

5 KILLER HABITS

1. Arise, awake & **KICKASS.**

2. Be a **HERO.**

&

3. Live **A** hundred lives.

4. Stay **CURIOUS.**

5. Become a dromo**MANIAC.**

BE A REBEL

SREE KRISHNA SEELAM

5 KILLER HABITS BE A REBEL

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All the revenue generated from the sale of this book will be
donated to support child education in rural India.



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This book is dedicated to every teacher who taught me and every author who inspired me.

I owe this book to all the 1600 volunteers who worked for Wedidit.in and their families who supported us for this great cause.

Special thanks to the management team of Wedidit Foundation.

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Kashish,

Suparna,

Jasqueen

and

Vanshika.

ABOUT

The idea behind the book! It's about the 'Truth' as it exists.

This is about questioning what we were taught and made to believe, about breaking rules that don't make sense, about finding your passion, love, experiencing life. It's about fighting for freedom from everything that restricts free will.

It's about living a life with a purpose, filled with adventures, with limitless happiness and living for everyone who is not as strong as us.

These are lessons learned from my life's experiences, along with wisdom gained from reading several books; knowledge acquired from interviews of people who were born around the time of the independence of India. The ultimate truth they wanted to convey to the next generations. Everything has been summed up into five life-changing habits.

Around 20 per cent of the making of this book involved—more than a thousand volunteers, hundred and sixty interns from thirty-eight locations across India, who worked for over six thousand hours. They interviewed their grandparents on questions like:

- What is their best experience in life?
- What is the significant learning they had?

- What is the message they wished to convey to the next generations?

All the while writing this book I kept my children in mind who are two- and four-year-olds as of 2021. I want them to read this book when they turn eighteen. I believe this will make them future-ready.

A rebel is someone who thinks differently from most of the people in the society, who takes nothing that was told without valid logic and is someone who leads and cares for his people.

The world badly needs rebels!

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ARISE, AWAKE AND KICKASS!

What is the one common trait shared among award-winning sports personnel, high-ranking students and successful business leaders?

“No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty days a year fails to make his family rich.”

– MALCOLM GLADWELL^{[1](#)}

Let me take the liberty to drag religion in between. Jews comprise 0.2 per cent of the world’s population, and out of the nine hundred and fifty people who won the Nobel Prize 20 per cent of them are of Jewish origin. Since four thousand years of its inception, as a part of their religious practice, most Jews are in the habit of getting up seventy-two minutes before sunrise.

One proven formula to achieve anything in this world: “Wake up at five, and do it!”

Is that it? Could getting up seventy-two minutes before the sunrise like the Jews gets you a Nobel Prize? “Yes, it did for them.”

Let me share the most effortless way to get high scores, be the best in class, break records, stand out at work, and excel in your respective fields. I will share a few case studies, surprising facts, and the best-held secrets for you to KICKASS.

MORNING ROUTINE AND DECISION MAKING

Born in 385 BC, Aristotle was one of the most intelligent philosophers. He taught and motivated the most outstanding conqueror in the world—Alexander the great!

Aristotle believed that the key to making good decisions is a part of living a good life. Critical decisions need to be made while seeking information and verifying with experts in that domain—most importantly early in the morning.

Next time, when you want to make an important decision, make sure you take such decisions after you get up from an eight-hour sleep and within thirty minutes of waking up.

A study conducted by Harvard University and the University of Utah revealed that morning hours are the best to make wise and ethical decisions. In the experiment, researchers divided the participants into two groups. They gave them some complex problems to solve and report their scores. At the end of the test, participants had to leave the answer sheets on the table without carrying them.

It bewildered researchers for two reasons. The group that took the test in the morning had higher scores than the second group, which took the tests late afternoon. The majority of participants who took the test in the afternoon lied about their scores.

As the day goes by, the mind tends to get tired. The efficiency levels drop along with a lack of self-accountability and chances of dishonesty creeping in. Be cautious. The worst decisions you make in life are the ones you take after 11 pm. This is because the brain slowly gets into sleep mode, making your cognitive and decision-making capabilities weaker.

If you need to make wiser and morally sound decisions, you know at what time you should. Apart from early morning decisions, most of your essential work needs to be done in the first half of the day.

In his study, Shai Danziger, a famous scholar and a researcher in Human decision-making, made few discoveries in the behaviour of judges. He found a certain consistency in the judges' decisions. Prisoners were more likely to be granted parole if the judges heard their case first thing in the morning. People act with compassion in the morning and it slowly dwindles over the day. The same study also revealed that the judges make better compassionate decisions right after lunch once their hunger is replenished and when at ease.

TIP: IF YOU WANT TO SEEK A FAVOUR, ASK THEM FIRST THING IN THE MORNING OR RIGHT AFTER THEY HAVE HAD A GOOD MEAL.

SLEEP WELL

One primary function of sleep is to repair the body and get rid of waste from the brain. Two independent researchers, Aleksanteri and Antoine, discovered this in 2015. They found out that a part of the brain keeps removing toxins, and this part is 60 per cent more productive while you are sleeping. Therefore, it's crucial not to skip sleep, as your brain will miss the chance of repairing itself.

Poor sleep is one primary reason for obesity.

In a 2015 study, scientists proved that sleeping for less than six hours increases obesity as decreased sleep levels increase a hunger hormone in the body, which contributes to overeating. It could be a challenge initially to manage a consistent sleep schedule. Still, it's one of the most significant

ways to improve the quality of your sleep and your quality of life in general.

EFFECTS OF SLEEPLESSNESS

When Fit Bit, a fitness equipment firm, did their study using data insights from many countries, they found out that India is the second most sleep-deprived country, clocking an average of seven hours. Sleeplessness can put you into depression and even result in heart strokes.

Indians born between 1950-2020 should be more worried about their health in the future. India is deemed as the world's capital of diabetes. The diabetic population in the country is close to hitting the alarming mark of 69.9 million by 2025 and 80 million by 2030.

In October 2009, Rajan Das, the youngest CEO and MD of SAP India, a fitness freak and a runner, died of a massive heart attack after returning from his morning workout. Initially, doctors assumed it was because of an injury to his head as he fell while running on a treadmill. However, the autopsy revealed that it was because of an underlying heart disease caused due to lack of sleep. Rajan used to sleep for four to five hours a day.

Rajan was maintaining a good diet, handling stress and exercising. What he missed is sleeping adequately. Anything less than seven hours of sleep among adults is like playing with fire.

Several studies have proven that skipping sleep for a day makes us insulin resistant, like a person with type-2 diabetes. An insufficient amount of this essential hormone leads to weight gain, decreased sexual drive, and increased signs of ageing. Ideally, when we are sleeping, our bodies are repairing themselves, getting rid of toxins, fighting signs of ageing, and strengthening our skeletal and muscular systems.

