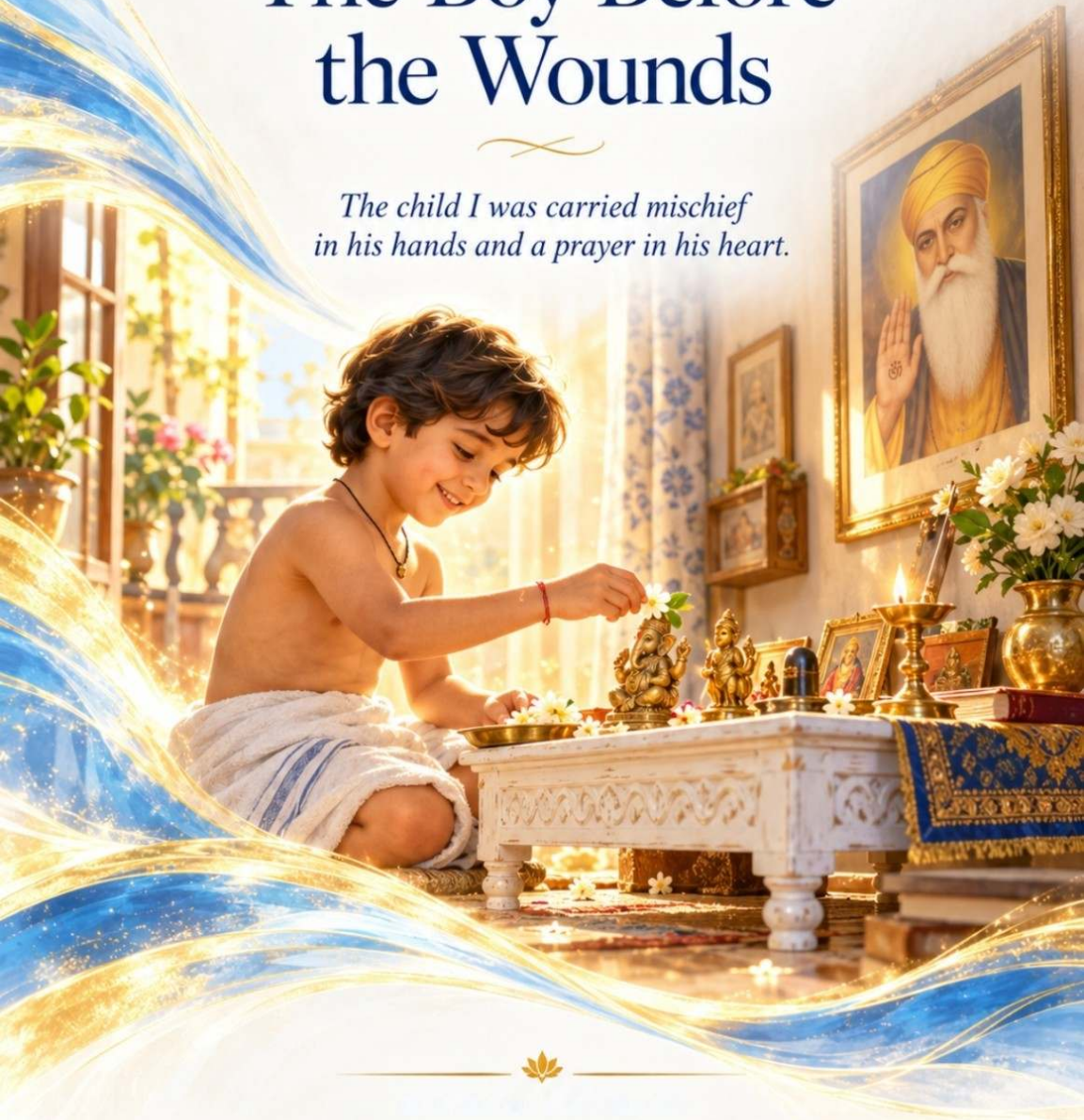
And this time, I will not turn away.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER TWO

The Boy Before the Wounds

The child I was carried mischief in his hands and a prayer in his heart.



CHAPTER TWO

The Boy Before the Wounds

When I travel back to my earliest childhood memories, I find myself in Bandra, Mumbai, in a building called Kamal Kunj.

That was home.

We were a family of four: my father, my mother, my elder sister Monika, and me. My younger brother, Jiten Nathani, whom we fondly call Bunty, had not yet come into this world.

My sister was studying at Rishi Valley, a boarding school in South India, and I was growing up at home. Both my parents worked, and when I look back today, I realise how much they did to give us a reasonably comfortable life.

My father worked for Indal, the Indian Aluminium Company, at Kalwa near Thane. He would get ready and leave the house at around seven in the morning. He drove from

Bandra to Sion, left the car near a little shop called Ladies Corner, which belonged to his elder brother Girdhari, and then boarded a train to Kalwa. By about six-thirty or seven in the evening, he would return home to his family.

My mother worked for more than twenty-five years, as far as I remember, as a telephone operator with Bharat Bijli. Before leaving each morning, she would cook, prepare the food and tiffins, attend to the household and make sure that everything was taken care of.

It was not as though life was overflowing with luxuries. But we had a roof over our heads, meals on the table, and clothes that our parents could afford. When Bunty was born and we became three siblings, their responsibilities grew, and they continued doing everything they could for us.

Today, I feel deep gratitude for that.

But what kind of child was I?

Well, let me confess: I was quite a rogue!

I was naughty, argumentative, rebellious and often very difficult to handle. I would argue with my parents, ignore their advice and

repeatedly do the very things they had told me not to do.

There were times when I even stole money from their cupboard or from my mother's or father's purse.

Their hard-earned money.

I would spend it on something to eat outside school or with my friends, hardly thinking about what my parents had done to earn it.

If I heard my mother or father coming towards the room after I had taken something, I would rush under the bed and hide.

Of course, hiding under the bed did not make me invisible!

They would find me and scold me. As far as I can remember, neither of my parents raised a hand against me. They would warn me, explain why what I had done was wrong and try to make me understand.

And I?

I would sit there pretending to listen.

But I wasn't really listening. Before long, I would repeat the same behaviour.

My mother probably had the toughest time with me. I troubled her enormously, and even

today I do not quite know why I directed so much anger and defiance towards her. My father was a kind soul who guided me, motivated me and tried to keep me out of trouble.

Still, I seemed to have a talent for getting into it!

There was anger in me, jealousy and, at times, even hatred. I was too young to understand those emotions, let alone manage them. I was not the obedient, studious little boy my parents might have wished for. I was an average student, and my behaviour often worried them.

Yet, strangely enough, there was another side to me.

A little boy who was drawn to prayer.

A LITTLE BOY AND HIS GODS

When I was perhaps six or seven years old, I would have my bath, tie a towel tightly around my waist and get ready to do a puja of my own.

We had a small white table that had come to our family from my Kamli Massi. I would take the little idols from the mandir at home,

arrange them on that table and worship them in my own way.

Nobody had asked me to do this. It was something I felt drawn towards doing.

My parents' daily prayer was simple. There was a beautiful portrait of Guru Nanak Dev Ji in our home. Before leaving for work, my father and mother would light an incense stick, move it gently before the portrait, fold their hands and offer their prayers.

I would watch them. In my child's understanding, this was God.

So I created my own little place of worship. At that age, I did not know anything about spiritual evolution, the soul or the experiences that would come into my life many years later. I only knew that I felt an attraction towards the Divine.

And even my little pujas had their moments of mischief!

One day, I tied my towel so tightly that I tripped and fell. The right side of my nose struck the glass edge of the dressing table.

I was hurt, and the scar is still there on my face.

Another time, I was watering the plants outside our veranda. I bent too far, lost my balance and fell onto the parapet of the flat below.

I hurt myself then, too.

When I recall these incidents, I can almost hear my parents wondering what their son would get up to next!

SCHOOL DAYS AND A DOUBLE-DECKER BUS

If my memory serves me correctly, I first went to St. Mary's Kindergarten in Khar, where I would be dropped off and picked up. Later, I studied at St. Anne's School.

I was certainly no academic genius. My schoolwork was average, and I was much more interested in other things going on around me.

One of those things was inventing stories.

I would tell my classmates, with a straight face, that I had come to school in my very own double-decker bus.

Yes, a double-decker bus!

It was parked outside, I would tell them, waiting for me. When school finished, I would climb in and drive it back home.

And the reality?

If I remember correctly, I was probably coming to school on a bicycle!

Why did I make up these stories? I honestly don't know. Maybe I enjoyed the imagination of it all. Maybe I liked the attention. At that age, I certainly wasn't analysing my behaviour.

I also had a very early interest in girlfriends.

By the fourth or fifth standard, I had already declared that two girls were my girlfriends. I will not mention their names. Looking back, they were simply good friends, and they remained friends while I was at that school.

I smile when I remember the little boy who could invent a double-decker bus and proudly announce that he had two girlfriends.

That was also me.

But childhood did not consist only of these light-hearted memories.

At another school, whose name I choose not to mention, I experienced bullying and sexual

abuse. One of the boxing instructors abused me. I have spoken about the pain of those early experiences in my conversation with my ten-year-old self, and there is more about them that belongs to the next part of my story.

The truth is that childhood can hold laughter and fear at the same time. Mischief can exist alongside confusion. A child may appear lively, rebellious or full of imagination while carrying experiences that the adults around him do not fully see.

In those years, I did not have the understanding I have today.

THE PATTERNS I COULD NOT SEE

As I grew older, I began noticing that I repeated certain behaviours even when I knew my parents disapproved of them.

Today, my spiritual understanding offers me one way of reflecting on those patterns. I believe in karma, reincarnation and the soul's continuing journey. In that understanding, Sanchit Karma refers to accumulated karma, while Prarabdha Karma is understood as the portion that unfolds in a particular lifetime.

I also believe that a soul may come into a family to learn through the relationships and

experiences of that life. These beliefs took on much greater significance for me after my spiritual awakening on 21 July 2002, which I will describe later in this book.

When I think of my childhood anger, jealousy, stubbornness and repeated mistakes, I sometimes understand them through the idea of samskaras—impressions and habits carried within us.

But I want to make one thing absolutely clear.

My beliefs do not excuse the things I did that hurt others. Nor do they mean that the abuse I suffered was my fault or that any child deserves such experiences.

I never want to blame my parents for my behaviour. They worked hard. They guided me. They tried to teach me what was right. I often chose not to listen.

Looking back now, I can see that the boy in Kamal Kunj was not just one thing.

He was mischievous.

He was argumentative.

He could be disobedient and difficult.

He was imaginative and sometimes rather funny.

He was curious about God.

He was capable of affection.

And, as life unfolded, he also became frightened and confused.

I cannot separate one part of him from the others and pretend that it represents the whole.

I do not wish to glorify his mischief. Neither do I wish to keep condemning him for every mistake he made.

I want to understand him.

Perhaps this is one of the gifts of growing older: the ability to look at our younger selves with greater awareness, acceptance and compassion, without denying the truth of what happened.

The University of Life does not begin when we become adults. It begins much earlier, when we are still children, learning lessons that may take decades for us to understand.

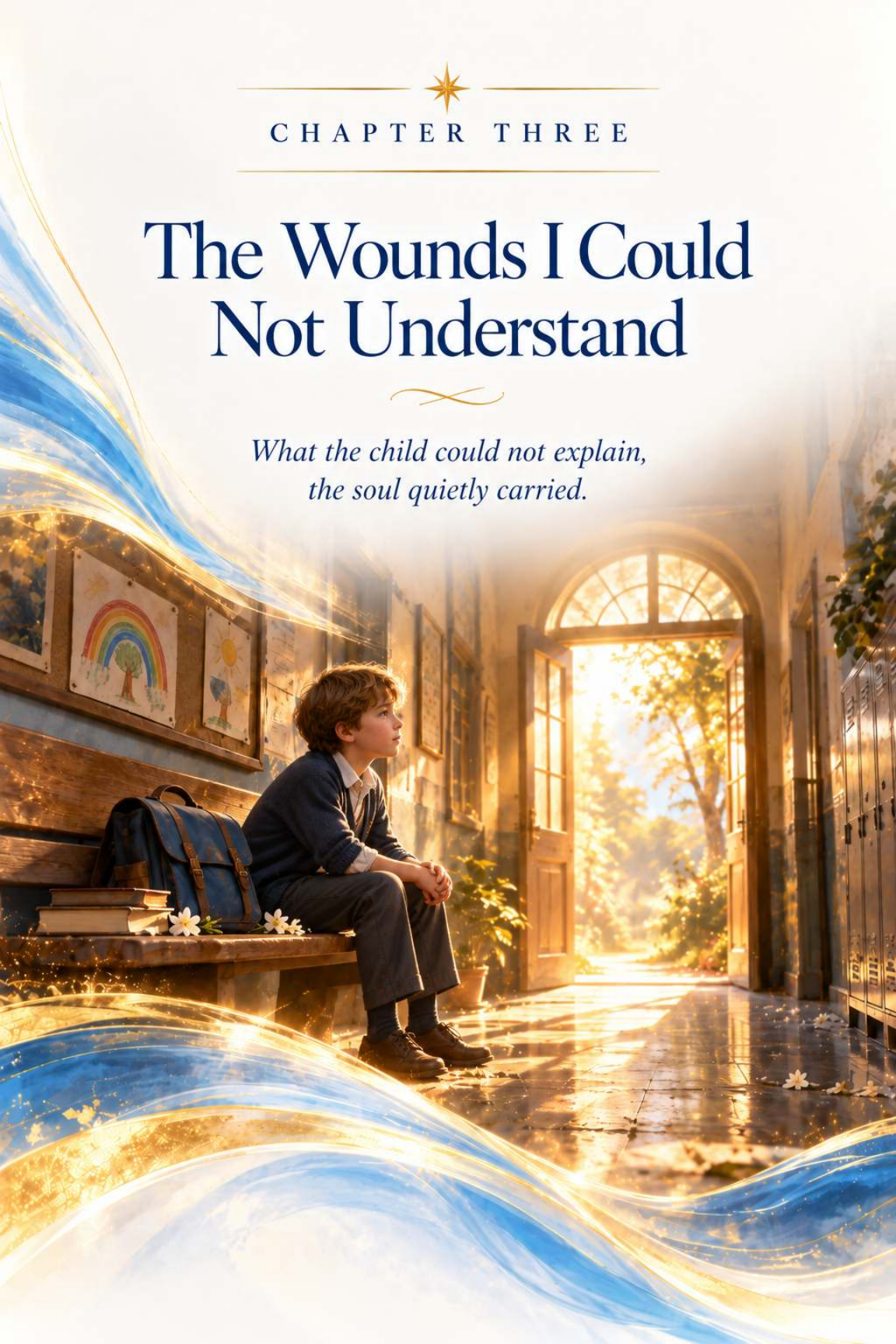
And that little boy from Kamal Kunj had only just begun his journey.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER THREE

The Wounds I Could Not Understand

What the child could not explain,
the soul quietly carried.



CHAPTER THREE

The Wounds I Could Not Understand

When I remember the little boy I was, I do not see only one picture.

I see the naughty boy who argued with his parents, invented stories about travelling to school in a double-decker bus and sometimes hid under the bed after taking money he should never have touched.

I also see the boy who arranged little idols on a white table and performed his own puja, drawn to God in a way he could not yet explain.

And then I see another side of him.

A child who was confused, frightened and carrying experiences that he did not know how to put into words.

That child was also me.

At approximately ten years of age, I was sexually abused by one of the security men in the building where we lived.

I have spoken about this in my conversation with my ten-year-old self. But there is a difference between looking back at a child with compassion and trying to explain what it was like to be that child while those experiences were unfolding.

At that age, I had no understanding of what the man was doing to me. I could not decide whether it was right or wrong, pure or impure, good or bad. Those questions came later. At the time, I did not even have the language to ask them.

One of the most confusing aspects was that my body sometimes experienced sensations of pleasure and sexual release.

I am sharing this openly because it became an important part of my confusion. On one side, there was a physical response. On the other, there was an emotional experience of fear, hurt and distress. As a child, I could not understand how both could exist together.

I carried that confusion for years.

Today, I understand that a physical response does not make abuse consensual. The responsibility was with the person who

abused me, not with the child who could not understand or stop it.

Unfortunately, the experience in our building was not the end of it.

During my school years, including the years I spent in boarding school, I experienced further sexual abuse and bullying. I was in boarding school during the eighth, ninth and tenth standards, and those experiences made an already confused young boy feel even more lost.

There is one experience involving a boxing instructor that I have not forgotten.

I have chosen not to name the school. This instructor would take me to a secluded area in the upper part of the school building, make me remove my clothes and sexually abuse me.

I do not wish to describe the acts in graphic detail. What matters to my story is that it happened, that I was a child, and that I did not understand how to protect myself.

There were also experiences of abuse involving cousins and relatives within the wider family.

When I look back, one question returns to me again and again.

Why did this keep happening?

I do not have an answer that can make those experiences reasonable or acceptable. I only know that they happened, repeatedly, and that they affected me deeply.

THE QUESTIONS I CARRIED

Over time, I began asking myself questions I could not answer.

Why couldn't I fight back?

Why couldn't I have the courage to say no?

Who would be the next person to abuse me?

I remember how fearful and uncertain I became. I grew more introverted and more guarded in my interactions. Instead of feeling free to be myself, I became conscious of the possibility that someone might hurt me again.

I began to lose my sense of who I was.

There was also a growing conflict within me. Some of the physical sensations were confusing, while deep inside I had begun to hate what was happening. I could not understand why experiences that caused such hurt had also produced responses in my body.