Not sleeping for eight hours is dangerous for humans, and even more harmful is not getting up by five.

HOW MUCH SHOULD ONE SLEEP?

Most experts recommend sleeping a minimum of seven and a maximum of eight hours for anyone who is twelve years and above. Getting early to bed and early to rise creates the most significant change in your life.

Discipline is the mother of success. Getting up early in the morning is a hard choice, but we have won our first war if we make the hard choice first thing in the morning. 99 per cent of human beings don't see success because they never win their first battle of getting up early.

Make your purpose clear to you—your goal of getting up. It could be anything. Even getting up to think of your loved ones is cool. So get up and do what you love the most.

In a study by Professor Rachel Manber in 1996, she found that fixed wake-up time encourages a regular rhythm of sleep. Waking up at the right time increases sleep quality and keeps you more active in the day.

It's always beneficial to invest in a smart watch that tracks your sleep. After using a Garmin watch, I was astonished to realize that my average sleep every week was around 6.4 hours. Adults should sleep for a minimum of seven hours, and if you are someone who works out and is highly active, eight hours is a must for the body to repair and recover. You should be in your bed by 9 pm, and there is no negotiation. It's your only way to win.

TIPS

- Use your bed only to sleep; you need to refrain from using your bed for anything else apart from sleeping. Else, your mind will start associating

your bed with things that stress you. Like checking social media, watching TV, playing games or anything that might prevent you from falling asleep.

- Never sleep with your phone on your bed. Instead, keep it beside the alarm in sleep mode. That way, the beeps don't disturb you.
- Read before you sleep. I recommend you buy a Kindle. This is the best way to inculcate a good habit of reading; it's the ideal way to fall asleep. The dim light on the kindle will not trouble your pupils. It would be best if you made it a habit to read for thirty minutes every day before bed.

WHAT IF YOU ARE A NIGHT OWL?

Night owls lose a lot in life. Most children develop 'eveningness' in their early teens and last till their thirties.

A study done in 2014 proved that people who sleep late, post 11 pm, end up having more negative thoughts when compared to that of the early birds. Also, morning people don't tend to oversleep on the weekends, unlike the evening ones.

Most late sleepers get into the habit over months and years of getting used to sleeping late. It's an unconscious habit that gets developed. It takes a mere four to five days of discipline to get out of it. I don't feel ashamed to admit that I was a night owl for several years. It took me just a week to break the habit. Little discipline and motivation helped.

To break the habit, I skipped sleeping for a night and the fatigue made me sleep early the next day. I struggled for three days but ended up going to bed early by the end of the fourth day. You require a bit of commitment. This is where the line is drawn between the one who is disciplined and the one who is not.

Research was done in Argentina on hundred elite chess players who played over two hundred games. For better analysis, they divided the players into two groups based on gender and their sleep patterns. They had an option to play the games at their convenience. So the morning folks played in the morning and the night ones in the evening.

Everyone assumed that the morning players made better decisions in the morning and the evening people would make better decisions in the evening. It was astonishing to know that all players, irrespective of their sleep timings, made slow and wise decisions in the morning, regardless of their sleeping habits. As the day passed, all the players took risky and hasty moves towards the evening.

It does not matter if you are a morning or an evening person, male or female or living in India or the United States. Morning decisions are always slower and wiser. That is one reason most business leaders get up early and make the most important decisions first thing in the day.

Make sure you stop being a night owl and start hitting the bed early.

A trick to keeping good habits is to pair them with another habit. It becomes difficult not to let go of a good habit as it impacts the other. In my personal experience, I paired two of my habits, jogging and listening to audiobooks. When I do not feel like going for a jog, losing that day's knowledge from not listening to audiobooks makes me go for the run.

I paired my reading habit with going to bed early. Come what may, I started getting to bed by 8 pm with a book and started getting up at 4 am to jog while listening to audiobooks. As a result, I finished listening to hundreds of audiobooks while jogging in the last couple of years.

SUMMER MIRACLE

A good friend of mine shared an exciting observation from her teens. Until her early teens, she had the potential to qualify for the finals of the world cup if there was one being given to the laziest person. Of course, it reflected in her grades.

She was a below-average performer in school and always flunked one or two subjects in the internals. However, she surprised everyone by topping the class after our seventh grade summer break. There has been no looking back for her since then. It was a summer miracle that changed her life.

Summers in southern India are horrible. The temperature soars up to forty-five to forty-eight degrees centigrade and nights were awful without air conditioning. In addition, power cuts were quite common in the late nineties. I remember going through the pain of bearing an average six-hour power cut every day in the summers.

My friend lived in a locality where the power cuts were between 5 am and 10 am, from April to mid-June. One could never sleep without a fan above. To avoid the discomfort, her entire family started sleeping sharply by 9:30 pm. She slept like any other teen for a good eight hours. She ended up getting around 5 am for the entire summer.

She began reading after waking up. It became a habit she couldn't get rid of. Getting up at 5 am changed her life forever. Getting up early made her an achiever from being below average. She is now a doctor in California.

PERFORMANCE

When I was young, Fridays and Saturday nights were meant to party. When the discipline of a morning routine crept in, the fear of missing a run or

losing on listening to a book kept me off from the weekend parties. I realized it created a tremendous difference in the time I had in hand.

Once we get into habits like getting up at five and having a morning routine. It is extremely difficult to get into bad habits. It's my observation that people who get into the habit of getting up early in their early teens seldom get into drugs or drinking. There are the ones who end up contributing a lot to humanity.

As mentioned, when you compare the top performers in sports, school and at work, they all have the same thing in common—they all are early risers.

According to Harvard biologist Christopher Randell, when it comes to business success morning people hold important cards. Research showed that they tend to get better grades in school, which gets them into better colleges, leading to better job opportunities.

Morning people also anticipate problems and try to minimize them. They are always proactive. Several studies have linked this trait, proactivity, with better job performance, tremendous career success, and higher wages.

In my early years of working, I met Ryan D Silva, the sales director of American Express, India. He was one of the most levelheaded bosses handling efficient teams. He was always an overachiever but never appeared like the hardworking type. In an offshore event, I asked him what makes him what he is.

He asked me to show up early. Everyone knew Ryan to be the first person in the office every morning. I tried following his advice for a few months, but it didn't help, as my wake up time was still the same. I was early because I was skipping breakfast at home and started having it in the office.

It took me a few months to understand what Ryan meant was to get up early.

When I started getting up early for a couple of months, I began to feel great and my performance increased tremendously. Once we get into the habit of getting up early, that is where discipline slowly kicks in. Discipline is like a disease; it spreads very quickly, unlike laziness.

WAKING UP AT FIVE

It is ingrained in the human mind to get up before sunrise. It was followed from the hunter-gather years till the early 1900s where humans were still struggling to break their daily bread. In ancient India, only the rich had the privilege to sleep till sunrise. Every other person was disciplined and hardworking.

Scott Adams, the man who created *Dilbert Comics*, finds mornings to be most productive. Most of his creative work is done in his early hours, and he feels that sleep deprivation can knock off a good ten points from your IQ score.

While writing this book, the best and the most logical thoughts struck in my mind in the early hours of the day when I made a habit of typing at 4 am. I ensured I had eight hours of sleep by sleeping at 8 pm.

Most of the time, we end up committing the mistake of sleeping late and assuming our alarm will help us get out of bed. It's very challenging and takes away most of your energies, making you feel depleted the entire day. Similarly, a survey done on employees found out that the early risers (5 am) take home an average of twenty- eight percent more salaries than the late bloomers.

Where is the lag?

The lag is in not knowing where to start.

TIP: THE ONLY WAY TO GET UP EARLY IS TO SLEEP EARLY. MAKE SURE YOU SLEEP A MINIMUM OF SEVEN HOURS BEFORE YOUR WAKE UP TIME.

Making a routine of hitting the bed by nine might sound absurd. Until the late 1990s, the average sleeping time around the world was 9 pm.

It is never late to make such choices.

TIPS FOR WAKING UP:

- Keep your alarm at the farthest corner of the room, and you can always get up to the most energizing song. For example, I wake up to *It's my life* by Bon Jovi.
- As soon as you get up, splash some cold water on your face. Do this for just three days in a row. You will quickly catch up with the habit.
- Sometimes, you find yourself trying to get back to sleep immediately after waking up. The trick is not to find ways to sleep but to jump off your bed and get out of the room within minutes of waking up.
- Switch on the lights. Let your favourite music play while you freshen up.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, seven times Mr.Universe and the thirty-eighth governor of California; in his book *Total recall*, states that his success is all because of the discipline his father instilled in him when he was a kid. Arnold was never allowed breakfast if he did not play football first thing in the morning. So his ritual was getting up at five and playing football every

day, even in the rain, till he was eighteen. He owes all his success to his father's discipline of pushing him to be a morning person.

You can become a celebrity if you can get up before sunrise every day for the next 365 days and do what makes you great.

The most powerful habit you master is getting up at five in the morning, and you have learned almost everything. Your will power will be under your control and you can gain mastery over many things. Waking up early will be exciting if we have a strong sense of purpose.

LOVE MOTIVATES

Most of the days, when I was writing this book, my routine was getting up early, and every half an hour when I took a break, I would walk into the room where my kids slept. I torched the phone towards the ceiling so that the light won't disturb them. Then, I watched their lovely faces in the dim reflection. Those beautiful moments kept my motivation going and helped me to express myself better in this book.

The power of love is the reason why parents work hard to raise their kids. Their responsibility to give a good life to their offspring is the byproduct of their love. Don't be surprised to know that your parents were mostly like you when they were in their teens. It's the other way too.

You carry the same DNA as theirs, and more or less, there is not much difference between you both while growing up, minus the little influence technology might have had on you.

Time has transformed them into different personalities, working hard, getting up early, and being responsible for their family and others around them. The same will happen with you when you grow and have a family to

take care of. There are only two ways humans learn, one by self-learning and the other by adversity.

Your parents strive hard to teach you from their leanings instead of making you learn from pain. However irresponsible you are, once you start loving someone, you become responsible for his or her happiness and wellbeing. You will eventually transform into a responsible adult while being accountable for another life form.

It is also proven that the probability of you reaching your goals when the benefit is attached to a loved one is three hundred percent. If you earn to keep your family happy, your probability of earning more is very high. If you study to make your parents proud of you, the probability of you doing well is exponential.

Falling in love at a young age is not only blissful; it makes you feel responsible for the other person. People who are in love act more responsible towards society. Childhood love takes you to thoughts you can never imagine. It takes you to a different planet and back several times.

GOALS

Getting up at five is incredible, but at what capacity?

“There is nothing on earth you cannot have once you have mentally accepted the fact that you can have it.”

– ROBERT COLLIER²

Most people are depressed because of having lack of attainable goals in life. Goals add meaning to how you live and who you are. 99 per cent of your goals are derived from your immediate responsibilities. For example,

performing well in your exams, excelling in a sport or hobby and earning a certain amount of money.

Setting goals does not require hard work. All you need to have is focus on the end result in mind. You need to have measurable goals with a timeline; else, they will slowly fizzle off. For example, if you need to lose weight, aim for a timeline and a specific amount of weight. Just having a goal of losing weight will not help you.

Unless I have a proven method and succeed in walking the talk, I cannot do justice to the point I am driving in this book. Therefore, I took on a few challenges.

Setting goals, getting up before sunrise and achieving them has worked for me in the past. But, I wanted to show a proven model to my reader and to push my limits to get the adrenaline rush in shouting out to the world that this habit is a killer one.

Getting up early and spending just one hour on your goal creates a tremendous difference. I lived off as an example. I started getting up at five and started running, and in less than fifty days did my half marathon on December 2, 2020.

For the love I have for my reader, I accomplished three out of four new goals to prove that getting up early helps.

- Lost five kilograms in ninety days. (I was weighing eighty kilograms when I started this chapter).
- Ran five kilometres in thirty-five minutes. (I could barely walk five kilometres in fifty minutes).

- Swam across the Krishna river. (overcame my fear of water and learnt to swim) in sixty days.
- Had to do the trek to Borasu pass in 2021. (I couldn't travel because of the pandemic. I will, soon).

I could achieve most of my goals, as they were measurable and time-specific.

MEASURING GOALS

Studies have proved that you need 10,000 hours of practice to become a world-class expert. So, ideally, three hours of training every day for about nine years—that's it!

So if you want to become a great sports person or excel in art or any field of interest, it is possible by sparing three hours every day. Ideally, if you want to become like Virat Kohli at twenty-five years of age or a civil servant, you need to start working from the age of eighteen.

What cannot be measured cannot be accomplished!

To reach your goals, you need to write them down and start measuring at regular intervals. Write it down; do not type. The magic doesn't work. You need to write your goals on paper, along with the timelines required to achieve them. Write why you are setting the plan and how you will feel after achieving the goal. Also, write how it impacts your loved ones.

Most importantly, you need to mentally exercise a lot and imagine yourself reaching your goal. This will help you keep focus and push you towards achieving your objective.