For years, that contradiction remained difficult for me to accept.

And yet, outwardly, life continued.

I could still be the troublesome boy. I could still have friends. I could still laugh, imagine things and get into mischief. The child who made up stories about a double-decker bus had not suddenly disappeared.

That is why I believe we must be careful when we look at another person's life. What we see on the outside may tell us very little about what that person is carrying within.

I am not saying that every part of my later behaviour came from these experiences. I cannot know that with certainty. But I do recognise that what happened in childhood affected my trust, my relationships and the way I saw myself.

When I completed my schooling and returned to Mumbai to attend college, I found myself seeking the company of girls and women more often than that of men.

I had male friends too, including some who became very good friends. Still, because of my earlier experiences, I was apprehensive about men and found it difficult to trust.

I made many female friends. I began falling in love, falling out of love and moving from one

attraction to another. At the time, I did not have the awareness to examine what was happening within me.

Was I looking for affection? Was I trying to feel safe? Was some of my inner angst finding expression through my relationships?

I still do not claim to know all the answers.

I will speak more openly about those choices in the chapters that follow, including the times when my own behaviour hurt other people. My childhood experiences are part of my history, but they do not remove my responsibility for decisions I made as I grew older.

THE SHADOW I DID NOT UNDERSTAND

I have often spoken of our shadows—the parts of ourselves that we find difficult to face or understand.

When I was a child, I did not know anything about shadow work, inner-child healing or the language I would discover much later in life. I simply knew that there were things happening to me that I could neither explain nor make sense of.

It was only many years later, through life experiences, spiritual practice and continued reflection, that I began looking at those hidden wounds differently.

I am a believer in karma, reincarnation and the continuing journey of the soul. Those beliefs form part of the way I understand my own spiritual evolution.

But I do not know why these particular experiences happened to me. I will not claim to know what karmic explanation, if any, lies behind them.

Most importantly, no spiritual explanation can turn the abuse of a child into that child's fault.

The people who hurt me were responsible for their actions. I was responsible neither for their choices nor for the way my body reacted.

For me, accepting my history does not mean approving of it. It means acknowledging the truth without continuing to condemn myself for what I could not have understood at that age.

Nor does acceptance mean that I have forgotten everything, that the hurt has magically disappeared, or that I have mastered life.

Far from it.

I am still learning.

THE BOY I CARRY WITH ME

Today, at fifty-nine, I can look back at the child I once was with much greater understanding.

He was not only the boy who made mistakes, argued with his parents and got himself into trouble.

He was not only the child who was drawn towards prayer.

He was also the child who went through painful experiences without understanding why they were happening.

All those parts belonged to the same boy.

In the previous chapter, I spoke about my mischievous childhood and the little white prayer table at home. In this chapter, I have shared the other side of those years—not to seek sympathy, and certainly not to ask anyone to excuse the mistakes I made later in life.

I share it because this, too, is my truth.

I cannot tell an honest story about my journey by keeping only the pleasant memories and hiding the ones that make me uncomfortable.

I also cannot change what happened.

What I can do, today, is look at that child without hatred or judgment. I can acknowledge the confusion, fear and anguish he carried. I can recognise that he deserved protection and understanding.

And I can give him a place in my life instead of pushing him away.

Perhaps the deepest wound was not only what happened to me, but how long I lived without understanding what had happened.

That understanding has taken decades.

The boy who once found himself lost in those experiences eventually grew into a young man who would make his own choices—some joyful, some foolish, and some deeply regrettable.

That is where my journey takes us next.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cakewala, the Casanova and a Twist of Destiny

Life was teaching me through love, desire, ambition and consequence.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Cakewala, the Casanova and a Twist of Destiny

A YOUNG MAN SEARCHING FOR DIRECTION

After spending three years at boarding school in Baroda, I returned to Mumbai and joined Jai Hind College to study Commerce.

Those college years brought new friendships, new experiences and a great deal of excitement. There were boys and girls in our group, and we spent some wonderful times together.

Gradually, I became attracted to one of the girls. I shall not mention her name, out of respect for her privacy. We were together for a couple of years.

But even while I was in that relationship, I found myself attracted to another girl.

Looking back today, I recognise that I had a wandering mind. I enjoyed affection,

attention, romance and the thrill of attraction. I did not understand what loyalty demanded of me or how my actions could hurt another human being.

I was an average student, as I have already admitted. And when it came to making sensible decisions about my future, I could be remarkably foolish!

Let me tell you how I chose my next course of study.

I had decided to leave Jai Hind College without completing my graduation and seek admission to a professional course at Sophia Polytechnic.

My original plan was Hotel Management and Food Technology.

There I was, standing in the admissions queue.

Alongside our queue was another one—for a one-year diploma in Bakery and Confectionery.

And what did I notice?

Pretty girls!

Not the prospectus.

Not the career opportunities.

Not the course curriculum.

The pretty girls.

Without giving serious thought to what I was doing, I stepped out of the Hotel Management queue and joined the Bakery and Confectionery queue.

Why?

Just because I had seen those girls!

Can you imagine the clarity of this young man's thinking?

Today, I can laugh at the absurdity of the decision. But I also recognise how easily attraction and impulse could direct my choices in those days.

THE HONEYBEE SYNDROME

My year at Sophia Polytechnic was a lovely experience. I learned bakery and confectionery, made friends and began developing a skill I would eventually use professionally.

But my romantic life was becoming increasingly complicated.

I was attracted to two girls while my earlier relationship from Jai Hind College had not been properly resolved. I found myself expressing love to more than one person and

accepting their love in return.

Where was the honesty?

Where was the loyalty?

At the time, I barely stopped to ask those questions.

I have often described that version of myself as a honeybee, moving from flower to flower, collecting nectar and then flying towards another flower.

I was influenced by Hindi films and the larger-than-life romantic heroes I had grown up watching. The so-called Casanova was sometimes shown as charming and successful, surrounded by women and admired for his conquests.

Somewhere along the way, I began confusing attraction with love and attention with achievement.

When I think back to the child I had been, I know my early experiences were part of my emotional history. But I cannot honestly attribute every questionable choice I made to that history.

I had my own responsibility.

I was not treating other people's feelings with the care they deserved.

At the time, I did not fully realise the hurt I could cause. Today, I can acknowledge it without trying to defend it.

THE BIRTH OF CAKEWALKERS

When I completed my diploma, I told my parents that I wanted to open a bakery.

My father and my sister's husband, my brother-in-law, agreed to put money into the venture. My elder sister would be a partner in the business, while I would be the active partner responsible for running it.

I named the business Cakewalkers.

What a journey that was!

I prepared cakes, pastries and chocolates. There were established names in the market, including Monginis and the larger hotel and confectionery brands, but I was determined to make a place for our products.

I worked hard.

I took orders myself. I prepared products, looked after customers and arranged deliveries.

I had one helper, a sweet young fellow named Daigo, whom I trained.

My brother-in-law generously allowed me to use his Volkswagen van. I drove around the suburbs and into South Mumbai, delivering cakes, pastries and chocolates.

Some places ordered products outright. At other outlets, I left them on the understanding that I would collect the unsold stock later.

It was a demanding way to work. I was involved in almost everything, often with only Daigo to help.

People appreciated what I made. That brought me genuine satisfaction.

Cakewalkers continued for approximately five years.

But appreciation did not automatically translate into profits.

Even as I worked hard and enjoyed the creative side of the business, the finances remained a struggle. There were also distractions and complications in my personal life.

I was learning to make beautiful cakes.

I had not yet learned how to make a financially successful business.

And, as it turned out, the name Cakewalkers would become part of something much bigger than my bakery.

It would become the name by which my future father-in-law first recognised me!

TEN ON TURNER ROAD

During those years, I joined a health spa called Ten on Turner Road in Bandra.

A dear friend of mine, Sunil Alamchandani, introduced me to another friend of his, Gautam Sharma.

Sunil is no longer with us. I remember him with great affection.

Gautam is the son of legendary music maestro and composer Pyarelal ji of Laxmikant-Pyarelal fame.

Laxmikantji and Pyarelalji were two separate individuals who, together, created an extraordinary musical legacy.

Gautam and I became close friends.

Eventually, he invited me to his home. There I met his parents and was introduced to his sister, Kanal.

Little did I know what that introduction would mean for the rest of my life.

We had a lively circle of around eighteen to twenty friends who frequently met on Hill Road in Bandra. We watched films, played cards, attended parties and enjoyed one another's company.

Gautam's family had a wonderful home-theatre system. Those were the days of laser discs—LDs—and we spent many enjoyable evenings watching movies together.

For approximately six months, Kanal and I were simply good friends.

At least, that was how things seemed.

THE RIDE THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

One day, around fifteen or sixteen of us decided to go to an amusement park.

We travelled in three cars. It was a carefree outing, moving from one ride to the next, laughing and thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

Then came a particular ride.

Kanal had already taken her seat, with one place still vacant beside her.

She raised her hand to call someone over.

I thought she was calling me.

Apparently, another fellow thought the same thing.

But I ran faster!

Before he could reach her, I was sitting beside Kanal.

The ride was frightening, and as it began, she clung to me and held my hand tightly.

What happened next is a memory that has remained with me for decades.

When the ride ended, we got down.

But we did not let go of each other's hands.

We continued holding hands through the rides that followed.

There had been no proposal, no declaration of love and no elaborate romantic conversation.

Just two friends holding hands.

And somehow, everything had changed.

On our way home, I was driving my jet-black Fiat, complete with tinted glasses and loud music.

I loved that car and the music that went with it!

Kanal sat beside me in the front, and we held

hands again. I remember driving, changing gears and continuing to hold her hand as we travelled back towards Bandra.

Meanwhile, the girls in the back seat were whispering to one another.

They knew my reputation.

They knew I already had girlfriends.

And now, here was this fellow, this Casanova, apparently becoming involved with their dear friend Kanal!

Their concern was understandable.

But something was different for me.

I was falling deeply in love.

"KAUN DINESH? WOH CAKEWALA?"

When we returned, Gautam told his mother that Kanal liked me.

We fondly called his mother Amma. We lost her in 2026, and I remember her with love and gratitude.

Gautam said something to the effect of:

"Kanal ko ek ladka achha lagta hai—Dinesh Nathani, jo cakes banata hai, chocolates banata hai."

Amma already knew me. I had been visiting their home as a friend, and we had spent many evenings there together.

She called Pyarelalji, whom we lovingly call Papa. He was recording music at Mehboob Studio in Bandra.

When she told him that Kanal liked a boy named Dinesh, his response was unforgettable.

“Kaun Dinesh? Woh cakewala?”

Which Dinesh? The fellow who makes cakes?

Amma confirmed that I was indeed the cakewala.

And Papa responded warmly. It was good news, he said, and they would see how to take things forward.

Just like that, Kanal's parents knew.

My own parents did not know yet.

And neither did the two girls whose feelings were still involved with mine.

I had created a situation that could not remain unresolved.

THE WEB OF MY OWN MAKING

I went home and spoke to my father about Kanal, and the news was shared with my mother.

Kanal already knew that I had been involved with other girls. She had met them.

But those girls did not know what was developing between Kanal and me. They did not even know the full extent of my overlapping relationships.

I was now genuinely, deeply in love with Kanal.

I also knew I had to tell the others the truth.

I could imagine that they would be hurt, but I had no idea how painful the confrontation would become.

When I finally told them, all hell broke loose.

There were tears, anger, shouting, blame and accusations.

And when the two girls learned that I had been involved with both of them, the situation became even worse.

I had hurt them.

I had broken trust.

I had created the mess, and I could not run away from that responsibility.

I sometimes think of myself during that period as a spider caught in his own web.

I had woven it myself.

Kanal also faced warnings from people who knew my reputation.

They questioned whether she should trust someone who had behaved as I had.

Others suggested that I wanted to marry her because she was Pyarelalji's daughter—because of the family's fame, money and standing in the film industry.

When I look back into my heart today, I do not believe those were my motives.

I loved Kanal.

I cannot undo the hurt caused by my earlier behaviour. But neither do I want to deny what I felt for the woman who would become my wife.

Kanal was firm in her decision.

So was I.

We wanted to be together.

WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSED

Just a couple of months before our marriage, another difficult event unfolded.

Cakewalkers was in financial trouble. Despite all my efforts, the business had been running at a loss.

My brother-in-law, who had invested money in it, was unhappy with how I was managing things and wanted his investment returned.

There was no money available to repay him.

My father stepped in.

He reminded me that my sister and brother-in-law were family and that we should not let a business damage those relationships.

He advised me to sign the papers and hand over the bakery unit to my sister.

I asked him, “Dad, what about me?”

His answer has remained with me:

“Don't worry. One door will close; another will open.”

So I signed the papers.

Cakewalkers was no longer mine to run.

My sister tried to continue the business, but eventually it could not survive. She had to close it and sell the place.

And here I want to give her credit for something important.

She returned the amount my father had originally invested. She gave the money to me, and I passed it back to Dad.

I remain grateful to her for doing that.

But as my wedding approached, my own situation was uncertain.

I had no bakery.

I had no job.

I was not earning an income.

And I was about to get married!

Kanal knew that Cakewalkers had stopped, but I felt I needed to tell her parents directly about my circumstances.

So I spoke to Papa and Amma.

I explained that the business had closed, that it had not been profitable, and that I had no immediate source of income.

Their response touched me deeply.

They told me not to worry. They had come from humble beginnings themselves, worked

their way up and experienced financial hardship. They believed that life and destiny could change, and that we should go ahead with the marriage and see how the future unfolded.

They accepted me without a business or a salary to offer.

I cannot forget that kindness.

Nor can I forget my father's desire to preserve family relationships when Cakewalkers was failing.

One door had closed.

I had no idea what the next would look like.

THE SANGEET AT DEEP BELA

There was a gap of about six months between our engagement and our wedding. During that period came another memory I treasure—the sangeet held before our marriage.

It took place in the compound of Deep Bela, where Kanal's family lived. Unlike the enormous wedding reception that was to follow, this was a small, intimate gathering of close family and friends.

A few people from the film fraternity joined us too. I remember Jackie Shroff, Bappi Lahiri,

Anand Bakshi ji and Amrish Puri among those present.

And what an evening it was!

I can still picture Amrish Puri dancing with a glass of whisky balanced on his bald head, completely in control as he moved. It was quite a sight!

Bappi Lahiri sang a few songs, bringing his own energy to the celebration.

But one moment remains especially vivid. Anand Bakshi ji, who had penned the lyrics for songs in Subhash Ghai's film Saudagar, sang live: “Deewane Tere Naam Ke, Khade Hain Dil Thaam Ke.”

To hear him sing those words in that close gathering was something special.

It was not a grand public function. It was a warm evening in our family compound, filled with music, laughter and the excitement of the marriage that was approaching. I carry that memory with great affection.

A WEDDING BEYOND MY IMAGINATION

Our engagement was arranged, and on 7 April 1991, Kanal and I were married.

What a wedding it was!

I could never have imagined that I would experience such an extraordinary celebration.

Our reception was held at St. Andrew's Ground in Bandra. It was an enormous venue, decorated with the magnificence of a film set.

According to the meal count I remember, approximately five thousand guests attended.

Five thousand!

Film personalities, actors, actresses, singers, music directors, filmmakers, family members and friends—people seemed to be arriving continuously.

I remember Jeetendra, Rishi Kapoor, Randhir Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle, Anu Malik, Bappi Lahiri, Amrish Puri, Jackie Shroff, Anil Kapoor, Salman Khan and Rakesh Roshan, among many others.

I mention these names as part of my memory of that extraordinary night. When we prepare the final book, we can check the details against any records or photographs available.

It was a reflection of the love and regard that Laxmikant–Pyarelal had earned through their enormous contribution to Hindi film music.

I particularly remember that filmmaker

Subhash Ghai and the late producer Yash Johar, Karan Johar's father, played a major role in creating and arranging the magnificent venue and decorations. Their association with Laxmikant–Pyarelal was part of the world into which I was entering through marriage.

And there I stood.

The cakewala.

Beside Kanal.

With thousands of people coming to bless us.

There was one activity that seemed never to end.

Bending down to touch people's feet!

Whenever an elder from our families or a respected guest arrived, we would bend, touch their feet, receive blessings, straighten up, smile and get ready for the next person.

Down.

Up.

Down.

Up.

Again and again.

We were exhausted!

I remember Jackie Shroff coming up to me

and saying, in his affectionate style, something like, “Bidu, you must be very tired now. Here, take this!”

He handed me a Black Label drink.

I gulped it down and treated it as temporary fuel to keep standing and bending through the evening!

Even now, I smile when I remember that moment.

The reception began around seven-thirty or eight in the evening and continued until roughly twelve-thirty or one in the morning, as far as I recall.

By then, all we wanted was to get to the hotel and rest.

My late Indu Maasi had generously gifted us a honeymoon suite.

She too is no longer with us. I remember her with gratitude and affection.

Eventually, we reached the hotel, carrying memories of a celebration that neither of us would forget.

There was, however, another side to that glorious night.

Some of my old friends had seen what happened in my earlier relationships. They

felt I had cheated and hurt the girls involved, and some chose not to attend the wedding.

I understood their decision.

A grand wedding did not erase the mistakes I had made.

Nor did the glamour outside change the fact that I was entering married life without a job, a business or a regular income.

THE CAKEWALA AND THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Today, as I look back at the age of fifty-nine, Kanal and I have been married for thirty-five years.

It has not been a perfect fairy tale.

We have known love, happiness, disappointment, struggles, disagreements and more than our share of the ups and downs of life.

There have been many Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham moments.