A study by Harvard Medical School found that people simulate the same part of the brain during visualization, which gets activated while performing the same in action. Therefore, if you visualize yourself reaching your goal, you improve your chances of success since you have already done it in your mind.

In the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing, Michael Phelps, the American swimmer who set world records in swimming, had a brutal encounter in the final race. Phelps was one hell of a swimmer and was sure shot at winning the medal. However, halfway through the swim, his goggles got filled with water, and he could not see where he was going. Despite this, he went ahead and won the gold medal for the 200-meter butterfly swim.

He was able to reach the finish line with sheer visualization of himself, making it to the endpoint. However, with such a handicap, he could still count the number of strokes he needed to make to reach the endpoint with his eyes closed.

Athletes like Phelps get trained to visualize themselves winning. They spend hours in training and mentally visualize themselves winning the race.

Rhonda Byrne, in her best-selling book, *The Secret*, says that winning happens twice, once in your mind and the second in reality.

Visualizing is one key element of reaching your goals.

EXERCISE

For everyone, waking up early is a little challenging. Your body wants you to sleep for some more time. So you need to stretch your muscles, get off the bed and walk a few feet to awaken your senses.

The first thing I do after getting up is to indulge in as many push-ups as possible. I don't keep a count; I do one set to failure. This helps alert the muscles, and of course, increases your muscle endurance, throwing your body into super active mode.

Exercise is something I cannot live without. It doesn't matter if you wear the most expensive T-shirt on an untuned upper. It makes you look dumb. The cheapest clothing on a well-toned body always stands out. It tells the world that you care for yourself and are disciplined.

Exercise benefits the brain in many ways. Regular physical activity boosts the part of the brain that handles problem solving.

A study from 2011 performed on 171 children proved the same. Children who did a bit of cardio scored higher than the ones who didn't. Researchers found out that aerobic activity increases blood flow to your prefrontal cortex, which helps in problem solving. In adults, one hour of physical activity in a week showed improvement in their heart and brain function.

People suffering from depression have a very low level of serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter that helps you regulate your mood. Serotonin can be increased by exercising and running, which is best done in the early hours.

A ready-made cure for people who suffer from depression—all you need to do is wake up at five every day for a week and go for a run. You should be feeling better by the third day itself.

A fulfilling, successful life lies in your habit of doing the right things first thing in the morning.

ACTIONABLE ADVICE

You are now equipped with understanding the value of being disciplined and working towards your goals. Every night you should go to bed with the happiness of getting up and doing what you like.

Everything is possible as long as you get up early and chase your dreams. So take time off the book, relax in your chair, don't control anything, and let your thoughts flow; imagine the heights you can reach by hitting the bed early and getting up at five.

LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS OF SENIOR CITIZENS:

97 per cent of the people we interviewed told us that the key to success is being disciplined.

Discipline comes from being habituated to respecting your timelines. Waking up before sunrise every day will instil a strong sense of respect towards your timelines.

Eventually, you will end working towards your goals.

- Win a year by winning a month.
- Win a month by winning a day.
- Win a day by getting up at five and doing what you love.

Often we keep our ideas in our head where it's hard to develop them. But simply by voicing these ideas aloud, we increase their chances of being realised.

Do this exercise: Don't read further unless you finish writing them down.

Write the names of the two people whom you love the most.

Write two things you wanted to do for them.

Write your most important goals and timelines to achieve them.

The only thing stopping you from reaching your goals or doing something for your loved ones is that one lazy bum reading this.

Time to Arise, Awake and Kickass!

BE A HERO

What makes you a Hero?

Aitzaz Hasan was a fourteen-year-old student from Pakistan, who lost his life saving two thousand of his schoolmates and staff. Atizaz tried to stop a suicide bomber from entering his school with a detonator. Unfortunately, the bomber blew himself up along with Atizaz in the fight. Atizaz sacrificed his life to save his school. He was pronounced as a national hero and named Herald's person of the year in 2014.

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’

– DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR³

Heroes are the ones who sacrifice a part of their time, resources, or even their life for the sake of others without anticipating anything in return. Ideally, these are selfless people who volunteered for a cause greater than their life. Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg, and best of all, people like Aitzaz Hasan.

Heroism is every human's ambition. The essence of being a social animal itself is the hunt for being recognized and respected by our fellow human beings. The awakening of the social animal in humans is most needed for society, more than the contributions from doctors, scientists, and engineers.

The world is badly in need of the next generation heroes who are volunteers.

VOLUNTEERING

Every human yearns for respect from others. Unknowingly we spend a large part of our earnings to look good in the eyes of others. The clothes we wear, the cars we drive, and the money we spend on fancy things. We do it to show off that we are successful.

We tell the world what we could attain in life. We try to gain the envy of others by showing things that we have that they don't have. Personal success makes others envious of us, which makes them look up to us. Unfortunately, we mistake this for respect. We earn respect by giving something we have, like money and time.

Volunteering is one way we serve society. It's about showing our gratitude towards the universe. Volunteering doesn't mean doing only communal service. It starts at home with family, friends, and people who are associated with us. The value of our life depends on the number of people we serve.

When we spend time helping people, it drives a great sense of satisfaction, especially in helping someone in crisis. Giving makes us feel connected to others. It will change the way we see ourselves, which makes us much happier. Volunteering helps us reflect on our inner values and builds a strong character.

Research done at the University of California, Los Angeles, proved that thinking about inner values makes people less stressed and makes us better individuals. People who volunteer are always positive and they have a zero chance of depression as they start living for others and their hope in life never dwindles.

Volunteering increases optimism. Optimists are always cheerful and they take care of their health and the people around them. If you want to wish for one thing for your children, wish for optimism.

Volunteering helps you in making friends with people with a similar mindset. Networking is key to success and through volunteering opportunities, you meet compassionate humans from different walks of life who think alike. Having volunteering experience in your profile is like your resume on Redbull. Studies suggest that people who volunteer have 30 per cent more chances of getting a better job and better career growth than those who don't.

Every year around 26.5 per cent of Americans volunteer, whereas it's only 1.5 per cent in India.

One reason for the low number is the struggling middle-class population in India. Middle-class parents put more emphasis on their kids to focus on their careers and increase their income.

However, the Indian Gen Z is changing the scenario. Gen Z are the ones born after 1998 and are also called zoomers.

When we started our volunteering organization in 2020, we were a mere seven-member team. However, we soon caught up with the numbers, and in less than a year, we grew to 1600 volunteers. 94 per cent of our volunteers were in the age group of eighteen to twenty-one.

The zoomers will change the way the world looks at us in the next ten years. However, there needs to be a solid social awakening about the importance of volunteering among the other age groups.

“If our hopes of building a better and safer world are to become more than wishful thinking, we will need the engagement of volunteers more than ever.”

– KOFI ANNAN^{[4](#)}

VOLUNTEER AS A CHILD

My school’s motto was ‘Love and Service’—one main reason, service has caught up with me. Studying in schools run by missionaries helps us in identifying our values and morals at a young age.

“Education should be taught by persons with a passion for teaching but not by those who do it for money or any other material things. Knowledge from such education will be priceless”

– JIDDU KRISHNAMURTHY^{[5](#)}

Fortunately, I fell into that category that Jiddu Krishnamurthy mentioned. I studied in a Christian missionary school run by brothers. Irrespective of the faith they had in their religion, they were selfless people who wanted to help others, who taught me.

We had special periods every week reserved for moral classes. We seldom find it in schools that treat education as pure business. Apart from the effort of my parents, my schooling helped in my ethical upbringing. They taught us to volunteer from our early teens.

Children spend more time at school than at home. The impact of a school and the teachers is higher on their upbringing than their parents. I request parents not to send their children to schools that run for profits. These schools are like any other sales organization. Your child is their product that needs to perform better in the finals for them to generate more business.

Your child might get into a premium college and do well in their careers. They will eventually lose the race of life if their upbringing lacks a sound value system.

They will go through personal hardships. Most hardships come at a later point in life. You might not be there to help them out. It is always advisable to put them in schools run by missionaries of any religion.

“An education obtained with money is worse than no education at all.”

– SOCRATES⁶

HOW LEADERS ARE MADE?

I was the speaker in over twenty colleges and loved every moment of it. How can one become a leader—is the most asked question by the students. Several theories have been explained and strategies have been defined. However, leadership does not come with implementing strategies. It comes with experience and having the right intent and it starts with compassion and the will to help.

To become a leader, you need to volunteer as much as possible and devote yourself to loving and serving others. Leadership always follows the ones with bigger hearts.

LIVE LONGER

Volunteering makes you identify your life’s purpose and makes you live longer.

We get caught up in the rat race, and most of us fail to realize our passions and life’s purpose. Volunteering will help us identify our life’s purpose.

Most people die not because they retire from their profession but because of the emptiness in their life of not having a goal after retirement.

Two researchers went on a mission to find out why the highest concentration of centenarians lived on the small island of Okinawa in southern Japan. They spent a reasonable amount of time interacting with the locals and understanding their genetics, food and behavioural patterns.

Their findings surprised the entire world.

The secret of living long and healthy is having a purpose in life. Most of the centenarians have been volunteering since their young ages and took up new careers even after retirement. One of the island's inhabitants became a painter at eighty, and one of them became a musician at seventy-four.

Everyone gets up early before sunrise. It is one secret of their longevity. Every morning, they wake up with a sense of purpose and start working towards their goals. Eating simple vegetarian meals also added to their increased life span.

By finding a purpose that drives you every day, you can focus your energy in the right direction and extend your happiness on earth. Social interactions are also a vital element of a long life, like meeting friends, attending events and volunteering in groups.

When humans ripe with age, movement becomes difficult because of the loss of bone and muscle density. Sickness with sadness slowly enters our life. That's why we hardly notice old folks laughing.

If you want your grandparents to live longer, volunteer to visit them often. Social interactions keep people happy and make them want to spend more time with their loved ones, and such stimulation keeps them young.

Most nations keep a physical retirement age at an average of sixty years. Countries with a higher retirement age are proof that people live longer when they have a purpose and are occupied.

Below are a few examples of retirement age versus life span of its citizens as of 2021.

INDIA

Retirement age - 60 years.

Average Life Expectancy - 69.65 years.

NORWAY

Retirement age - 67 years.

Average Life Expectancy - 89.94 years.

BANGLADESH

Retirement age - 59 years.

Average Life Expectancy - 73.57 years.

FINLAND

Retirement age - 68 years.

Average Life Expectancy - 82.48 years.

NEPAL

Retirement age - 60 years.

Average Life Expectancy - 71.74 years.

Norway and Finland have a higher retirement age—one main reason for their citizens to have a longer life span. India, Nepal, and Bangladesh have

a lower retirement age with a lower life span. This is one reason for the United Nations to increase the retirement age of its staffers to sixty-five years.

Being a volunteer at a younger age will help people connect with the world and work for a higher purpose. Volunteers can identify new goals and passions even after retirement that makes them live longer.

Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl lost his family during World War II. He was among the very few who survived a German concentration camp for two years. He said that people who saw no purpose in life were quickly lost. The reason for his survival was hope and a purpose to help others.

It is your responsibility to encourage senior citizens in your family and friends to find new passions or volunteer for a cause to stay engaged. Volunteering is at the very core of being a human.

“No one has made it through life without someone else’s help.”

– HEATHER FRENCH HENRY⁷

VOLUNTEER TO LIVE AFTER DEATH

The only way to live even after death, is by becoming an organ donor.

Some religions are against organ donations and few argue organs need to be donated only to people following the same religion. They use concepts like missing ‘Moksha’ or claim that the soul would not rest in peace.

Does it matter?

There is nothing proven about the soul resting in peace or ‘Moksha’ (not having another life). We cannot assume things that we don’t know and

come to conclusions. These are assumptions written in religious texts by the same folks thousands of years ago, who believed that the earth is flat and is the center of the universe.

Harvard Medical School defines death as an irreversible coma. Once oxygen supply stops to the brain, it stops firing its neurons and stops working forever. We still haven't advanced to a stage to restart the brain with technology; therefore, we dispose of the body by burying or by burning. Whereas by donating our organs, we contribute towards disposing our body by helping others and in a scientific and eco-friendly manner.

The best way to help our fellow humans even after death is by organ donation or by donating our body to a hospital, to use it as a subject for testing. That way, our body can still be of use even after we stop breathing.

Seventeen people die each day waiting for an organ donation. One donor can save up to eight lives. There are thousands of heart-touching incidents of people donating organs and giving life to others.

BY BEING AN ORGAN DONOR, WE ARE GIVING MORE MEANING TO OUR DEATH, IF NOT OUR LIFE.

The same goes for donating blood. Every two seconds, someone needs blood. You can donate blood every ninety days, and our body can replace donated blood every fifty-six days.

There are many health benefits associated with donating blood.

- It helps in maintaining a healthy liver.
- Helps maintain iron levels.
- Reduces the risk of a heart attack.
- Helps in stimulating new blood cell production.

My mother donated blood twenty-seven times in the last twenty years. It takes thirty minutes of your time to donate. One blood donation can save up to three lives.

We can donate organs only in the case of accidental death. Prolonged illness cases can only be considered for testing and research.