But we have continued walking through life together.

When I look back at the amusement-park ride, I think of that empty seat beside Kanal.

Her raised hand.

My running faster than the other fellow.

The ride that frightened us.

And our hands remaining joined after the ride was over.

Who could have imagined where that simple moment would lead?

I had joined a bakery course because I noticed pretty girls.

I had learned to make cakes and chocolates.

I had created Cakewalkers, worked hard and eventually lost the business.

And when the man who would become my father-in-law first heard that his daughter liked me, his question was:

“Woh cakewala?”

The cakewala.

Life was teaching me about attraction, ambition, love, dishonesty, responsibility, loss, acceptance and destiny.

I was nowhere near understanding all those lessons.

But they were unfolding.

I carry gratitude for my parents, for the family that welcomed me, for friends like

Sunil and Gautam, for my sister's gesture when Cakewalkers closed, and for everyone who played a part in those years.

I also carry responsibility for the hearts I hurt.

And above all, I carry gratitude for Kanal, who chose to walk beside a young man who still had so much to learn.

The wedding lights eventually went out.

The guests went home.

The cakewala was now a husband.

But I had no job and no clear idea of how I would earn a living.

The University of Life had another lesson waiting for me.

The University of Life… the journey continues…



CHAPTER FIVE

The Groom Without a Job

The lights of celebration had faded.
The lessons of life were just beginning.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Groom Without a Job

THE CELEBRATION ENDS

The wedding lights had gone out. The guests had gone home.

The cakewala, whose business was no more, was now a husband.

And I was a husband without a job.

At twenty-three, I was married to Kanal, the woman I loved deeply. We had celebrated a wedding beyond anything I could have imagined, but when the celebration ended, the reality of my life was waiting for me.

I had no business, no regular income and no clear idea of what I was going to do next.

From the outside, many people considered me mature and confident. I was often praised for knowing what I wanted from life.

But was that really true?

Looking back, I realise that much of my confidence was a brave face. I wanted to feel important, capable and valuable. I was

learning to appear assured even when I felt anything but assured inside.

At the time, I did not recognise that as a mask. The understanding would come much later.

For the moment, I was a young husband trying to find his way.

Kanal and I spent two nights at the Holiday Inn, in a honeymoon suite lovingly gifted to us by my late Indu Maasi. Then we travelled to Goa for a week.

Goa was very different in those days. It was not the bustling, extensively developed destination it has become today. For us, it was a beautiful honeymoon paradise.

We were young, deeply in love, and enjoying the beginning of our married life.

But a question remained in the back of my mind.

What was I going to do for a living?

THE FAILURES I WAS COUNTING

I want to use the word failure.

I do not want to dress it up or pretend that everything I attempted was a success in disguise.

I had failed my seventh standard. I had not completed my college graduation. I had worked for approximately five years to build Cakewalkers, only to lose the business.

And now, as I entered marriage, I could see those failures clearly.

I was carrying them in my mind like a scorecard.

The word failure brought its own emotions—shame, disappointment, worry and the sense that perhaps I was not capable of doing what other people seemed to manage.

I can look at those experiences differently today, but I do not wish to erase how I felt at that time.

There was more to come.

After our honeymoon, Kanal and I returned to Mumbai. We stayed with my parents at Asit Apartments in Bandra, near Mount Mary's Church.

We had moved there from Kamal Kunj when I was about ten years old. Our family home was familiar, and we were surrounded by the shelter and support of my parents.

The first week of our married life went well.

Then, in the second week, Kanal and I had an argument.

I do not wish to go into the private details. What matters is that the disagreement became serious enough for Kanal to return to her parents' home.

I was stunned.

How could this be happening? We were so deeply in love. We had only just been married. And already, we were living apart.

In my mind, I counted it as another failure.

Her parents welcomed her and gave us the space to work things out. Kanal and I spoke on the telephone during that week, and gradually the distance between us eased.

Within about a week, she came back home.

That early disagreement did not define our marriage. But it taught me, long before I was ready to understand the lesson, that love and marriage were not the same as the romance of courtship or the grandeur of a wedding reception.

Living together meant facing real differences, feelings and responsibilities.

And I still had to find work.

MY FIRST JOB — NORWAY 5

The first opportunity I took was with Orion Caterers as a camp boss, or catering manager, on an offshore oil rig.

I was offered a salary of ₹5,000 a month.

It was not a career I had trained for. I had done a diploma in Bakery and Confectionery, not a full course in Hotel Management and Food Technology.

But I needed a job.

So I accepted the opportunity.

The rig was called Norway 5. It meant leaving Mumbai, my wife and my family for long stretches.

I remember being transported by helicopter from Mumbai to the rig.

That was the first helicopter ride of my life.

As we flew over the vast ocean, I looked down at the water stretching in every direction. The experience was thrilling. Landing on the rig, I thought, “Wow! This is going to be a good job.”

I had no idea how difficult those months would become.

The work involved pressure and responsibility that I struggled to handle. I was living among men on the rig, far from the people I loved.

I also experienced bullying and unwanted sexual advances.

Those experiences were painful, especially for someone carrying memories of being bullied and abused earlier in life.

I began breaking down emotionally. At times, I cried at work. My ability to cope with the demands of the job was deteriorating.

Eventually, after complaints from the rig management, the company brought me back.

I had worked there for approximately six months.

And once again I was home, jobless and uncertain.

THE DARKNESS I COULD NOT EXPLAIN

Depression was already becoming a serious part of my life.

Even before marriage, I had experienced periods of unusually deep emotional lows. These were not simply the everyday disappointments or temporary sadness that people experience.

There were times when I struggled to communicate, to manage my feelings and even to understand what was happening within my mind and body.

My mother, too, was experiencing depression and was receiving psychiatric treatment in Mumbai.

Seeing my condition, my parents took me to the psychiatrist who was treating her, in the Grant Road area.

I remember sitting there, hardly speaking.

I did not know what I was supposed to tell the doctor. I did not understand what a psychiatrist did, or why I was there.

After a consultation, the doctor prescribed several tablets.

I began taking the medication, hoping that it would help. But those early experiences with treatment were difficult for me. I felt changes in my mind and body that I could neither explain nor manage easily.

My parents encouraged me to continue the treatment as prescribed.

I remember a particularly painful picture from those days.

My mother would sometimes be lying in one room, crying because of her own suffering and her worries about me.

And there I would be, in another room, crying too.

Two people in the same home, struggling with depression, while the rest of the family tried to understand what was happening.

I was grateful that my parents gave us food, shelter and care. But their support did not remove the shame I felt about my inability to work consistently or provide for my new family.

The same questions returned again and again.

What will happen to us?

How will I earn?

What kind of husband am I becoming?

I was often harsh with myself.

I did not yet have the understanding of mental illness that I would gain over the decades that followed. All I knew was that I was struggling and that my efforts to get back on my feet kept being interrupted.

THE GOA EXPERIENCE

After my first offshore job on Norway 5 ended, Kanal and I moved to Goa, hoping for a fresh start.

I accepted a position as food-and-beverage manager at a three-star hotel. I have decided not to name the hotel.

A small management team of around eight to ten people had been brought in to run the property.

Kanal came with me. We rented a modest one-bedroom home from a kind lady named Lucy, whom I remember fondly.

We carried our belongings from Mumbai and tried to create another fresh start.

But the working environment gradually became disturbing.

Our team became concerned about the people associated with the hotel and what we understood to be their connections with the underworld. We were uneasy about how we were being treated, and the atmosphere became increasingly stressful.

Eventually, members of the management team decided to resign together.

Within approximately six months, that chapter came to an end.

Once again, Kanal and I packed our belongings and returned.

We had moved in with hope.

We came back with uncertainty.

I mention these experiences not to suggest that every difficulty was caused by circumstances outside me. I made decisions, and I had to live with them. But I also want to be honest about the pressures and fears I remember from those years.

TRYING AGAIN — INTERNATIONAL LINKERS

After our difficult experience in Goa, I continued looking for opportunities.

A small advertisement led me to a company called International Linkers.

I went for an interview and met a wonderful lady, Durriya Pardiwalla, who remains a dear friend.

She saw something positive in me and encouraged me to join.

I was grateful for that chance.

For roughly two to two-and-a-half years, as I remember it, I worked in catering-management assignments connected with oil operations at places including Jambusar, Mehsana and other locations in Gujarat.

There was also an assignment on Viking Driller, and later a role based in Baroda overseeing catering arrangements at different sites.

The work gave me opportunities to learn and earn. But the demands of remote locations, the pressure of managing people and my continuing depression and anxiety made life difficult.

I repeatedly asked Durriya whether I could work at a desk in the Mumbai office instead of being posted away from home.

Eventually, I was given that opportunity.

Being closer to Kanal and my parents brought some relief.

For a time, I felt better.

Later, I was posted to Baroda. The company provided a small but neat two-bedroom home.

I enjoyed arranging the furniture and making the place comfortable. I have always loved

creating a beautiful home within whatever means were available to me.

It was during our time in Baroda that Kanal conceived our son, Karan. I wanted us to have a secure life together.

Yet the same internal struggles continued.

The pressure of the work, my anxiety, the depression and the difficulties I was experiencing with treatment became overwhelming again.

Eventually, I returned to Mumbai. Our son Karan was born after we came back.

And there I was, looking at another professional setback and questioning myself all over again.

Why couldn't I handle these jobs?

Why was I walking away from opportunities?

Why couldn't I simply live what appeared to be a normal, balanced life?

At that time, I often used the language of failure against myself. I saw the setbacks as evidence that I lacked the strength or discipline to make a success of my life.

Today, I can acknowledge the failures without denying the reality of the illness I was living with.

But that understanding was still far away.

ANOTHER DOOR BEGINS TO OPEN

There came a point when it seemed that I was constantly starting again.

One job had ended. Then another. A move that had held promise had not worked out. Depression continued to disrupt daily life.

My parents saw how difficult things had become.

Kanal's parents were also concerned.

One day, Papa and Amma came to meet us. Amma made a generous suggestion.

“Why don't we shift to Bangalore?”

They had a three-bedroom apartment there where we could stay. We could try to begin again, and they would stand behind us.

I remember wondering what I would do there, how we would manage, and whether I was capable of yet another fresh start.

But their offer was made with love and an open heart.

They were not asking me to prove myself before accepting their help.

They were giving us somewhere to begin again.

That mattered more than I can express.

I had married at twenty-three, full of romance and dreams, but without a job or financial security.

I had tried working on an offshore rig, in catering-management assignments and in a hotel.

I had known brief periods of relief, only to be drawn back into depression, anxiety and self-doubt.

And through those years, Kanal, my parents and my in-laws continued supporting us in different ways.

I had not found the stability I was searching for.

But even when I was unable to see a clear road ahead, people who loved me were helping to keep the road open.

Bangalore was waiting.

So was another chapter in the University of Life.

The University of Life… the journey continues…



CHAPTER SIX

Bangalore, Big Kids Kemp and a New Beginning

When one door closed, another opened with light, work and hope.

CHAPTER SIX

Bangalore, Big Kids Kemp and a New Beginning

BEFORE BANGALORE, A SON

In the previous chapter, I spoke about the opportunity to begin again in Bangalore.

But before I take you to that city, there is a precious moment I must return to.

The birth of our son, Karan.

Karan was born on 8 October 1993 at Holy Family Hospital in Mumbai.

Kanal gave birth to Karan by Caesarean section.

Whatever uncertainty was surrounding our working life, the arrival of our son brought enormous happiness to both our families.

My parents, Kanal's parents, relatives and friends were all celebrating.

I remember Krishna Raj Kapoor, wife of the late Raj Kapoor, and actress Neetu Singh visiting the hospital to bless little Karan. A

gold coin was among the blessings and gifts he received.

Can you imagine the excitement?

The celebrations did not stop at the hospital.

Cakewalkers had already closed, but my love of making chocolates was still very much alive. When Karan was born, we made chocolates to share our happiness with family, friends and the film industry fraternity.

The huge hall at Papa and Amma's home became our chocolate-making workshop. Papa (Pyarelal ji), Amma, Kanal, Gautam and I were all involved. Together, we made the chocolates, wrapped them in gold foil and arranged them in little plastic plant holders. We finished each gift with cellophane and a ribbon, and sent them out to our relatives, friends and people in the film industry.

One particular response has remained close to my heart. Krishna Raj Kapoor telephoned Papa, whom she affectionately called Pyarebhai, to tell him how much she had loved the chocolates. It was such a special feeling: something our entire family had prepared together, with love, had brought happiness to someone else.

There were wonderful gatherings at Papa's home, where musicians, singers, filmmakers, actors and friends would often meet. People such as Ghulam Ali and Subhash Ghai were part of those memorable occasions.

One evening, with guests including Subhash Ghai, Jackie Shroff, Anil Kapoor and the late Yash Johar, I announced that I wanted to sing a song for my newborn son.

I chose “Tujhse Naraaz Nahin Zindagi.”

And as I sang the line about being troubled by a child's innocent questions—“tere masoom sawaalon se pareshaan hoon main”—everybody began laughing!

I couldn't understand what was so funny.

Then they explained: “You've only just become a father, and you're already worried about your child's questions?”

We all laughed.

That was me.

Full of emotion. Full of enthusiasm. And sometimes completely unaware of the humour in my own choices!

I also remember walking into a children's shop around Peddar Road and Napean Sea Road with ₹10,000 in my hand.

I came out with a cradle, a stroller and toys—some of which Karan would not even be ready to use for years!

I loved buying things for him.

But even in that beautiful phase, I was showing a pattern that would continue for some time.

I loved to spend.

I had not learned how to save.

A HOME IN BANGALORE

By then, my career had already been through several uncertain turns. Cakewalkers had closed. The offshore rig, the hotel job in Goa and my work with International Linkers had all brought opportunities and difficulties.

Depression and anxiety continued to affect me.

It was during this unsettled period, after Karan's birth, that Amma and Papa offered us the use of their home in Bangalore.

Their kindness gave Kanal and me an opportunity to start afresh.

So we moved to Bangalore with our little son.

Our new home was a three-bedroom apartment on the third floor of Sampurna Apartments, opposite the Palace Grounds.

I can still picture that area.

There was a small lane nearby, connecting towards Guttahalli, Mount Carmel College and the railway underpass. Bangalore has changed considerably since those days, but that neighbourhood remains etched in my memory.

And before I started worrying seriously about employment, what did I do?

I started arranging the house!

I have always had a great love for interiors, furniture and making a living space warm and welcoming.

Whatever belongings we had brought, I wanted them placed beautifully.

Whatever our financial position, I wanted our home to feel like a home.

Only then did I set out to look for work.

THE STORE THAT LOOKED LIKE MAGIC

One day I went to M.G. Road, looking for a job.

I entered a retail store called Big Kids Kemp, opposite the Oberoi Hotel.

This was around 1994.

And I was amazed.

I had never seen a shop quite like it.

The interiors, the lights, the colours, the merchandise—everything seemed to have been designed to make shopping an experience.

There were people dressed as lively cartoon characters, dancing and welcoming customers outside the store.

As shoppers entered, they were offered welcome drinks. I even remember occasions when drinks of a rather different kind, including liquor, were offered!

In those days, long before the kind of large modern shopping malls we know today became widespread, Big Kids Kemp felt extraordinary to me.

Families came from different parts of South India. I remember some shoppers arriving

with money to spend and leaving with suitcases filled with purchases.

To me, it was not simply a shop.

It was theatre.

It was entertainment.

It was energy.

And something within me responded to it.

I did not yet know how much I would learn there.

MEETING RAVI V. MELWANI

I was called for an interview with Ravi V. Melwani.

Ravi, whom we all came to know as RVM, was Sindhi, like me.

His father, Vashi Melwani, had founded the original store on Kempe Gowda Road. Ravi had helped take the retail experience in exciting new directions.

Before our interview could properly begin, I decided to tell him the truth about myself.

I told him that I was suffering from deep depression, that I was taking medication, that I was married, that I had a young son and that I needed work.

I did not try to present myself as a man whose life was perfectly under control.

After so many professional disappointments, I had little desire to hide the reality of my condition.

Ravi listened.

And he gave me a chance.

I remember his simple encouragement:

“Dinesh, just join.”

I joined Big Kids Kemp as a floor manager on a salary of ₹5,000 a month.

There was still anxiety inside me.

Would I be able to do this job?

Would I let people down again?

Would the depression overpower me?

Those thoughts had not disappeared.

But I had been given an opening, and I wanted to make something of it.

THE TWO-MINUTE DISCUSSIONS

Working with Ravi was an education in itself.

The store opened at around 9:00 a.m.

Ravi would often come with the keys and open the shop himself. We would gather, get ready for the day and begin with what we called a TMD.

A Two-Minute Discussion.

It sounds so simple.

Yet in those few minutes, people could be recognised, encouraged and motivated.

I watched how Ravi communicated. I watched how he managed a team. I watched how he created enthusiasm among colleagues and excitement among customers.

He taught through action.

There were techniques, ideas, conversations and small gestures that stayed with me.

The people around me were lively. There was joking, teasing and sometimes even a little poking fun at one another.

But for me, this was a very different environment from the ones in which I had previously struggled.

I felt involved.

I felt useful.

I felt that I was learning.

I began to smile at my own professional progress.

THE RISE I HAD NOT EXPECTED

From floor manager, I gradually took on greater responsibilities, eventually becoming a general manager.

Another colleague and friend, Rajkumar, was also a general manager. Together, we worked with the team under Ravi's leadership.

Those years, from about 1994 to 1997, were some of the most exciting of my professional life.

The boy who had left college without graduating, the young man whose bakery had failed, and the groom who had stood on his wedding stage without a job—he was now finding confidence at work.

I was discovering skills I had not known how to use before.

I loved interacting with people.

I loved creating excitement.

I loved thinking of something different.

And I loved seeing a team respond to an idea.

The work was demanding, but unlike so many earlier jobs, I genuinely enjoyed going there.

I was beginning to realise that I could create value.

Yet there was something important I did not understand at the time.

My professional life was moving forward.

My inner life was not necessarily becoming more balanced.

TURNING SHOPPING INTO CELEBRATION

I became deeply involved in promotions, competitions and special activities at Big Kids Kemp.

We organised games, prize schemes and lucky draws.

I would approach companies and try to persuade them to sponsor gifts for our customers.

Refrigerators, air conditioners, microwave ovens, merchandise—there seemed to be no end to the possibilities.

I enjoyed the challenge of creating something exciting without simply buying everything ourselves.

And then came one promotion I remember with particular pride.

Daewoo had introduced its Cielo car in India.

I approached the company with an idea: let us display a Cielo outside Big Kids Kemp, on a ramp, during the Diwali shopping season.

And let us give a car away to one lucky customer.

Imagine winning a car simply by taking part in a store promotion!

The people I approached agreed.

We secured a Cielo for the promotion, and after the festive period it was awarded to a lucky winner in Bangalore.

Ravi was astonished at what we had managed to arrange.

I felt an enormous sense of satisfaction.

These were the kinds of experiences that awakened my creativity.

Much later, when I became involved in event management, I would recognise how much I had learned at Big Kids Kemp.

It was preparing me for work I had not even imagined yet.

THE OTHER SIDE OF SUCCESS

But here is the truth.

I was becoming deeply absorbed in my job.

I would often leave home early in the morning.

And I would return at about 10:30 at night.

By then, Kanal and little Karan were usually asleep.

Sometimes I had hardly seen my son during the day.

I was working hard, earning more, and becoming increasingly occupied with professional responsibilities.

But what was happening at home?

Karan was growing up.

Kanal was caring for him.

And there were countless small moments in their day that I was missing.

It is important for me to say this without pretending that I was deliberately neglecting my family.

I loved them.

I wanted to give them a good life.

But my idea of giving them a good life was becoming strongly connected with working, earning and providing.

I had not learned how to balance work with being present.

And even while I enjoyed success outside the home, depression and anxiety were still part of my experience.

The smile people saw at work did not always tell the whole story.

SHREYA, MY LITTLE PRINCESS

Then came another beautiful blessing.

Our daughter, Shreya, was born on 4 June 1996.

My princess.

Kanal gave birth to Shreya by Caesarean section too.

Our family had grown.

Karan now had a little sister, and I had two children to love, care for and provide for.

There was great joy in that.

But it also meant that the responsibilities of family life were growing while my working days remained long and demanding.

I adored my children.

Yet when I look back, I recognise how much of their early childhood was spent with Kanal while I was away at work.

This is not an easy thing to admit.

But the story of my successes would be

incomplete without acknowledging the sacrifices and absences that went alongside them.

FRIENDS, PARTIES AND A LIFESTYLE WITHOUT SAVINGS

Bangalore also gave us a wonderful circle of friends.

I remember Neil and Shilpa, Ricky and Suparna, Sunil and Priya, and especially Trupti and Anand, whom we had known from our days at Asit Apartments in Mumbai.

There were Jyotika and Vijay Anand, and their sons Aman and Anuj; Raj Sethia and Komal; Abhishek and Manisha; and Sunil and Sonali Kale, among others.

Many of us had children of similar ages.

There were dinners, parties, outings and evenings together.

We would entertain at home or go out to clubs and restaurants.

And I loved being the host!

Food, drinks, decorations, arrangements—I wanted everything to be enjoyable for everyone.

We sometimes partied twice a week.

As my responsibilities and position at work grew, so did my earnings.

There was a stage when I was earning almost ₹1 lakh a month.

A huge amount for me in those days.

Yet by the end of the month, the money would be gone.

Clothes.

Food.

Socialising.

Drinks.

Gifts.

Entertaining.

Spending on the home, on Kanal, on Karan and on Shreya.

I was not spending only on myself. I enjoyed giving to the people I loved.

But I had little control over my spending.

And practically no savings.

Isn't that a strange contradiction?

I had worked so hard to find a job.

I had suffered because I could not earn.

Now I was earning more than I could have imagined a few years earlier.

And I still did not know how to manage my money.

In one part of my life, I had learned to create successful promotions for a business.

In another, I was struggling to manage my own household finances.

There was excitement around me.

There was love around me.

There were friends, colleagues, parties and professional recognition.

But there was also an imbalance within me that money and applause could not resolve.

WHAT, THEN, IS SUCCESS?

Looking back, I see how much professional success I was enjoying—a respected position, a good income, a lively circle of friends and the pleasure of being able to give.

I treasured those Big Kids Kemp years. But the outward signs of success did not tell the whole story.

Ravi V. Melwani gave me an opportunity when I badly needed one. His leadership, encouragement and example helped me discover abilities that had been buried beneath years of self-doubt.

I remain grateful for that.

But I also remember the other side.

My family was growing, and I was often away.

My income was increasing, and my savings were not.

My professional confidence was returning, and my emotional struggles had not gone away.

Only much later, including after my spiritual awakening on 21 July 2002, did I begin questioning that narrow definition of success.

Even today, I am learning to balance achievement with presence, emotional wellbeing and responsibility.

But when I look at that young man at Big Kids Kemp, I see someone learning lessons on two very different levels.

Outside, he was discovering ambition, creativity and leadership.

Inside, he was still searching for stability and understanding.

ANOTHER DREAM WAS WAITING

After my years at Big Kids Kemp, I felt ready for another challenge. I learned about Sammy's Dreamland, a vast amusement-park project being developed on roughly fifty acres

or more—a Disneyland-like dream in Bangalore. Its promoter, Sammy Nanwani, knew Ravi V. Melwani and was aware of the senior responsibilities I had handled at Big Kids Kemp. When I approached Sammy, he hired me at a salary matching what I had been earning.

I stayed for about a year and a half. We were a small management team of perhaps eight to ten people, but the project was held up by serious land-related legal problems. As I understood it, there were disputes involving farmers and payments for the land. Construction was taking place, yet the park never opened during my time there. I was responsible for advertising, marketing and promotions—work that could truly begin only when there was a functioning destination to promote. So, despite the grand vision, there was very little for me to do.

That experience nudged me towards another kind of opportunity. My dear friend Sunil Kale and I began exploring an event-management venture of our own. Around the same period, I also returned to Ravi's premises to organise events. The lessons I had learned at Big Kids Kemp were finding a new direction.

I had learned to make shopping entertaining. Now I was being drawn towards entertainment itself. I could not have imagined how high that journey would take me, or what it might cost.

But for the moment, Bangalore had given me a new beginning.

A home.

A family of four.

A livelihood.

A mentor.

Friends.

And the first glimpse of a professional confidence I had once feared I would never find.

The University of Life had opened another classroom.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EVE ENT YEARS

Artists, Concerts and Memories

1997



Daler Mehndi
"The Daler Mania"



Mika
"Alongside Daler Mehndi's Concert"



Jagjit Singh
"Love Is Blind"

1998



Shaan
"Loveology"



Talat Aziz
"Mehboob"

1999



Abhijeet
"Bollywood Musical Night"



Kavita Krishnamurti
"Bollywood Musical Night"



Roop Kumar Rathod
"Sandese Aate Hai"



Sonali Rathod
"Sandese Aate Hai"

2024



Aunp Jalota
"Pune & Indore"

CHAPTER SEVEN

EVE ENT — Music, Magic and a Bigger Stage

WHEN AN IDEA BEGINS TO GROW

By 1997, something within me was changing.

My years at Big Kids Kemp had taught me that I was capable of much more than I had once believed.

I had entered that store as a young man struggling with depression, anxiety and a long list of disappointments. There, I discovered a love for people, promotions, organisation and creativity.

I enjoyed turning an ordinary shopping experience into something memorable.

But now another idea was taking shape.

What if I could take that energy beyond a retail store?

What if I could create experiences where people gathered not simply to buy something, but to be entertained?

Music had always excited me. I loved the atmosphere around performers and audiences, the lights, the organisation, the excitement and the emotion.

And there was something else.

I wanted to create something of my own again.

Cakewalkers had been my first business. It had failed financially, but I had known the satisfaction of building a venture, giving it a name and trying to make it succeed.

Was I ready to try again?

I did not have the answer.

But I had the urge.

EVE ENT IS BORN

Sunil Kale and his wife, Sonali, were among the dear friends we knew from Mumbai who had also moved to Bangalore.

Sunil and I began discussing the possibility of starting an event-management venture together.

It was around 1997.

In Bangalore at the time, there were only a few names in this particular space that I knew of; Encore was one of them.

We felt there was room to create something exciting.

I coined a name for our company.

EVE ENT.

Event and Entertainment.

I loved the way it sounded.

There was energy in it.

There was ambition.

And in those six letters, I could already imagine lights, music, shows and gatherings that people would remember.

I had no way of knowing then how much we would achieve, how many people we would meet, or how difficult the financial and personal lessons would become.

I was simply excited to begin.

FROM RETAIL TO THE STAGE

After leaving Big Kids Kemp, I spent about a year and a half at Sammy's Dreamland. As Sunil and I began organising events, I also returned to Ravi V. Melwani's premises to conduct some of them. I remain grateful for that opportunity.

My retail years had taught me to plan promotions, approach companies and present

ideas with confidence. Those skills now travelled with me into a much riskier world—live entertainment.

A WORLD OF MUSIC AND STARS

And then came the concerts.

Can you imagine what it was like for me?

The young man who had once stood in line for the wrong college course because he saw pretty girls was now helping to organise shows featuring some of the most recognised voices in Indian music!

Through our events, we were associated with performers such as Daler Mehndi, Mika Singh in his early years, Jagjit Singh, Talat Aziz, Kavita Krishnamurti, Abhijeet, Shaan, Roop Kumar Rathod and Sonali Rathod.

Each name brings back memories of that extraordinary period.

There were different musical styles, different audiences and different kinds of events.

The energy of a lively performance was unlike the atmosphere of a soulful ghazal evening.

And that was part of the excitement for me.

I loved that we could move between such varied worlds of music and entertainment.

We organised concerts in Bangalore and Mumbai, and later in Hyderabad. I will return to the Hyderabad experience in the next chapter.

Behind the public glamour, of course, was the work.

An event might appear effortless when an artist walked onstage.

But there was an enormous amount to coordinate before an audience could enjoy the performance.

Planning.

Venues.

People.

Arrangements.

Promotion.

Expenses.

And a thousand details that an audience might never see.

I enjoyed the challenge of bringing those moving parts together.

For me, it was another form of creativity.

I was not the singer holding the microphone.

I was part of the team trying to make the evening happen.

And I found that deeply satisfying.

COOL POOL DROOL

Not everything we created was a conventional concert.

There was an event we called Cool Pool Drool.

Now, this was the kind of idea that excited me!

Imagine taking a swimming pool, removing most of the water and using the space as a dance floor, with only a little water left.

It was different.

It was unusual.

It made people look at a familiar space in an entirely new way.

I loved coming up with such concepts.

I enjoyed asking myself: Why must something always be done the usual way?

Why not experiment?

Why not give people an experience they have not encountered before?

Looking back, I see a clear connection between the promotions I created at Big Kids Kemp and the ideas I explored at EVE ENT.

The setting had changed.

The scale had changed.

But the delight I felt in creating something memorable was the same.

A CASTLE, A CONCERT AND A DOWNPOUR

During that period, Ravi Melwani was also developing a remarkable project called Kemp Fort.

I remember its castle-like architecture, with several floors and the feeling of something almost out of Disneyland.

It was a striking place.

There was a large terrace, and we arranged a concert there featuring Roop Kumar Rathod and Sonali Rathod.

The stage was ready.

The audience had gathered.

The performance began.

And then, almost as soon as the singing started, it began to rain heavily.

The concert had to be cancelled.

Just like that.

All the anticipation.

All the planning.

All the effort.

And nature had other ideas!

At the time, I took it terribly personally.

Instead of recognising that the weather was beyond my control, I began thinking that perhaps I was unlucky.

Perhaps something went wrong because I was involved.

Perhaps this was another failure.

Can you imagine the burden of thinking like that?

Not only did I hold myself responsible for mistakes I actually made; I also blamed myself for things that no human being could control.

I know differently today.

Rain is rain.

An outdoor event is exposed to circumstances that even excellent planning cannot fully command.

But the young man I was could not separate those realities from his habit of judging himself.

The concert was cancelled.

And I carried the disappointment as though I had personally caused the clouds to open.

THE CENTAUR EVENING

Another performance that remains in my memory is a Talat Aziz concert at the Centaur Hotel in Mumbai.

It was attended by people from the film and entertainment world.

I remember Poonam Dhillon and Padmini Kolhapure among the guests, along with other familiar faces.

These occasions gave me the chance to work in a world that had fascinated me for years.

Music.

Artists.

Filmmakers.

Audiences.

Elegant venues.

And the thrill of seeing an idea become a real event.

I did not take that privilege lightly.

Whatever mistakes I made in business and in life, my enjoyment of the work was genuine.

I felt alive in that creative environment.

THE BUSINESS BEHIND THE APPLAUSE

But let me tell you something about glamour.

It can be dazzling from the outside.

Yet dazzling lights do not necessarily mean a business is making money.

Over the course of that journey, Sunil and I organised ten concerts. In addition, we handled events for private clients.

Some made money.

Others did not.

And when we lost, the losses could be enormous.

The business demanded financial commitments. There were people to be paid and arrangements to be made, whether or not an event eventually became profitable.

Finding sponsors was a tall order. Companies did not simply hand over money because an event had a big name or an exciting concept. They wanted results in their favour—visibility, publicity or real value for their investment. We had to convince them, negotiate the support and deliver what we promised.

A successful-looking evening was not always a financially successful evening.

Sometimes the excitement of producing a show was followed by the harsh reality of the accounts.

That was something I struggled with.

I loved the imagination, the ideas, the energy and the public-facing work.

I was much less comfortable with what repeated financial setbacks did to my sense of security.

I had been through this pattern before.

Cakewalkers had produced cakes that customers appreciated, but the business had remained in the red.

Now, in another field, I was again discovering that hard work and a good idea did not guarantee a profit.

And yet I continued.

There was something in me that wanted to try again, to create again and to see whether the next event might work.

I did not understand that part of myself very well then.

Much later, I would recognise it as a kind of persistence, even when I was dealing with depression and anxiety.

WHEN PARTNERSHIP BECAME DIFFICULT

The financial pressures were not the only challenges.

Over time, differences began to develop between Sunil and me.

I started feeling that I was doing more work than he was.

And once that thought entered my mind, it affected the way I viewed our partnership.

I began measuring contributions.

I began comparing responsibilities.

I began believing that my own efforts were greater.

When I look back now, I do not think that was the right way to approach a partnership.

Two people need not contribute in exactly the same way to bring value to a business.

We all have different gifts.

Different talents.

Different ways of working.

And unless we respect those differences, comparison can become destructive.

At the time, I lacked that understanding.

There was tension between us, and eventually bitterness entered a friendship that had meant so much to me.

It is not something I feel proud of.

I cannot speak for what Sunil experienced, and I will not try to put words into his mouth.

I can only acknowledge my own part in what happened.

I wish I had shown more appreciation, patience and respect.

SUNIL AND SONALI

There is something I want to say here, from my heart.

Sunil and Sonali Kale were our dear friends before EVE ENT, and our relationship meant more than the business we tried to build.

Today, they are settled in Canada with their children.

We remain in touch.

The bitterness of that period is behind us.

But because this book is about looking at my own life without hiding the uncomfortable parts, I want to say this openly.

I owe Sunil and Sonali an apology for the hurt and bitterness that arose through our business partnership.

I was not always fair in the way I judged contributions.

I did not always recognise that someone else's strengths might be different from mine.

And I could have handled our disagreements with greater maturity.

I am grateful that our friendship has continued.

Not every relationship survives the disappointments of business.

Ours has.

And that means a great deal to me.

THE MAN BEHIND THE EVENTS

When I think of those years, I see two pictures.

One is filled with stage lights, artists, music, guests, excitement and creativity.

The other is far more private.

It is the picture of a man who could organise a performance for an audience, yet struggled to organise his own emotions.

A man who could convince other people to support a creative idea, yet found it difficult to reassure himself when something went wrong.

A man who loved giving people memorable experiences, but who was often unable to experience peace within himself.

Depression had not disappeared just because I was doing glamorous work.

Anxiety had not disappeared because my professional contacts were growing.

I was also smoking and drinking regularly in those years. Smoking was the stronger habit, and the pressures of organising events led me to smoke even more. It was another part of my life that had grown out of balance.

And my habit of turning every setback into a personal failure had certainly not disappeared.

When an event went well, I could feel tremendous happiness.

When something went wrong, I could fall into self-criticism and despair.

The contrast was exhausting.

At the time, I did not always understand what was happening to me.

I knew that I was working hard.

I knew that I was ambitious.

I knew that I loved what I was creating.

But I did not know how to bring balance to the different parts of my life.

WHEN THE MUSIC BEGAN TO FADE

The period from around 1997 into the early part of 2000 was filled with extraordinary experiences.

We produced concerts.

We experimented with unusual events.

I met people from worlds I had admired.

I learned what it meant to work with talented performers and to shoulder the responsibility of putting a show together.