India's organ donation rate is the lowest in the world. There should be enough awareness to be spread and followed. If we cannot donate, the other way to save lives is to volunteer to spread the good about blood and organ donation.

WE NEED PLANETEERS

I grew up watching *Captain Planet and the Planetegers*. It's an animated television series about a group of superheroes that volunteer to save the planet from the villains who try to pollute it.

I was very determined as a child to protect the environment and stay responsible towards nature. However, over the years, adulthood slowly took over the child in me. Like any other grownup, my priorities from worrying about the planet and pollution changed to taking care of my family and finances.

It was after the first solo trip that my love for the world around me bounced back.

I started reading a lot about what's happening to the earth and how we can contribute to a better future. It pained a lot to realize the unrecoverable damage we humans have done to our home and to the future generations to come. I challenge that we will be called idiots of humanity by those born a few hundred years from now, like how we named the past as dark ages.

We assume the dark ages of human stupidity are over. The real darkness is where humanity is right now.

If the current scenario continues and if we don't take corrective action, humans will have to roam with gas masks in the future and children will be born with deformities.

It's been twenty-one years since *Captain Planet* was first telecasted. Unfortunately, the damage to the earth has tripled since then.

There is untold suffering awaiting humanity round the corner. The question is, how near are we to the corner?

THE BIGGEST DANGER

If our kitchen catches fire, would we wait for our entire house to be on fire to take action?

We will run to the kitchen to douse the flames.

Our earth's kitchen is already on fire with pollution and global warming. It is soon catching up country by country. It's time for every human to panic. There is enough damage done which is already irreversible.

"We've wasted three decades. Since we were first warned by scientists that the climate was changing in perilous ways."

– **BILL MCKIBBEN**[8](#)

In 2021, as per the United Nations, we have another ten years left to stop the damage. Otherwise, it will be irreversible forever.

FLOATING ISLANDS

In 1997, a boat captain Charles Moore, while sailing home to California, he was surprised to see a massive island in the Pacific Ocean spread over thousands of kilometres. When he approached to haul his boat, it amazed him to find that it was not an island but a vast pile of floating garbage.

It was named the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which lies between California and Hawaii, and now it's half the size of India. This monster is growing at an alarming rate of 6 per cent every year. It grew four times its size since it was discovered.

Researchers discover that around 74 per cent of sea turtles' diet that live around the garbage patch consists of plastic. They eventually die after eating it. Fish can barely survive for days. There are around five such massive garbage patches floating in the oceans across the planet. Every year lakhs of birds, fishes, and mammals die because of these demonic floating patches.

One plastic bag takes about five hundred years to degenerate. Our contribution as an Indian towards this floating garbage every year is about 3 kilograms of plastic waste per person.

We are directly feeding the cancer of the oceans, and it should stop.

COLLAPSED AS A COUNTRY

As per WHO 2020 report, Delhi is ranked as the tenth most polluted city in the world. India is very unfortunate to have twenty-two out of the top thirty most polluted cities on earth.

Breathing air in Delhi is equivalent to smoking five cigarettes per day. So if you are in Delhi for a year, your lungs get affected the same way as that of a smoker who smokes 1,850 cigarettes a year. Imagine what happens to the

little ones born in Delhi and the other twenty-one cities in India. India tops the world with the highest number of deaths caused by pollution, followed by China and Pakistan.

24.5 per cent of deaths in India are because of pollution. Yet, the layman knows little that the cause of cancer and other irrecoverable diseases is pollution. Pollution is a major reason why people who don't smoke or drink die of cancer.

My mother ate healthily and did regular yoga, never smoked or drank. I am not sure if I can blame genetics or pollution as the cause of my mothers' cancer.

One in every four people whom we know will die prematurely because of pollution.

WE ARE THE KILLERS

I loved to feed sparrows along with my mom on our terrace when I was a kid. It's been twenty years since we spotted a sparrow in my hometown. They are all extinct. Everyone knows the reason.

Humans are 0.01 per cent of all the living beings on earth, and our stupidity has wiped out 60 per cent of the animals and bird population in the last forty years.

India, Indonesia, and Brazil are the top countries which has the most threatened animals and birds. Without the proper ratio of humans to plants and animals, the planet's ecological balance gets disturbed.

This will be disastrous for humans.

HUMAN LOVE FOR DEAD HAIR AND SKIN

Every year 100 crore rabbits, 1.4 crore foxes, 1.35 crore raccoon dogs are killed in fur farms in China. China is the biggest killer of animals, followed by Denmark, Poland, and the Netherlands.

Most animals are skinned alive; their hearts stop beating 5-10 minutes after their skin is peeled off. There are thousands of horrifying facts floating on the internet about animal farming and human brutality towards animals.

China's biggest customer and demand for fur comes from the USA—the major culprit. The United States has many restrictions on killing animals for fur. But they are free to import from a different country. So it's like killing someone is a crime, but hiring someone to do the job is not.

The rich American hires a poor Chinese farmer to kill animals to make his coat.

Many countries have already banned the culling of animals for fur farming. The United States' ban on fur products will save crores of animals every year. We can't afford the slaughter in the name of luxury.

Every year 2.9 crore cows are killed to make leather handbags. India contributes to 13 per cent of the world's leather industry and 9 per cent of the footwear production, being the second largest in the world. India's treatment of animals is the cruelest. Though we have several laws to protect animals. Fear of breaking the rules is hardly found among our fellow citizens.

“While the cows were being loaded, I could hear the gurgling of one cow choking on her own blood. The rope in her nose had been improperly placed, and with the constant tugging on it by rough handlers, as well as

being tethered to her fellow cattle during the twelve-hour march, it had ripped through her nose, and blood was pouring down her face.”

– PETA WORKER²

Raising cattle for beef consumes ten times more resources than poultry and pork. Eliminating beef from our diet is the best thing we can do for the planet. Its even better to turn into vegetarians as livestock-based food production contributes to 14.5 per cent of the global greenhouse gas emissions.

As of 2021, famous brands like Prada, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Burberry, Fendi, Roberto Cavalli and many more still use leather and fur from culling animals.

It shouldn't fancy us wearing dead skin around our waist or dead hair in our coats. We should voluntarily stop buying fur and leather products. Discourage using such brands that promote animal leather.

We should never support cruelty in any form.

DEATH ZONE

In 1970, unusual dying fish populations in the oceans led to the discovery of oceanic dead zones. Oceanic dead zones are the areas where there is reduced or zero oxygen levels in the water where no living organism can survive. Marine life will suffocate and die if they pass through or venture into a dead zone.

They are caused because of extensive agriculture, industrial activities and by letting sewage water into the oceans. A friendly dolphin swimming into these zones suffers from a lack of oxygen and dies within fifteen minutes.

The largest oceanic dead zone is now the size of West Bengal. There are over five hundred dead zones in the oceans as of 2021. Research shows that dead zones have grown four times in their sizes and five times in numbers since 1950.

The catastrophe that the planet is heading into is hardly covered in the daily news. As a species, we are more concerned about the past than the future. We love looking at how far we have come without paying attention to where we are heading.

**AS A RACE, WE ARE SLEEPWALKING TOWARDS THE
EDGE OF A CLIFF.**

All the above damages are due to increased use of fossil fuels, deforestation, overexploitation of animals for meat, leather and due to heavy use of plastic.

The health of mother earth doesn't look good. The earth's vital signs are dropping. But, unless we jump into action making those minor changes, we will not be able to do justice to the opportunity called life.

LITTLE LEFT TO LIVE

We worry about poor grades in college and insufficient earnings. However, we seldom look into how badly planet earth is scoring in terms of depleting its natural resources.

As per the World-O-Meter statistics 2021, with our current rate of consumption of natural resources, we will deplete:

- Oil reserves in the next 42 years.
- Natural gas in the next 156 years.
- Coal in the next 406 years.

This should be our biggest concern!

Our greed is leading to massive consumption of earth's resources. We are selfish and worried only about our time left on earth. We over-consume, pollute, and are most irresponsible as a race.

YOU ARE HERE TO CREATE A NEW RUCKUS

Our own thoughts discourage most of us, we think of giving back to the society only when we are content. "Being content" is a highly abused word. Humans are never content and our greed to earn never stops. Giving back is all about our upbringing and how our goals are aligned with society.

People who keep making money among the top priority in life are the ones who go through the most suffering. Once you push money away from your priorities and keep doing what you love and while contributing your efforts to humanity, money will automatically fill the void it is supposed to fill. You will stop solving problems using money and run after chasing your goals.

I am not trying to sell my opinion here. I am talking out of my experience. Money is the by-product of your contribution to the world. You need to put others' interests first and start thinking beyond your lifetime. I want people to work together towards building a great planet. We need to think like a human and act like a global citizen.

It's so fulfilling to accomplish your childhood goals. As you grow older, you will find more happiness in helping others reach their goals. This effort of mine is to guide my readers in being more human and reaching their goals.

We only have one life. We need to fill it with love, joy, meaning, and inspiration.

If we believe in ourselves, being thankful, humble and inspiring to others, no goal is unattainable. Our lives will be meaningless if we are not ambitious about the world after we are gone. So start having goals that are attainable a hundred years from today. You won't see your success, but it will make you live for a higher purpose and make you a selfless and better human.

I believe, in a few centuries from today, there will be no countries or boundaries. People will stop fighting over land and natural resources; there will be no armies or wars. Instead, humanity will be facing a bigger problem where everyone will fight together to survive as a species.

As a contributor to humanity, it's our responsibility to act now!

Everyone needs to volunteer to

- Turn into vegetarians
- Stop using fossil fuels
- Recycle and reduce plastic
- Reduce water wastage
- Reduce pesticides on plants
- Avoid products made from animals

The real heroes are the ones who take action and are concerned about the planet and the future of humanity.

MY TWO CENTS

Like any other teenager, I was rebellious in my teens. I believed I was meant for bigger things. I questioned authority and did what I felt was right. However, I was upset with the way society was heading.

I grew up to become an angry man, not knowing where to vent my anger. I was against the concept of marriage, and having kids was a strict no. I thought I would become selfish, worrying about my family and ignore the bigger things I was born for.

Marriage strengthened my commitment to give back. My wife insisted that a part of our financial planning should be towards charity, and we committed to give 10 per cent of our earnings. Anything left after the donation will go into our essentials. My kids made me more generous. They made me a better person. They put more responsibility on me to make the world a better place.

The day my son was born in 2017, he was kept in an incubator for a few days. I spent sleepless nights watching him in the incubator. I was not worried, but I couldn't digest the fact that it was a life form that came out of my wife. Though everyone was congratulating me, I felt no joy. Instead, I was very curious about what I could do with the new company.

That was when I promised myself that I would make this guy someone who will contribute most of his time to others. I am not going to rub my interest on him. Let his free will take him where he wants to go. But I believe somewhere, his journey on this planet will add more meaning to humanity. I will guide him. I will be that guide whom the tourist loves to spend the most time with.

I am going to teach my children to volunteer as the first thing. That's how they will become better humans.

ACTIONABLE ADVICE

Here is a challenge for you:

1. In the next fifteen days, visit an orphanage and an old age home. Spend half a day in each of the places.

Write what you can do in your capacity to make them happy.

2. Volunteer with two nonprofits that work in the area of environment in the next 30 days.

Write ways you can contribute to preserving nature.

Whatever you write will eventually become your personal mission statement in helping others.

LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS OF SENIOR CITIZENS:

96 per cent of the people said that most of their happiness came from helping others.

As I write this in the month of August 2021, my fifty-eight year old mother is suffering from stage 4 breast cancer which has metastasized to the lungs. 80 per cent of her lungs are damaged. She has difficulty breathing, sleeping,

and eating. It tears me to pieces to see her in immense pain. She wishes her body to be donated as a subject for research. That way, her body can be of some use to humanity.

She is a HERO.

The world, along with humanity, is sinking. It needs more volunteers to save it.

I want you to lead the next generations.

I want you to start volunteering and become a hero!

BECOME A DROMOMANIAC

Centuries ago most kings in India used to send their sons on solo trips. Once they attained the age of sixteen and after completing their basic education, they were made to travel solo around the country in the guise of a common man for several months with very little money.

Do you know why?

“Run from what’s comfortable. Forget safety. Live where you fear to live. Destroy your reputation. Be notorious. I have tried prudent planning long enough. From now on I’ll be mad.”

–**MOHAMMED RUMI**^{[10](#)}

The kings believed that education within walls would never make a man what he is supposed to become. Unless the prince goes around and understands how his people lived and earned their daily bread, he will not be able to become a better ruler without first-hand knowledge.

Also, travelling with less money will make them live the life of a commoner and go through the same hardships ordinary people go through. This will make them more compassionate, which will help them understand their subjects’ lives better.

Ever wondered what happened to the Nepali prince, who stepped out of his palace for his first travel, somewhere five hundred years before Christ?

He became whom we call the ‘Gautama Buddha’, the founder of Buddhism.

DROMOMANIAC

Dromos is an ancient Greek word that relates to journey. Manic is being an enthusiast. ‘Dromomaniac’ in this context refers to having an immense intensity to travel. It’s another word for being a wanderlust. Human life is one long quest for happiness. Some turn to money, some to love, and few seek happiness and meaning in travel.