There was excitement.

There were successes.

There were disappointments.

There were financial losses.

And there were relationships that taught me difficult lessons about myself.

As the years went on, the pressure began to take a toll on me.

I was already living with depression, and I was increasingly struggling to cope.

Around the beginning of 2000, I experienced a severe burnout and emotional collapse.

My involvement in EVE ENT came to an end, as did the working chapter of my life connected with Ravi's businesses.

I had moved from the world of a retail store into the glittering world of concerts.

For a while, it had seemed that the stage was getting bigger and brighter.

But something inside me was growing darker.

This is where I want to end this part of the story.

Because what followed was not merely another disappointed businessman looking for his next opportunity.

It was one of the most difficult periods of my life.

THE LESSON BEHIND THE LIGHTS

Today, I can appreciate the EVE ENT years without pretending that they were all glorious.

I loved the music.

I loved the creativity.

I loved the challenge of building something that could bring joy to an audience.

I am grateful to the artists we worked with, the colleagues who supported us, and especially to Sunil for the journey we undertook together.

And I am grateful for the lessons that did not feel like lessons at the time.

Success in public does not mean everything is well in private.

A grand event can produce a financial loss.

A partnership needs more than enthusiasm.

And a person who appears confident under bright lights may be carrying struggles that nobody in the audience can see.

I had learned to organise music, entertainment and celebration.

But I was still learning how to live with myself.

The applause would fade.

The stage lights would go out.

And I would have to face what remained when the auditorium was empty.

The University of Life was preparing to teach me something far more difficult.

The University of Life… the journey continues…



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FALL BEFORE THE RISING

When everything seemed to fall apart,
life was quietly preparing me for my greatest awakening.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Fall Before the Rising

AFTER THE APPLAUSE

There is a strange silence when the music stops.

For several years, my life had been full of activity. There were meetings to attend, people to speak to, artists to coordinate, performances to organise and audiences to entertain.

At Big Kids Kemp, I had discovered my enthusiasm for creativity and management. Through EVE-ENT, I had entered the glamorous world of concerts and entertainment.

I knew the excitement of an idea becoming an event.

I also knew the disappointment of a beautiful event becoming a financial loss.

By the beginning of 2000, the pressure had taken its toll.

I was exhausted, mentally and emotionally. My depression had become so severe that the energy people had seen in me seemed to disappear.

I stopped running EVE-ENT.

My work connected with Ravi V. Melwani, whether at Big Kids Kemp or at Kemp Fort, also came to an end.

The man who had been organising concerts and motivating people could hardly motivate himself to get out of bed.

From the outside, these may have looked like professional setbacks.

From within, they were part of a collapse I could not understand.

I did not have the language to explain everything that was happening to me. I only knew that I could not go on in the way I had been going on.

The stage lights had gone out.

And I was left facing myself.

THE HOURS THAT HAD NO DIRECTION

During that period, I spent an extraordinary amount of time in bed.

I have described it as nearly eighty per cent of my time.

I would lie there, crying, wondering what had happened to the man who had once been so energetic.

Sometimes I got up to go to the bathroom or to have a meal, only to return to bed.

Days that had once been filled with appointments and work became long stretches of uncertainty.

I could not understand why I was unable to do things that seemed so natural to other people.

Get up.

Go to work.

Earn a living.

Spend time with my family.

Enjoy an ordinary day.

These simple expectations had become mountains.

It is difficult to explain the helplessness of severe depression to someone who has not experienced it. It is not merely a bad mood, and it cannot necessarily be overcome by deciding to think positively.

At that time, I was often unable to manage even the smallest demands of daily life.

I was also deeply ashamed.

I remembered leaving college without graduating. I remembered Cakewalkers, the rig, the jobs that had not worked out and the financial difficulties of the concert business.

I looked at those experiences and began adding them together.

In my mind, I had become a man who failed again and again.

The more I judged myself, the more painful my situation felt.

And yet, life did not stop around me.

Kanal was there.

Our children, Karan and Shreya, were growing up.

There were bills to be paid and a home to be managed.

I was physically present, but so often emotionally and mentally overwhelmed.

I knew my family needed me.

Knowing it did not give me the strength I was searching for.

TALAT AZIZ AND ANOTHER ATTEMPT

Even in those difficult years, there were moments when another opportunity appeared.

One person who continued to believe in my abilities was my dear friend, the ghazal singer Talat Aziz.

He had seen what I could do in the world of events.

He knew me as someone who could plan, create and put a show together.

Together with my EVE ENT partner Sunil Kale and Naeem Khan, we organised a concert featuring Talat Aziz in Hyderabad. It was an event we put together, not a job I held in Hyderabad.

The venue was the beautiful Falaknuma Palace.

It was an extraordinary setting, and I wanted the programme to succeed.

Despite the depression and uncertainty I was carrying, a part of me still hoped I could make something work.

But the concert became another financial disappointment.

Instead of the success I was longing for, I faced another loss.

I felt I had returned to the very place from which I was trying to escape.

Back to square one.

Looking back, I can see that I was still trying.

At the time, however, I saw mostly the result.

Another effort.

Another disappointment.

Another reason to doubt myself.

A DOOR OPENS IN DUBAI

Talat did not stop encouraging me.

He told me about a friend in Dubai who wanted to establish an event-management company.

There was an opportunity for me to join as general manager.

The offer, as I remember it, was worth approximately ₹1 lakh a month in Indian rupees at the time, along with accommodation.

A lakh a month!

For a man who had struggled to earn consistently, it was a tremendous opportunity.

I knew something about event management. I had worked with artists, handled concerts and built relationships in that industry.

Perhaps this could be another beginning.

Perhaps a change of place would help.

Perhaps, at last, I would be able to provide for my family with confidence.

So I went to Dubai.

Whatever the state of my mind, I accepted the chance.

I wanted to believe that work, opportunity and a new environment would help me regain my footing.

But I carried my illness with me.

And it did not simply disappear because I had crossed a border.

THE TWO SUITCASES

Within approximately three months in Dubai, I was struggling again.

My depression became overwhelming.

I had not managed to organise even one event for the new company.

I was unable to continue.

The management suggested that I take a break and return when I felt better.

I came back to India.

I remember leaving two large suitcases behind in Dubai.

They contained personal belongings—clothes, watches, shoes and other things I had taken with me.

I left them because I expected to return.

I thought I would recover enough to go back and continue the opportunity that had been offered to me.

But I never returned.

And those two suitcases never came home.

Even today, they remain a powerful memory for me.

Not because of the clothes or the watches or the shoes.

But because of what they represented.

I had gone there hoping to build something.

I came back unable to continue.

Those bags remained in another country, filled with the belongings of a man who had expected his life to move forward.

At that time, I did not see them as a symbol of anything.

I only felt that another door had closed.

A HOME WITHOUT CERTAINTY

Between 2000 and 2002, depression dominated my life.

When I say that I did nothing during those years, I am describing how powerless and inactive I felt for much of that time.

There were attempts to work, as I have shared. But they were brief, and I could not sustain them.

Much of my time was spent at home, in bed, crying or sleeping.

I was jobless.

Our savings had been wiped out.

There were periods when my parents and Kanal's parents helped us financially.

I remember a time when we did not have enough money to pay the electricity bill.

It is a terrible feeling to know that the ordinary expenses of running a home have become difficult to meet.

Kanal had to live through that uncertainty with me.

And our children were there, growing up in the middle of it all.

I remember Karan seeing me in that condition.

What must it have been like for a child to watch his father so often confined to bed, crying and unable to work?

I cannot tell you exactly what went through his mind.

That is his story to tell.

But I know what it meant to me to be aware that he was watching.

I wanted to be a father who could support his children, give them security and spend joyful time with them.

Instead, I was struggling to support myself.

I do not write this to condemn the man I was.

I write it because it is part of what happened.

And because the people around someone living with severe depression are also affected, often in ways that remain unseen.

TRYING TO SELL ROLLS AND SANDWICHES

During that period, I made another attempt to earn something.

It was nothing like the glamorous world of EVE-ENT.

There were no stage lights.

No famous singers.

No impressive venues.

No large audiences.

I had an aluminium trunk, like the ones used by people carrying bakery and food products.

We prepared chicken rolls, vegetable rolls and sandwiches.

I took the trunk to an area near Mount Carmel College in Bangalore and tried selling the food.

I would place the trunk down and offer what we had made, hoping it might bring in a little money.

I had trained in bakery and confectionery years earlier.

Perhaps this was one skill I could still put to use.

But the venture did not sustain us.

Once again, I stopped.

And once again, I felt the familiar sting of failure.

Sometimes I wonder how many times I must have used that word against myself.

Failure.

Failure.

Failure.

It seemed to follow me everywhere.

But when I look back today, another question comes to mind.

What does it say about someone who is experiencing severe depression and still tries to sell a few rolls and sandwiches just to earn something?

Back then, I could not see any dignity in that attempt.

I saw only that it had not worked.

Today, I can look at the man standing with his aluminium trunk and recognise that he was still trying to do something for his family.

Even when his strength was disappearing.

TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING

Our parents cared about us, but the subject of depression was difficult for everyone to understand.

My mother had experienced depression herself and had undergone psychiatric treatment. My parents had seen what the illness could do, both in her life and in mine.

Kanal's parents were concerned about our family too.

As I remember it, they found it more difficult to understand what depression meant and why I could not simply get up and work.

I do not hold that against them.

They had shown me generosity and kindness, including giving us a home in Bangalore when we needed a fresh start.

I also understand that people interpret suffering through their own experiences.

When someone has not lived with severe depression, it can be hard to comprehend why an apparently capable person becomes unable to function.

Perhaps I myself would have struggled to understand it had I not lived through it.

I remember the worry it caused our families.

I remember the confusion.

And I remember wanting desperately to become the person everyone hoped I could be.

A MOTHER'S WORDS, A FATHER'S SUPPORT

My mother would often tell me something simple.

“Dinesh, live a balanced life.”

Those words stayed with me.

A balanced life.

It sounded so reasonable.

But how was I supposed to find that balance when I could barely understand my own mind?

My father continued to encourage me.

He would remind me that they were there for me, that I should take care of myself and not lose hope.

I am grateful for that support.

The financial help mattered.

The shelter mattered.

But the feeling that I had not been completely abandoned mattered too.

There were times when I felt that I was a burden to everybody.

I wanted to be useful.

I wanted to earn.

I wanted to give Kanal and our children a secure life.

I wanted my parents to stop worrying about me.

But wanting those things and being able to make them happen were not the same.

That difference caused me immense pain.

THE STRUGGLE WITH TREATMENT

By then, psychiatric treatment had been part of my life for years.

There were consultations, medications and changes to treatment as doctors tried to find what helped me.

I remember how difficult it was to experience the illness while also adjusting to different medicines and their effects.

At one stage in my longer journey with psychiatric treatment, I was taking as many as thirteen tablets a day.

That number has remained in my memory.

It reflects how complicated my treatment became, although I would not want readers to assume that my experience is the same as everyone else's.

People respond differently to psychiatric medications, and effective treatment often requires careful follow-up with qualified doctors.

For me, in those years, there was simply no easy or immediate answer.

I was not looking for a grand philosophy.

I was looking for relief.

I wanted to wake up and feel capable of facing a day.

I wanted to think clearly.

I wanted to stop crying so often.

I wanted some space inside my mind where fear and uncertainty were not constantly present.

And I wanted to understand why this was happening to me.

THE QUESTIONS I ASKED GOD

There were times when I went down on my knees and prayed.

Not the quiet prayer of a man who felt certain of everything.

The desperate prayer of someone who could no longer understand his own life.

“God Almighty, where are You?”

“Why am I not able to live a balanced life?”

“Why is this happening again and again?”

I was already someone who believed in God and felt drawn towards the spiritual dimension of life.

But belief did not mean I understood what was happening.

Nor did it remove the depression.

I would pray.

I would question.

I would search for some explanation.

Sometimes I felt anger at my own helplessness.

Sometimes sorrow.

Sometimes there seemed to be nothing but exhaustion.

I cannot say that I received an answer during those moments.

And I do not want to turn that suffering into a neat spiritual lesson that I somehow understood at the time.

I did not understand it.

I was living through it.

THE WORD I DID NOT KNOW HOW TO USE

Looking back now, there is a word I can use for something I did not recognise then.

Resilience.

Not the kind that looks dramatic in a film.

Not a triumphant speech after a failure.

Not a man standing on a stage and announcing that he has conquered his difficulties.

I am talking about a much quieter kind.

The man who tried to organise a concert in Hyderabad.

The man who accepted a job in Dubai.

The man who came home without being able to continue.

The man who tried to sell rolls and sandwiches from an aluminium trunk.

And the man who, despite all those attempts, spent long periods unable to get out of bed.

At the time, I saw only the ventures that had ended.

I did not recognise the effort it had taken to attempt them.

I was not consistently strong.

I was not always hopeful.

There were many days when I felt neither capable nor brave.

But the desire to try had not disappeared completely.

That is something I can see now.

It does not erase the seriousness of my illness.

It does not turn the failed ventures into successes.

And it does not mean that determination alone could have healed me.

It simply allows me to look at those years with a little more understanding than I had then.

WHEN DARKNESS HAD NO END IN SIGHT

As 2002 approached, I remained deeply unwell.

I had known exciting years in retail management and entertainment.

I had organised performances with well-known artists and had earned money that once seemed beyond my imagination.

Now, even paying the electricity bill could be a struggle.

I had received generous opportunities from people who believed in me.

Yet I had been unable to sustain many of them.

I had a loving wife, two children, parents and in-laws who were helping us.

Yet I often felt alone in the experience of my illness.

These contradictions were painful.

I did not know what was going to happen to us.

I did not know whether I would be able to work normally again.

I did not know whether I would ever feel the energy and enthusiasm that had once been such a visible part of my personality.

I was not standing at a window confidently waiting for the dawn.

I did not know when, or whether, things would change.

I was simply trying to get through life.

THE FALL BEFORE THE RISING

Today, at fifty-nine, I can call this chapter The Fall Before the Rising.

But I want to be clear about something.

I could not have given it that title while I was living through those years.

There was no sense of a beautiful story unfolding.

There was fear.

There was uncertainty.

There was financial hardship.

There was depression.

And there was a family living through it alongside me.

Only in looking back can I see that these were the years immediately preceding a profound turning point in my life.

That does not mean I believe depression was necessary or that every painful experience happened for some predetermined purpose.

It means that, in the story of my own life, the sequence was real.

First came those years of darkness.

Then came a day I would never forget.

21 July 2002.

I will not rush to explain that day here.

It deserves its own space.

For now, I want to leave you with the image of the man I was before it happened.

Not a successful coach.

Not a speaker addressing an audience.

Not a man claiming to have mastered his mind.

Just Dinesh.

A husband.

A father.

A son.

A man lying in bed, questioning his life, sometimes trying again, and often not knowing how he would face tomorrow.

That man, too, belongs in my story.

Perhaps especially that man.

Because The University of Life is not only about the moments when we rise.

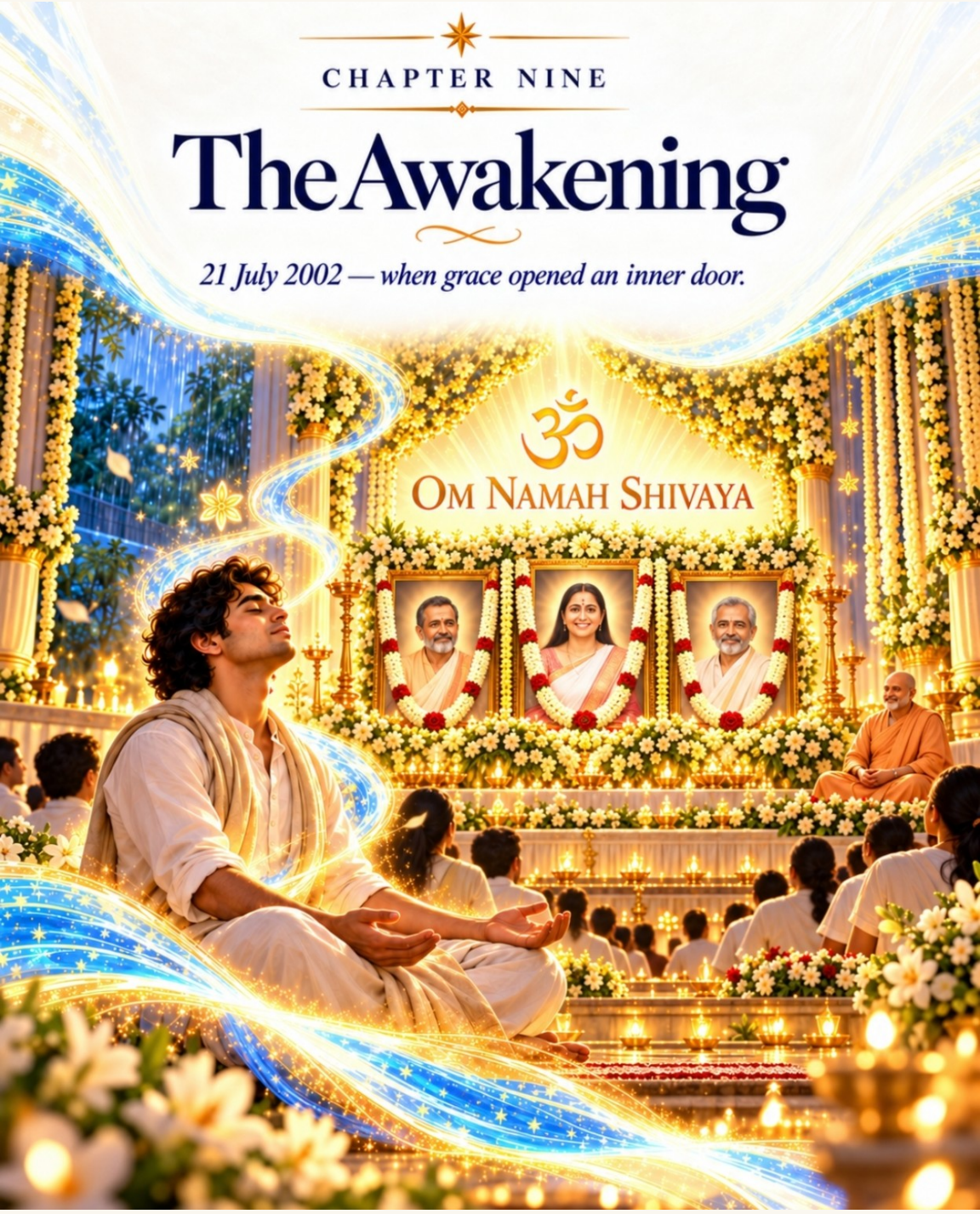
It is also about the moments when we cannot yet imagine rising.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER NINE

The Awakening

21 July 2002 — when grace opened an inner door.



CHAPTER NINE

The Awakening

21 July 2002 — When Grace Opened an Inner Door

THE MORNING I PICKED UP A NEWSPAPER

It was the year 2002.

For a long time, my world had become very small.

There had been years of professional disappointments, financial uncertainty, deep emotional pain, anxiety, and a mental-health struggle I simply did not know how to manage.

I had lost interest in many things that had once been part of my everyday life.

Reading the newspaper was one of them.

I could spend day after day without wanting to know what was happening in the world.

What difference did it make when I could barely understand what was happening inside me?

Those were desperate years.

I have shared earlier how deeply disillusioned with life I had become. During that period, I had even made two attempts to end my life.

Today, I am profoundly grateful that I survived.

I do not mention those attempts to shock anyone. I mention them because, without acknowledging how dark that time had become, I cannot honestly tell you what 21 July 2002 meant to me.

Then came a Thursday morning, a few days before that date.

For some reason I cannot explain, I picked up the newspaper.

I had hardly touched one for months.

Yet there it was in my hands.

And almost immediately, I found myself on page five.

A small photograph caught my attention.

It showed a woman I did not recognise, someone connected with a spiritual tradition about which I knew almost nothing.

There was an announcement.

“Spiritual Descent in Bangalore.”

I read it.

The words spoke of stress and depression and invited people experiencing such difficulties to attend a spiritual intensive.

You must remember my state of mind.

I was not someone calmly researching spiritual programmes.

I was a man who had tried so many things and still could not find his balance.

And here was a newspaper announcement suggesting that people like me might find some relief.

I was sceptical.

Very sceptical.

But something made me reach for the telephone.

THE CALL THAT LASTED AN HOUR

A telephone number had been printed with the announcement.

I called.

A woman answered.

I did not know who she was, and I had no background in the tradition she represented.

I began questioning her.

How could anyone suggest that a person experiencing serious emotional distress might come to a programme and feel better?

What did they mean by “spiritual descent”?

How was chanting or sitting in a gathering supposed to help me?

I did not speak for five minutes and politely put the phone down.

I questioned her for almost an hour.

I was not trying to be difficult merely for the sake of being difficult.

I wanted to understand.

I had lived with severe lows, treatments, setbacks and disappointments for years.

I had learned to be suspicious of anything that seemed to promise an easy answer.

I remember that, after listening to all my questions, she spoke gently about the possibility that I had been guided towards the announcement.

I cannot reproduce every word of that conversation now.

But something about it stayed with me.

When I look back at that Thursday, I see it through the lens of my spiritual beliefs.

To me, the timing felt like grace.

Thursday has always carried a special meaning for me as Guruvar—the day associated with the Guru.

Was it coincidence?

Was it a nudge from somewhere within?

Was I simply responding to the first possibility that had caught my attention after months of withdrawal?

I cannot prove an answer.

I can only tell you what I did next.

I decided to go.

I remember the programme fee being about ₹600.

Even that decision, in my condition, was a major step.

I did not know what would happen.

But I was going to find out.

A RIDE INTO THE UNKNOWN

On 21 July 2002, I got onto my Kinetic Honda and travelled to the venue in Bangalore.

I was still feeling terribly low.

I had not suddenly recovered because of a newspaper advertisement.

I had not woken up full of confidence or enthusiasm.

My mind was heavy.

My energy was low.

Part of me wondered why I was going at all.

But I went.

That is one detail I do not want to lose in the telling of this story.

I could not manage so many ordinary things during those years, yet on that particular morning I got dressed, left home, sat on my scooter and made my way to a place I had never been to before.

I was not expecting to receive a new profession.

I was not looking to become a spiritual teacher.

I was not thinking about conducting workshops, speaking to people, or building a mission around energy and self-awareness.

I was looking for some peace.

Nothing more.

THREE PHOTOGRAPHS AND THREE HUNDRED PEOPLE

When I entered the banquet hall, I looked towards the front.

There were three garlanded photographs on the stage.

Above them were the words:

“Om Namah Shivaya.”

I noticed a Swamiji seated to one side near the stage.

The living master of the tradition was abroad, as I understood it. I knew almost nothing about the teachers, their lineage, or what the day would involve.

There were approximately three hundred people present.

Some had been following that spiritual path for years.

Others, like me, were newcomers.

I found myself a place and sat down.

As I looked around, I wondered what I had stepped into.

There were no promises written across the room.

No one knew the full story of the man sitting among them.

I was just another participant.

Another person carrying questions.

Another person hoping for something to change.

THE CHANTING AND THE SILENCE

During the intensive, we chanted together.

“Om Namah Shivaya.”

“Om Guru Om.”

Again and again.

The mantras were used to invoke the grace of the spiritual masters within that tradition.

There were also moments of silence and opportunities to write notes.

I made my notes.

And slowly, something began to change in my experience.

My thoughts seemed less crowded.

The constant noise in my mind began to settle.

For once, I was not being pulled in so many directions by worries, memories and fear.

I began to feel calmer.

More centred.

More present.

I cannot tell you exactly when that change began.

There was no announcement that a transformation was about to take place.

We were simply chanting.

And I was participating.

But as the day continued, I became aware of a quality of stillness that I had been missing for a very long time.

Then something happened that I had never experienced before.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME THAT DAY

I want to describe this carefully.

There were approximately three hundred people in the hall.

From what I recall, around six of us had particularly unusual physical experiences during the intensive.

I was one of them.

I remember finding myself on the floor, moving and rolling in a way that reminded me of a snake.

My hands, too, seemed to take on movements I can only describe as snake-like.

I was not deciding, in the ordinary way, to perform an act for the people around me.

I was experiencing movements that felt spontaneous and completely unfamiliar.

At another moment, I suddenly rose and jumped.

To me, the jump felt extraordinary—far higher than my normal physical ability would have suggested, perhaps two or three feet above the floor as I remember it.

Then came movements that reminded me of a frog.

I hopped in a way that, in my experience, covered a startling distance.

I have remembered it as something like ten or twelve feet.

Even today, I find these moments difficult to describe.

I know some readers may question my recollection of what happened.

Some may think there must have been another explanation.

Others may understand the experience through spiritual traditions they already know.

I respect that.

I am not asking anyone to accept my physical impressions as a scientific measurement or as proof of a supernatural event.

I am telling you how I experienced it.

I felt that something extraordinary had happened to me.

And I knew that the person who had entered the hall that morning was feeling very different from the person who was now sitting within it.

A BOOK CALLED KINDLE MY HEART

At the end of the intensive, I noticed a stall where books were displayed.

There were many books.

Yet my attention went straight to one particular title.

Kindle My Heart.

It was a book by the living spiritual master associated with the tradition.

I bought it.

Then I went to the Swamiji who had been present during the programme and asked for his blessing.

He wrote a message in the book.

The words I remember carried the Guru's blessings and urged me to be loving and caring towards my family.

That blessing touched me deeply.

At a time when I had been questioning my own value and my ability to contribute to my home, here was a message directing my attention towards the people who mattered most in my life.

Kanal.

Karan.

Shreya.

Our family.

It was not an instruction to escape the world.

It was a reminder to love the people with whom I shared it.

I carried that book with me.

And I left the hall.

THE RIDE HOME IN THE RAIN

I climbed back onto my Kinetic Honda.

A light drizzle had begun.

As I rode through Bangalore, the rain fell on me.

And I kept chanting.

“Om Namah Shivaya.”

“Om Namah Shivaya.”

“Om Namah Shivaya.”

I continued all the way home.

That ride has remained one of the most vivid memories of my life.

The rain.

The scooter.

The chanting.

And a feeling within me that I had not experienced in years.

For once, my heart felt light.

I felt joy.

I felt energy.

I felt an inexplicable sense of freedom.

I do not know how the people passing me on the road saw me.

Perhaps they saw nothing unusual at all.

But inside me, the experience was extraordinary.

The world around me had not changed.

Our financial difficulties had not vanished.

I did not have a job waiting for me.

The questions about my future were still unanswered.

Yet for that ride home, those questions seemed to loosen their grip.

I felt that I had received a blessing.

And I could not stop chanting.

WHAT I TOLD KANAL

When I reached home, I shared the experience with Kanal.

Our children were still young.

I had no grand explanation to offer her.

How could I explain movements I had never experienced before?

How could I describe the unusual calm that had come over my mind?

Or the feeling of joy that had replaced, for a time, the heaviness I had carried for so long?

I was excited.

I wanted to talk about it.

I wanted to understand it.

And I wanted to hold on to whatever had happened within me.

This was not the beginning of a life in which every question had been answered.

It was the beginning of a new set of questions.

But they were different questions now.

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITHIN ME?

Within about a week, I began creating a small space at home for prayer and spiritual practice.

It became my mandir.

I placed photographs of the spiritual masters and deities I had collected there.

The prayer space was part of our dining-room area.

Nothing elaborate was required.

For me, it was a place I could return to each day.

I began chanting regularly.

I sat in contemplation.

I practised breathing exercises and meditation.

I wrote in my journal.

And I began paying close attention to what I experienced when I closed my eyes.

For roughly the next two months, my inner experiences felt wonderfully intense.

There were moments of great joy and devotion.

Sometimes tears would roll down my face without my being able to give a simple reason for them.

At times, with my eyes closed, I saw beautiful floral forms and colours within my mind.

I am not suggesting that flowers were physically present in front of me.

These were inner images—visions, as I experienced them.

They delighted me.

There were also occasional jerks, twitches and sensations of movement in my body while I practised.

At that time, I did not know how to interpret all these experiences.

I was simply a person beginning a new form of spiritual practice.

I was learning as I went along.

THE LANGUAGE I DISCOVERED LATER

As I began reading more about the spiritual tradition, I encountered words and ideas that were new to me.

Shaktipat.

Kundalini.

Chakras.

The awakening of an inner energy.

The symbolism of Shakti rising and uniting with Shiva.

The idea that our spiritual journey includes a movement towards greater awareness and union with what we understand to be the Divine.

I found these teachings fascinating.

They gave me a language through which I could interpret what I had experienced during the intensive.

I began to understand the events of that day through the teachings of the masters whose books I was reading.

That is my spiritual interpretation.

It is important for me to distinguish it from a medical or scientific explanation.

I cannot independently establish why those movements occurred or what physical processes produced them.

But I can speak about what the experience meant to me.

It made me curious about the life within my own consciousness.

It turned my attention inward.

And it awakened a desire to explore questions I had spent most of my life looking for answers to outside myself.

WHEN THE ECSTASY FADED

I wish I could tell you that, from 21 July 2002 onward, every mental and emotional struggle disappeared.

That would be a lovely ending to a chapter.

But it would not be the truth.

The extraordinary sense of bliss did not remain at the same intensity.

After roughly a month and a half or two months, I began struggling again.

The emotional darkness returned.

The anxiety returned.

The difficulties I had been living with had not simply been erased by a spiritual experience.

And that confused me.

I had felt such grace.

I had begun chanting and meditating.

I had a book carrying a blessing.

I had created a prayer space.

Why, then, was I still suffering?

Why couldn't I remain in that state of peace?

Was I doing something wrong?

Had I misunderstood what had happened?

I remember asking those questions.

Today, I would not wish to suggest that anyone's inability to feel better means they are lacking devotion, spiritual strength or faith.

Mental health is far too complex for such an explanation.

The experience of that day was precious to me, but it was not a substitute for medical care, nor did it instantly resolve every difficulty in my life.

That distinction matters.

For years, I had sometimes expected a single achievement, opportunity or change of circumstance to make everything well.

The spiritual experience was different, but I still had much to learn about how to live with both inner experiences and the realities of ordinary life.

A DOOR, NOT THE DESTINATION

As the years passed, I would continue practising, reading and learning.

I would also continue making mistakes, facing setbacks, asking questions and discovering parts of myself I had never understood.

The inner journey was not a straight road.

Sometimes there was clarity.

Sometimes confusion.

Sometimes joy.

Sometimes pain.

And I gradually began to see that the experience of grace and the process of learning how to live were not necessarily the same thing.

The spiritual intensive gave me an opening.

What I would do with that opening was another matter.

At the time, I was not thinking about founding Synergy with Energy.

The inner instruction that would eventually lead me to that name, and the unexpected writing that became the foundation of my first workshop, belonged to a later stage of the journey.

I will share those moments in their proper place.

For now, I want us to stay with the man on the Kinetic Honda, returning through the rain with a book in his possession and a mantra on his lips.

He had entered that banquet hall in distress.

He had emerged feeling something he could only describe as grace.

He did not know whether the feeling would last.

He did not know what work he would find.

He did not know what the future held for Kanal, Karan, Shreya and himself.

He did not know that, one day, he would begin sharing his experiences with other people.

He was simply a man who had encountered something that deeply changed the way he looked at his life.

And he wanted to understand it.

21 JULY 2002

I have returned to that date in my mind more times than I can count.

21 July 2002.

A day that began with uncertainty.

A hall filled with chanting.

Movements I could not explain.

A book called Kindle My Heart.

A blessing that reminded me of my family.

A drizzle over Bangalore.

And the sound of “Om Namah Shivaya” accompanying me home.

Some readers may recognise elements of their own spiritual experiences.

Others may not believe or identify with what I have described.

That is absolutely all right.

I do not ask anyone to adopt my interpretation.

I ask only that you understand that this is how I remember one of the most significant days of my life.

I am sharing what my heart carries and what my memory allows me to recollect.

I am not telling you the story of a man who mastered life that day.

I am telling you the story of a man who discovered that there might be an inner door he had never known how to open.

He had no idea what awaited him on the other side.

But for the first time in a very long while, he felt drawn to explore.

The University of Life had opened another classroom.

The University of Life… the journey continues…


CHAPTER TEN
A New Purpose
FROM INNER AWAKENING
TO OUTER SERVICE
SPIRITUALITY
HUMAN BEHAVIOUR
ENERGY
MEDITATION
AWARENESS
PRACTICE
LEARN
SHARE
SERVE
GROW
Help
Share
Guide
Serve

CHAPTER TEN

A New Purpose

From Inner Awakening to Outer Service

A QUESTION AFTER THE AWAKENING

When I returned from the spiritual intensive in Bangalore on 21 July 2002, I carried something I had not felt for a long time.

A sense of possibility.

For a while, the chanting, prayer and meditation seemed to bring an extraordinary calm into my life. I created a small mandir at home. I began reading, writing in my journal and spending time in contemplation.

I felt that a door had opened within me.

But, as I shared in the previous chapter, the difficult days did not disappear.

The joy and ecstasy gradually faded. The anxiety returned. My emotional and mental-health struggles were still there, along with the very practical questions of work, money and how I was going to provide for my family.

I kept asking myself: What am I supposed to do now?

Was the experience in Bangalore simply one beautiful day, or was there something I was meant to learn from it?

I did not have the answer.

But I found myself increasingly drawn to prayer, to the words of the spiritual masters, and to the idea that perhaps there was more to a human life than earning, spending, achieving and starting all over again.

That did not mean those everyday responsibilities had stopped mattering.

On the contrary, they mattered very much.

I was a husband and a father.

Kanal and our two children needed security.

And we still needed a home, a livelihood and some stability.

The inner search would have to take place in the middle of ordinary life.

LEAVING BANGALORE

Bangalore had given me so much.

It was where I had rebuilt my confidence at Big Kids Kemp, worked with Ravi V. Melwani

and explored the world of concerts through EVE-ENT.

It was also where I had experienced some of my most painful years.

And it was there that the spiritual intensive had changed the way I looked at my life.

But our time in Bangalore was coming to an end.

Amma, my mother-in-law, needed to sell the apartment in which we had been living. The family had financial reasons for liquidating that property.

Kanal and I had to decide what came next.

I was not in a position to simply buy another home with the money I had earned.

The savings were not there.

So I turned once again to my parents.

I asked my father and mother whether we could come to Pune, where they were living.

My father reassured me.

Come, he said. We would find a place to live.

I cannot tell you how much those words meant to me.

When I look back at my life, I see a father who repeatedly opened a door when I could not see one for myself.

And this was another such moment.

A HOME IN PUNE

We moved from Bangalore to Pune in 2004, as I remember it.

My parents were living in Kalyani Nagar.

With the support of my father, mother, brother and sister, we were able to buy a two-bedroom apartment at Konark Campus in Viman Nagar.

The home was in my name.

It was understood within the family that the amount my father had contributed was part of what I would eventually receive from my parents' financial legacy.

I want to be clear about that.

This was not a property I had managed to purchase through my own financial success.

It came through the generosity and support of my family.

And I was grateful.

Our new home was perhaps ten or fifteen minutes from my parents' place.

After years of uncertainty, that closeness was comforting.

I was in my mid-thirties, a husband and father of two, and still receiving substantial help from my parents.

There was gratitude in my heart.

There was also the discomfort of knowing that, at my age, I had not established the independence I once thought I would have.

As I had done whenever we moved into a new house, I began arranging the furniture and decorating the rooms.

I have always loved making a home look warm and beautiful.

I could spend hours deciding where something should go, how a room should feel and how best to use what we already had.

It may sound strange, but arranging a house gave me a sense of direction at times when other parts of my life felt uncertain.

And, of course, there was one space I particularly wanted to create.

My prayer space.

THE ZENITH COMPUTER AND A NOTEBOOK

I continued my sadhana in Pune.

Prayer.

Chanting.

Meditation.

Breathing.

Journaling.

Contemplation.

There were days when the practice felt deeply meaningful, and other days when my thoughts and emotions were still difficult to manage.

I was learning that spiritual practice was not a magic switch that would permanently remove every difficulty.

It was a part of the way I was trying to live.

At home, we had one of those old box-type desktop computers.

A Zenith computer.

Those of you who remember the early desktop computers will know exactly what I mean!

There was a table for the computer, and I had a notebook there too.

I could never have imagined that this ordinary corner of our home would become associated

with one of the most significant experiences of my professional and spiritual journey.

One day, after my meditation, I was lying on my bed with my eyes closed.

Then, as I remember it, I suddenly sat up with a jerk.

I felt a strong impulse to go to the computer table.

I took my notebook and a pen.

And I began writing.

I wrote.

And wrote.

And wrote.

For approximately forty-five minutes, the words continued.

I was not sitting down to prepare a business plan.

I was not drafting a speech for a client.

I had not been asked by an organisation to conduct a workshop.

Yet page after page was being filled.

To me, the experience felt spontaneous and extraordinary.

I came to describe it as automatic writing.

That is how I experienced it; I cannot claim to know exactly what mental or spiritual process was taking place.

But I remember the astonishment I felt when I looked at what I had written.

THE WORDS THAT STAYED WITH ME

There was another experience connected with that period of meditation.

I remember hearing, very distinctly within my awareness, the words:

"START SYNERGY WITH ENERGY."

It felt loud, clear and compelling to me.

I did not experience it as the result of a deliberate brainstorming session.

It was not a name I had been working on for weeks with a team of advertising professionals.

It simply arrived in my experience.

Start Synergy with Energy.

I remember wondering, What does that even mean?

Synergy?

Energy?

How did those words belong together?

I found myself looking up "synergy" in the dictionary.

I understood the dictionary meaning as cooperation and harmony—the coming together of different forces. For me, the meaning was beautifully simple:

Ek ho jaana.

Becoming one.

I began relating that idea to the energy within ourselves.

What if we could become more aware of our thoughts, emotions, actions and choices?

What if we could bring greater harmony into our inner lives?

What if we could learn to understand ourselves rather than constantly battling ourselves?

This was not a scientific formula that I had discovered.

It was a personal philosophy beginning to take shape.

To me, it connected what I had learned from experience with what I was beginning to read in spiritual teachings.

And suddenly, the words seemed to give a name to something that had been growing within me.

Synergy with Energy.

A name.

An idea.

And perhaps a direction.

A WORKSHOP WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

When I returned to the pages I had written, I began recognising a pattern.

There were points about life.

About thoughts and emotions.

About how human beings respond to situations.

About love, forgiveness, relationships and the search for peace.

There were themes I associated with the teachings of sages, saints and spiritual masters across traditions.

I began organising these notes.

Gradually, they took the shape of a full-day workshop.

Imagine the contrast!

For years, I had been searching for work that I could sustain.

I had been part of a bakery, catering operations, retail management and event production.

Now I had material for an eight-hour workshop, and I did not even know who would attend it.

I had no client list.

No conference hall.

No corporate appointment.

No guarantee of payment.

I was still dealing with financial insecurity and my own mental and emotional challenges.

But for once I was not being driven only by the question, How much money will this bring me?

I was beginning to ask another question.

Could something I had learned through my experiences be of use to another human being?

THE FIRST FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE

Our home at Konark Campus was in a large residential complex.

I began inviting neighbours and their children to sit with me for a workshop.

Not hundreds of participants.

Not even twenty.

Sometimes five or six people.

We sat around our dining table.

I gave them journals.

We spoke about life, thoughts, feelings, choices and the importance of looking within.

I shared the ideas that had come to me through my reading, reflection and personal experiences.

I did not have to pretend that I was a man who had figured everything out.

I knew I hadn't.

If anything, my own life had taught me how much there was still to understand.

But there I was, sitting at the dining table, speaking to a small group for an entire day.

And I found that I loved it.

I loved the interaction.

I loved the questions.

I loved seeing people respond to a thought or recognise something in their own lives.

It was a very different feeling from managing a store promotion or organising a concert.

There were no stage lights.

No famous singers.

No prizes.

Just people sitting together, talking about what it means to be human.

And somehow, that felt important.

The first sessions were free.

Eventually, participants began telling me that I should charge for the time and effort involved.

I remember saying, almost casually, "All right, give me five hundred rupees."

Five hundred rupees per person.

It was not a grand fee.

But it represented something significant.

Someone was willing to give their time, listen to what I shared, and recognise that it had value.

Those small gatherings became the first steps through which the workshop began to take practical shape.

THE OTHER JOB I STILL NEEDED

Of course, inspiration did not pay the electricity bill.

We still needed regular income.

I could not simply sit at home writing and conducting occasional sessions while Kanal and the children depended on me.

So, once again, I tried my hand at earning a living in more familiar ways.

Konark Campus was a large residential complex. I thought a small fast-food counter near the clubhouse might be useful to residents.

I approached the builder, Samit Karia, and sought permission.

He agreed.

We began selling burgers, pizzas, rolls and sandwiches.

Residents would come by in the evenings to buy something to eat.

Karan, still a schoolboy, would sometimes help me after school.

I remember him putting together the buns, patties, sauces and other ingredients.

He enjoyed helping.

And I enjoyed having him beside me.

There is something tender in that memory.

The same son who had seen me struggling so much was now sharing a small part of my working day.

But the food counter was not financially successful.

Money was being lost.

We eventually closed it.

One more venture had come to an end.

But by then I was beginning to see something about myself.

I could experience disappointment and still find myself looking for a new way to work.

I did not always feel resilient.

Yet some part of me kept searching.

FINDING OUR FEET

Karan and Shreya also needed to settle into school in Pune.

My mother helped us enormously.

She met Deepika Parab, the principal of the Air Force School in Viman Nagar, and both children were admitted.

The school was close to home, and the children could cycle there.

At that stage we were not in a position to choose an expensive school simply for its prestige.

We did what we could with what we had.

And we were fortunate to have family supporting us.

Later, there would be changes in the children's schooling and new opportunities for Kanal as well.

But in those early Pune days, our priority was straightforward.

Settle the family.

Find a way to earn.

And keep moving forward.

There was love around us.

There was help.

But there was still work to be done.

A SHORT STOP, THEN MARIPLEX

I worked with Minocher Patel, who was himself a motivational trainer.

My tenure with him lasted just two months, after which I decided to move on again.

There is no doubt that I learned a lot from him, and I remain grateful.

Then I approached Mariplex, a new mall complex in Kalyani Nagar, where Gold Adlabs had cinemas.

I met Amit Bora, the chief executive.

Over time, Amit would become a very dear friend.

He gave me an opportunity to work there.

I joined as a manager on a salary of approximately ₹10,000 a month.

It was not an enormous amount.

But a salary coming into the household mattered.

I knew something about retail, advertising, marketing, promotions and managing people.

At Big Kids Kemp, I had helped create experiences that made customers excited to visit a store.

At Mariplex, I found myself using those skills again.

I enjoyed coming up with ideas and seeing how they could help a business attract people.

My responsibilities grew.

I moved from manager to general manager and eventually to vice president, as I recall the sequence of my roles.

Once again, a familiar side of me was emerging.

The organiser.

The communicator.

The creative professional.

I could walk into a workplace and become deeply involved in making it better.

But something else was happening alongside that professional life.

The small workshop born at our dining table was not leaving my mind.

TWO PATHS AT THE SAME TIME

While working at Mariplex, I continued with Synergy with Energy whenever I could.

The job had its own demands and long working hours, so the workshops could not happen as often as I wished.

Yet whenever an opportunity arose, I would conduct a session.

Sometimes it was with young people.

Sometimes with families.

Sometimes with people who simply wanted to understand themselves better.

I loved the conversations about stress, anxiety, relationships, work-life balance, emotional wellbeing and the way we think.

What I found striking was how many people had never been encouraged to ask such questions.

We educate children in so many subjects.

We teach them to read, write, calculate, compete and pass examinations.

We encourage sports, music, art and professional ambition.

But how often do we teach ourselves to recognise what is happening within our own minds?

How do we respond to anger?

How do we handle disappointment?

How do we cope with pressure without losing ourselves?

How do we say no?

How do we remain kind when life becomes difficult?

I was not approaching these questions as someone who possessed all the answers.

I was approaching them as someone who knew from experience what could happen when our inner life became overwhelmed.

Perhaps that was part of what people connected with.

Not perfection.

But honesty.

THE ROOM AMIT OFFERED ME

Then Amit Bora did something for which I remain deeply grateful.

He saw how much Synergy with Energy meant to me.

He knew I wanted to conduct workshops while continuing to meet my professional responsibilities.

So he offered me the use of a room at Mariplex.

No rent.

No extra burden.

I could use the space as a small office for Synergy with Energy and invite people for sessions.

Can you imagine what that meant?

I had gone from a dining table with five or six people to having a place where I could welcome participants outside my home.

I could reach out to families.

To young people.

To people from workplaces.

And slowly begin building something that felt distinct from the jobs and businesses I had tried before.

I was still drawing my salary.

The workshop payments were modest.

But together they helped our household.

More importantly, I began to understand that there might be a way of doing meaningful work that also contributed towards our financial needs.

Amit had not merely lent me a room.

He had given me space to explore something I believed in.

I have never forgotten that gesture.

FROM ONE HEAD, HEART AND SOUL TO ANOTHER

As the workshops developed, I began to see what I wanted my work to stand for.

I did not want simply to deliver a motivational speech in which everybody felt excited for an hour and then went back to the same patterns.

I wanted people to look within.

To become aware of their thoughts.

To acknowledge their emotions.

To examine how they treated themselves and other people.

To consider what a balanced life might mean in their own circumstances.

I was coming to believe that awareness and acceptance were essential parts of personal growth.

But I also knew that one workshop could not do another person's inner work for them.

No speaker could live somebody else's life.

No coach could make every decision for a participant.

And certainly no spiritual belief could remove the need for medical care when someone was dealing with a serious mental-health condition.

The most I could hope to do was share something useful.

A thought.

A question.

A perspective.

An invitation to reflect.

And then allow each person to discover what it meant in their own life.

Over time, this became part of the way I described my mission:

Energizing individuals—one head, heart and soul at a time.

The words expressed what I was learning to value.

One human being.

One conversation.

One moment of awareness.

Not an entire life transformed by someone else's speech, but perhaps the beginning of a more conscious relationship with oneself.

THE CALLING AND THE RESPONSIBILITY

There were days when I wondered whether I should remain in employment or give Synergy with Energy my complete attention.

At Mariplex, I had a position and an income.

There was professional recognition.

There was also the familiar excitement of creating promotions and helping an organisation grow.

Why would I risk all that?

Especially after so many periods of financial difficulty?

Was it sensible to step away from a salary?

Or would it be irresponsible?

These were not small questions.

Kanal and our children were living the consequences of the choices I made.

My parents had already done so much for us.

I could not ignore those realities.

Yet I also knew that the thought of sharing what I had learned was growing stronger.

At times it felt like an inner calling that I could no longer set aside.

In my spiritual understanding, I associated it with the grace I had experienced and the guidance of the masters whose teachings I was studying.

But a calling, however meaningful, still had to find a place in the practical world.

I would have to learn how to balance inspiration with responsibility.

Service with livelihood.

Giving to others with caring for myself.

Eventually I told Amit that I wanted to leave Mariplex and devote my attention to Synergy with Energy. He encouraged me to keep conducting workshops while retaining my job. It was sensible advice, and I understood it. But I felt strongly drawn to give the workshops my full attention. I decided to leave Mariplex and see where the work would lead. I remain grateful to Amit for the opportunity, the room and his friendship. I had no guarantee of future earnings. I was still learning how to balance service, responsibility and care for my own wellbeing.

A NEW PURPOSE

When I look back at this period, I see a journey that did not unfold in the order I might have chosen.

There was first the long struggle to find stability.

Then the awakening in Bangalore.

Then more uncertainty.

Then the move to Pune and the generosity of my family.

The notebook.

The words "Start Synergy with Energy."

The early workshop notes.

Five or six people around a dining table.

A small fee of five hundred rupees.

A fast-food counter that did not survive.

Another job.

Amit Bora's kindness.

And a room in which I could begin reaching beyond my home.

It would be easy to tell this story as though I knew from the beginning exactly where I was going.

I did not.

I was still dealing with anxiety, self-doubt, stress and periods of emotional difficulty.

I was still learning how to manage money, work and relationships.

I was still a student of the University of Life.

But slowly, something was changing in the questions I asked myself.

For many years, the question had been:

What work will make me successful?

Now another question was becoming just as important:

What can I share from the life I have lived that might help someone else?

That question did not guarantee an easy future.

It did, however, give me a reason to keep exploring.

There would be more workshops.

More people to meet.

More opportunities.

More mistakes.

And more lessons about what service really demands of the person who wishes to serve.

I had not mastered my own life.

I had simply begun to discover a purpose beyond my own struggles.

And for the first time, I was beginning to understand how a personal journey might become something I could share.

The path was opening.

I could not yet see how far it would lead.

The University of Life… the journey continues…

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BUILDING THE JOURNEY

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS TO A LARGER SERVICE

TAKING SYNERGY WITH ENERGY TO MORE SOULS



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Building the Journey

From Small Beginnings to a Larger Service

Taking Synergy with Energy to More Souls

BEYOND THE DINING TABLE

When Synergy with Energy began taking shape, there were five or six people sitting around my dining table.

I would give them journals. We would speak about our thoughts, our emotions, our choices and the many things about ourselves that we rarely stop to examine.

Nobody was walking into an impressive training centre.

There was no grand entrance or professional stage.

Just a small group, a table, and a man who had spent years searching for ways to understand his own life.

Yet those sessions meant something to me.

I was not standing before the participants as someone who had conquered his inner struggles.

Far from it.

I still had days when anxiety troubled me, when stress felt overwhelming, and when maintaining my own emotional balance was difficult.

But for those few hours, I was able to share.

And in the sharing, I felt alive.

Over time, I began to wonder whether I could take those conversations beyond our home.

Could I speak to students?

To teachers?

To working professionals who spent so many hours under pressure?

To families trying to understand one another?

Could I carry the same spirit of those small gatherings into a room with twenty people, or a hundred?

I didn't know.

But I wanted to try.

STEPPING OUT ON MY OWN

In the previous chapter I spoke about Mariplex and the support I received from Amit Bora.

I had a job. I had a salary. I had responsibilities.

Amit had even made a room available for my Synergy with Energy work without charging me rent.

His kindness enabled me to conduct workshops while remaining employed.

And yet, the inner calling was becoming stronger.

I began to feel that I needed to focus more fully on the workshops.

Financially, the sensible course would have been to keep my job and conduct occasional sessions on the side.

Amit encouraged me to consider that.

I understood his concern.

Kanal and our children needed stability.

My parents had already helped us so much.

I knew only too well what it meant to be without an income.

But my desire to follow this work did not leave me.

Eventually, I chose to move on from Mariplex and give Synergy with Energy my attention.

That choice did not make all my worries disappear.

There was no guarantee of another workshop next week, or another fee next month.

I was taking another risk.

But this time it was attached to something that felt deeply connected to my personal experience.

I wanted to help individuals become more aware of their inner lives.

I wanted to share what the University of Life had been teaching me.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PROFESSIONS

Slowly, I began approaching educational institutions, companies and industries in and around Pune.

I saw something very familiar in the lives of many working professionals.

Long hours.

Deadlines.

Expectations.

Responsibilities at work.

Responsibilities at home.

The pressure to do more, achieve more and prove more.

I had known those pressures myself.

I had spent years managing stores and events, making things happen, creating excitement and trying to deliver results.

I also knew how easily the person behind the job title could become exhausted.

Some individuals were facing anxiety.

Some were struggling with stress and burnout.

Some were finding it difficult to balance their professional and personal lives.

And some were carrying emotional difficulties that nobody around them knew about.

I did not want to approach them as employees who needed to be more productive.

I wanted to meet them as human beings.

Because a person who is a manager in the office may be a worried father at home.

A woman leading a team may also be caring for parents or children.

A student sitting in a classroom may be carrying fears about failure, comparison or the future.

We all have a life beneath our visible roles.

That was the life I wanted to speak to.

FROM ₹500 TO PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS

I remember the early paid sessions.

Five hundred rupees per participant.

It felt significant that someone appreciated the workshop enough to pay for it.

When I began approaching organisations, I started charging for full sessions.

There were workshops for which I received ₹5,000 or ₹10,000.

Gradually, institutions began inviting me to conduct programmes for larger groups.

Sometimes a company wanted more than one session.

There could be different batches of employees on different days.

At times, I conducted eight or ten separate sessions for an organisation.

My fees also grew.

There was a stage when I was being paid approximately ₹50,000 for a full-day programme.

One engagement I remember was a three-day workshop for Suryadatta Institutes. I was paid ₹1 lakh per day—₹3 lakh in all.

I could hardly have imagined such a journey while sitting at our dining table.

And I want to make something clear.

These were not fifteen workshops every month, with people constantly queuing outside my door!

They were arranged in advance.

Dates were discussed, commitments made, and sessions scheduled according to the needs of the organisation.

I learned to ask for payment in advance so that a date would not be blocked and then casually cancelled.

It was a professional service, even though its roots were deeply personal.

There were good months.

There were quieter months.

And because I was self-employed, the income was not always regular.

The mission was developing, but the practical lessons of running a business were still there to be learned.

SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND CORPORATES

Over the years, the work took me into different environments.

I remember conducting workshops for organisations such as HSBC, Tata Motors and companies in the industrial sector.

There were educational institutions too, including the Indira group and D. Y. Patil institutions.

I recall the D. Y. Patil campus at Akurdi, with its several colleges and a large auditorium capable of seating hundreds.

Standing before a large group of students or teachers was very different from sitting with five or six neighbours.

But the essential purpose remained the same.

Could one thought cause someone to reflect?

Could one conversation help a participant look at their emotions with greater honesty?

Could we speak about what it meant to succeed not only in an examination or career, but also in our relationships and our everyday lives?

I conducted programmes for students and faculty.

I worked with employees and managers.

There were days of workshops followed by feedback, questions and conversations that stayed with me.

Sometimes an organisation invited me back for several batches.

Those invitations mattered because they told me that someone had found enough value in the experience to offer it to others.

I was grateful for every opening.

It was a long way from the days when I could barely imagine holding a job.

EIGHT HOURS AND A HALL FULL OF QUESTIONS

My full-day workshops were not short motivational talks.

At times I would speak for eight or nine hours, taking the usual breaks, often facilitating the day largely on my own.

There would be a presentation on a screen behind me.

But I never wanted the presentation to become the workshop.

The workshop was the interaction.

The questions.

The shared experiences.

The laughter.

The singing.

Sometimes even dancing.

And yes, sometimes tears.

There were occasions when participants began speaking about pain, disappointments or unresolved emotions they had carried for a long time.

I could see how deeply some of those conversations affected people.

There were also moments of lightness and humour.

I enjoyed making participants laugh because I knew that the subject of mental and emotional

wellbeing need not be presented only through sadness.

We could examine serious questions without losing the joy of being alive.

I have addressed groups of twenty, two hundred and, on some occasions as I remember it, audiences numbering around two thousand.

But numbers were never the only thing that mattered to me.

I could stand before a full auditorium and still want to reach one individual who had come in quietly carrying a question.

I did not believe there was a single answer that fitted everyone.

Every participant came with a different history.

A different family.

A different set of fears and hopes.

I wanted each person to take from the day whatever might be useful in their own life.

ONE HEAD, HEART AND SOUL AT A TIME

I often spoke about two births.

The first is the biological birth through which we enter this world.

The second, in my spiritual understanding, begins when we consciously turn inward and start asking who we really are.

That second birth is not a medical event.

It is the language through which I describe an inward search.

An awakening of awareness.

A willingness to look at our own patterns.

A desire to understand what moves us, what frightens us and what we value.

I would ask participants questions that I was still asking myself.

How are you thinking?

Why do particular situations disturb you?

Why is it sometimes so difficult to say no?

How do you respond to criticism?

How much of your happiness depends on approval from others?

What would a balanced life look like for you?

I was not there to give everyone a ready-made answer.

I had certainly learned that life does not come with one.

I was there to encourage reflection.

I began describing my mission in words that continue to be close to my heart:

“Energizing individuals—one head, heart and soul at a time.”

That was not about measuring every workshop by applause or attendance.

It was about the person sitting in front of me.

One person.

One conversation.

One moment of greater awareness.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS REALLY MEAN?

At different times I had described myself as a motivational speaker, an inspirational speaker or a life coach.

Eventually I chose a description that felt closer to the philosophy I wanted to share.

Life Energy Success Coach.

I wanted the words to bring together three things.

Life, because we are living a human journey.

Energy, because my spiritual understanding of existence places importance on the life force within us.

And success, because each one of us wishes to live meaningfully, even if we define success very differently.

But what is success?

I had earned substantial money at different stages of my career and had also experienced moments when even ordinary household expenses became difficult.

I had held impressive positions.

I had worked with famous artists.

I had enjoyed professional recognition.

And still, I had known emotional exhaustion and despair.

To me, success could no longer mean only a designation, an income or a public achievement.

It also had to include how we treated the people around us.

How we dealt with our thoughts.

How we cared for our health.

How we managed our choices and relationships.

And whether our work contributed something meaningful to others.

I was not saying these things because I had perfected them.

I was saying them because I had learned, often painfully, how important they were.

THE OLD PATTERN THAT FOLLOWED ME

Even as the workshops grew, one old habit remained.

I was not very good at saving money.

When I earned well, I enjoyed spending.

I wanted to do things for Kanal.

For Karan and Shreya.

For my parents.

I wanted to give what I could to people I loved.

There is joy in giving.

But I had often confused generosity with spending beyond what was sensible.

I had lived through the consequences before.

I knew what financial insecurity felt like.

And yet I continued to struggle with the discipline of planning and saving.

It is a contradiction I do not want to hide from the reader.

I could speak to a room of professionals about balanced living while still learning how to find balance in my own financial life.

I could help a participant examine a habit while wrestling with habits of my own.

I was a teacher in some moments.

In many others, I remained a student.

Perhaps that is why the name The University of Life still means so much to me.

THE COST OF GIVING TOO MUCH

There was another difficulty that took time for me to understand.

I loved my work so much that I could overextend myself.

Some workshops involved deeply emotional conversations.

Participants would speak about worry, anger, painful memories, family problems or experiences they had rarely shared openly.

I wanted to give my best to everyone.

Sometimes I went home feeling drained.

At other times, my anxiety, physical exhaustion and emotional difficulties became overwhelming.

There were occasions when I had a workshop scheduled for the following day and wondered how I would manage it.

How could I stand before an audience when I was struggling so badly inside?

Yet sometimes I got dressed, went to the venue and found myself engaging fully with the participants.

That contrast was astonishing to me.

I interpreted some of those moments through my spiritual faith, as the grace of the masters enabling me to serve.

That was how I understood my experience.

But I also recognise today that commitment does not remove the need for rest, boundaries, appropriate healthcare and practical support.

A person working in the field of wellbeing must take care of their own wellbeing too.

That sounds obvious now.

It was not always obvious to me.

THE STONE AND THE SCULPTOR

There is an image from my spiritual reflections that remains very meaningful.

A large block of stone.

Hidden within it, the possibility of a beautiful statue.

The sculptor does not create the statue by placing a few flowers around the stone.

The sculptor must work.

Chip away.

Shape.

Remove what does not belong.

I began to see my own inner journey in that image.

I felt that the spiritual masters were helping me discover aspects of myself that I had not yet understood.

But the process was not always comfortable.

There were habits I needed to examine.

Relationships in which I had behaved without enough understanding.

Choices I regretted.

Patterns of anger, guilt, fear and self-criticism.

And a tendency to give too much outwardly while neglecting my own needs.

In my spiritual language, the chiselling was continuing.

I had not become the finished statue.

I was still the stone being worked upon.

That is a humbling thought.

And it is one I want to carry throughout this book.

A PRACTICE I COULD NOT AFFORD TO NEGLECT

As Synergy with Energy reached larger audiences, I sometimes found myself giving less time to the very practices that had helped me begin the journey.

Chanting.

Meditation.

Prayer.

Journaling.

Contemplation.

Satsang.

I was busy preparing and conducting programmes.

Travelling.

Meeting people.

Trying to earn.

Trying to help.

At times, I felt that I was absorbing the pain and distress of the individuals I met.

Within my spiritual framework, I thought of this as taking in difficult energies and needing to cleanse myself through sadhana.

I recognise that this was my way of making sense of the exhaustion I experienced, not a medical explanation for illness.

In practical terms, I also needed rest, boundaries and the humility to acknowledge when I was unwell.

Through further reading and reflection, including books that reminded me of the teachings of Bhagwan Nityananda and Baba Muktananda, I was drawn back towards a more consistent personal practice.

I needed to care for the person who was trying so hard to care for others.

That remains a lesson for me even today.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

I have been fortunate to conduct many workshops, seminars and individual sessions over the years.

Different audiences.

Different places.

Different circumstances.

Some paid programmes.

Some sessions offered freely because I felt they were needed.

And the work would continue into chapters of my life that I have not yet shared.

I have met people whose feedback touched my heart.

I have watched participants laugh, cry, ask questions and leave with thoughts to explore.

But I want to be careful about one thing.

I cannot know everything that happens in a participant's life after a workshop.

I cannot claim to have transformed every person who sat in a hall.

Transformation belongs to the person living that life.

What I can say is that these encounters mattered to me.

I felt privileged to be allowed into people's questions, even briefly.

The workshops were not simply another profession.

They were becoming one way I tried to give meaning to the experiences I had lived through.

THE JOURNEY IS NOT COMPLETE

When I think back to the person I was in 2000, lying in bed and wondering whether I would ever be able to work again, I find it difficult not to become emotional.

That man could not have imagined addressing a hall full of students or working professionals.

He could not have imagined beginning a workshop at a dining table and watching it reach organisations and educational institutions.

He certainly did not imagine calling himself a Life Energy Success Coach.

And yet none of that means his struggles were neatly resolved.

The same man continued to experience difficult periods.

He continued making mistakes.

He continued facing the consequences of some of his choices.

He continued returning to his practices, questioning his beliefs and learning from life.

I do not wish to tell you the story of a man who found a spiritual calling and was thereafter free from conflict.

That would not be my story.

My story is about learning to live with greater awareness while remaining imperfect.

It is about discovering that service can be meaningful, but that service alone does not excuse neglecting ourselves or our families.

It is about understanding that material success and inner wellbeing are not always the same thing.

And it is about remembering that even after a moment of awakening, there can be many more moments of darkness, doubt and growth.

TO MORE SOULS

The picture that began at our dining table grew larger.

From five or six participants to classrooms.

From classrooms to corporate training rooms.

From smaller groups to auditoriums filled with students, teachers and working professionals.

Different faces.

Different stories.

Different questions.

Yet beneath them all, I began to see something that felt profoundly simple.

We are human beings trying to understand our lives.

In my spiritual understanding, we are also souls on a human journey.

We may come from different backgrounds and follow different traditions.

We may hold different beliefs.

But I hope we can meet one another with greater love, compassion and respect.

I have come to believe that the purpose of life is to live a life of purpose.

And that a purpose becomes especially meaningful when it includes caring for others.

Have I reached that goal?

Not at all.

I am still learning.

Still discovering.

Still shedding old layers.

Still trying to bring greater harmony between what I believe, what I say and what I do.

The path ahead has held—and continues to hold—more challenges than these pages can contain.

There are further stories of my family, my masters, my mistakes, my shadows and my search for a more balanced life.

They, too, belong in The University of Life.

But for now, I want to remember the dining table.

The first few journals.

The willingness of a handful of individuals to sit and listen.

And the remarkable journey that followed.

A small beginning.

A larger service.

And the continuing desire to reach more souls.

This is not the story of a man who mastered life.

It is the story of a man whom life continues to teach.

And now, perhaps, you are wondering: what happened after the workshops began to grow? Did awakening make my life easier? Did I finally learn to live by the very lessons I was sharing? The answers are neither simple nor always comfortable. Beyond the applause waited more family stories, harder choices, unfinished shadows, unexpected grace—and moments when I had to question what I thought I knew about myself. In Book Two of The University of Life, I hope to open those doors with you, as honestly as I have tried to open these pages. This chapter ends here, but some of life's most revealing lessons were still ahead.

The University of Life… a new chapter unfolds…

My Universal Prayer

One Humanity. Many Paths. One Divine Source.

Om Guru Om,
Guru Om, Guru Om,
Guru Om, Guru Om,
Guru Om, Guru Om,
Guru Om, Guru Om,
Guru Om, Guru Om.

Guru, teri hi krupa se sab kaam ho raha hai,
Karte ho tum Guruji, mera naam ho raha hai.

Baba Dada, teri krupa se sab kaam ho raha hai.

Sadguru Shri Sainath Maharaj,
Shiv Shakti Ki Jai.

Hare Krishna,
Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna,
Hare Hare.
Hare Rama,
Hare Rama,
Rama Rama,
Hare Hare.

Jai Shri Ganeshaya Namah.

Jai Shri Hanuman.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Allah hu Akbar.

Ek Onkar. Sat Nam.

BLESS THE WHOLE WORLD.

Om Bhur Bhuvah Svaha,
Tat Savitur Varenyam,
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat.

Om Tryambakam yajaamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam |
Urvaarukamiva bandhanaan-mrityormuksheeya maamritaat ||

Om Namah Shivaya,
Namah Shivaya,
Namah Shivaya.

Jai Jai Maa,
Jai Jai Maa,
Jai Jai Maa.

Om Guru Om.

HEALING AFFIRMATION

Affirm this 11 times in the morning
as you get up and 11 times before sleep.

I am healed.
I am cured.
I am pure.
I am blessed.
I am healthy.
I am abundant.
I am grateful.

Om Namah Shivaya.
Jai Jai Maa.
Jai Jai Maa.
Jai Jai Maa.

Energy2U

DINESH NATHANI

LIFE ENERGY SUCCESS COACH



With a Heart Full of Gratitude

As I look back upon my journey through the University of Life, I realise that I could never have walked this path alone. Every person who entered my life, whether bringing love, encouragement, opportunities, challenges or lessons, has contributed in some way to the person I am becoming. My family, my spiritual masters, my friends, my mentors, the institutions that placed their trust in me, and the thousands of individuals who opened their hearts during my workshops have all been part of this unfolding journey. Some held my hand through my darkest hours, while others helped me discover the purpose of my life. To each one of you, I bow my head with humility and gratitude. Whatever I have been able to give through Synergy with Energy has been made possible, in part, because of what I have received from you. This journey has never been mine alone.

With a Heart Full of Gratitude — Continued

My Family — My Roots, My Strength

With profound love and gratitude, I acknowledge:

My mother, Jassu Nathani, and my father, Vishnu Nathani.

My father-in-law, Pyarelal Sharma, and my late mother-in-law, Sunila Pyarelal Sharma.

My sister, Monika Manglani, and my late brother-in-law, Dilip Manglani.

My younger brother, Jiten (Bunty) Nathani, and my sister-in-law, Anuya Nathani.

My wife and life companion, Kanal Nathani.

My son, Karan Nathani, and daughter-in-law, Disha Kapur Nathani.

My daughter, Shreya Nathani Jivani, and Nihad Jivani.

Hemant, Baani and Zaveer Manglani.

Abhinav and Aarya Nathani.

With a Heart Full of Gratitude — Continued

Each of you is part of my story, my learning and my life's journey. Your presence, love and support hold a place in my heart that words can never fully express.

To Everyone Who Walked Alongside Me

My heartfelt gratitude extends to a host of friends, well-wishers, mentors and supporters, and especially to everyone who has attended or participated in my Synergy with Energy workshops and sessions over almost 25 years.

Every encounter, every conversation, every shared experience has contributed to my own learning and growth.

Deep gratitude to one and all.

With love, humility and gratitude,
Dinesh Nathani

Global Life Energy Success Coach
Inspirational Speaker & Author

About the Author

DINESH NATHANI

Global Life Energy Success Coach
Inspirational Speaker & Author

Dinesh Nathani is a Global Life Energy Success Coach, Inspirational Speaker and Author, and the founder of Synergy with Energy, a personal-development initiative whose roots reach back to 2002.

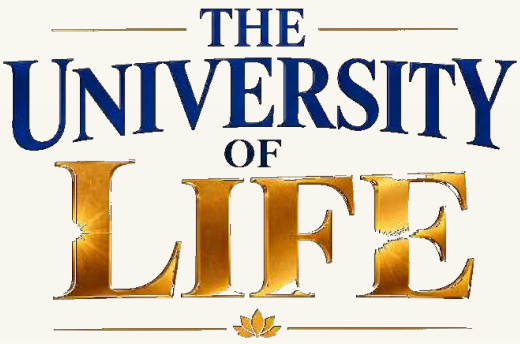
His work has taken him into schools, colleges, corporate settings and one-on-one conversations, exploring mental and emotional wellbeing, self-awareness, resilience and purposeful living.

The University of Life draws on his lived experiences—not as a declaration that life has been mastered, but as an invitation to keep learning through darkness, awakening, shadows and grace.

His guiding intention is simple: Energizing individuals—one head, heart, and soul at a time.

www.dineshnathani.com

Awareness | Acceptance | Ascension



A New Chapter Unfolds…

A door opened in 2002.

A purpose began to take shape.

But the lessons did not end with the applause.

More shadows. More choices. More grace.

Book Two awaits.

Om Namah Shivaya. Jai Gurudev.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LIFE

A Journey Through Darkness,
Awakening, Shadows and Grace

An unfinished human journey through family, setbacks, difficult inner landscapes, and the grace that made a new beginning possible.

“This is not the story of a man who mastered life. It is the story of a man whom life continues to teach.”

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