What is your best childhood experience?

I bet 96 percent of young adults would recollect moments from a school picnic or a family trip. For most Indians, travel is synonymous with a pilgrimage. Most middle-class travels happen to a holy place. Thanks to having many gods in the religion I was born into, at least my childhood travel went into visiting various pilgrim destinations instead of one.

My middle-class background restricted leisure travel while I grew up. Once I was financially independent, I started travelling a lot with friends to exotic destinations. Travel is always fun. We unwind ourselves with our loved ones and get to feel the independence of not attending our daily chores.

As social animals, we enjoy travelling in groups, with family and friends. Travel increases the bonding with people whom we travel with. However, transformational magic happens when you travel alone.

“Solo Travel: The goal is to die with memories, not things.”

Individuals reach the highest level of self-consciousness when travelling alone. It’s an indicator of human wellbeing. Solo travel, unlike group travel, is a low budget journey, sometimes to unplanned and unknown destinations.

Most of my solo travels were a one-way flight ticket to a random place. Only the length of the trip is planned, not the destination.

On one of the trips, I ended up in Haridwar and took a bus from there to Srinagar. Spending most of my life in south India. I could barely manage Hindi. Reading was twice as difficult as I could speak. I couldn't read the board on the bus properly. I was under the impression that the bus was headed to Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir, but I ended up in a small town in Garhwal hills with a similar name, which is 602 kilometres from Srinagar. That's how it is, without a phone and access to GPS.

All adventures begin at the end of your ignorance and comfort zone.

I was always well prepared for such incidents as I carry my single bedroom tent along wherever I go. So accommodation was never a problem, and all the while I met good people who helped me with directions and good food. I made great friends with people whom I could have never met if it was a planned trip.

NAMING A FEW, I STILL KEEP IN TOUCH

- Buntty Bhai, who sells the best Pani Puri, near Lakshman Jhula. His dream is to have a chain of Pani Puri stalls.
- Ganga Tyagi, from Rishikesh, is a young and adventurous river rafting guide. He aims to own a house.
- Jagdish Sati, from Karna Prayag, is a blue-collar employee working in the cargo division of the Delhi Airport. He wants to give good education to his kids.

Travel makes you appreciate little things in life. I roamed with the sadhus and had my best meals with the destitutes.

On one of my travels in 2015, I randomly landed in Mana village. The last Indian village in the Himalayas, which is 24 kms from the border of Tibet and 26 kms from the Indo-China border, is at an altitude of 3,200 meters and covered in snow for six months. The temperature drops up to minus 13 degrees centigrade. The entire village population migrates to a lower altitude in winters.

I got the opportunity to work as the head of customer relations, product development, sales, and collections, in a Tea stall in Mana.

I made forty rupees on the first day and sixty and hundred in the next two days. The perks were good with Roti and Sabzi on the house and unlimited Chai. My employer was a migrant from Uttarkashi and a gentleman. He was the only person in the entire village who agreed to give me a job. I worked with him for three days with absolute job satisfaction.

Business as usual:

- 20 per cent of our customers forgot to pay for the Chai; it was my responsibility to remind them.
- However careful we were, there was always a discrepancy between the number of *Chais* sold and the money collected. The deficit averages were around 3-5 per cent.
- Most people gathered in the stall for no reason; it was my duty to keep asking them if they needed anything every fifteen minutes.
- My employer kept everyone engaged in some interesting discussions, though I failed to understand their slang. I use a friendly nod with a smile.

I wanted to experience what it was like—being a nobody—living in a strange place far off from home without any identity of my own. By solo

travelling, I learnt tons about the world and myself.

Travel made me appreciate family and friends more than ever. It made me feel grateful for the life I have.

TRAVEL AS AN ADVENTURE

Solo travelling helps you to see things clearly. You will be able to answer life's biggest questions of who you are and why you are here.

Solo travel makes us awesome. Solo travelling is like exercising our self-confidence.

When we travel with someone we know, we end up spending a lot of time watching and listening to him or her. We click pictures and share opinions of the place and food. We get too concerned about the number of likes and followers we add with the photos. We seldom live in the moment.

Solo travel, on the other hand is a different experience altogether. It is like a drug, very hard to get off. Solo travel is all about figuring out what makes other people and cultures tick and sharing that knowledge with others. To do that effectively requires an open mind and a will to venture beyond your comfort zone.

Interviews of solo travellers aged between 18-30 from Central America pointed out that adventurous travel is a highly valued space for personal development among youth.

A group of researchers experimented on rats. They bred a group of rats, a few of them extremely smart and a few extremely dull. They found that duller rats become smarter when they are put in an exciting maze. Conversely, the smarter rats become stupider when they are kept into a

boring maze. Even when genetics determined their intelligence, their environment influenced their ability to use their intelligence.

Similarly, intelligent people can become stupid if they do not exercise adventure and excitement in life. Solo travel is an adventure by itself. You get to know the reality of a place and its people, rather than the distorted images propagated by the media and politicians.

I was working in Bengaluru when the evening news on October 8, 2016 showed some heavy unrest in Kashmir. Mobs were clashing with the army with several people dead and a twelve-year-old being shot, in the Safakadal area by the cops. It was a complete curfew with the internet and cell phone network being stalled.

It was my long pending concern and curiosity to know the reality of what is happening in that part of the country. When it comes to patriotism, Jammu and Kashmir always topped my list of concerns. I always heard stories from a few friends who were posted there in the Indian army. They never had answers for the questions I asked.

I needed to know the truth.

The next day I was in Srinagar. The only luggage on me was a power bank for my phone. I was not carrying any bags, as I didn't want to look like a vulnerable tourist to be attacked.

It was a terrifying first-hand experience. A group of boys vandalized the taxi in which I was travelling. While on my way to Srinagar. One of them had a gun. The youngest one in the batch should be around twelve years and the eldest not more than seventeen.

More than the fear of being killed, I was saddened by their pain and worried about their future. It was the 92nd day of the riots and curfew. Every person and every kid was boiling with rage. There were no shops open, no restaurants, no hotels, no cellphone network, and no internet. In fact, there was no lighting in the streets. Not finding accommodation was something I did not expect. I miscalculated my probability.

My lack of Hindi speaking skills was a saviour; it made me sound like a lost tourist. I was questioned and left by the Army twice while I was roaming aimlessly in the streets. I managed to get accommodation on the porch of a closed hotel with half a bottle of water left by someone. My dinner was at the government hospital, where they serve free food for their in-house patients. The compounder was kind enough to give me food and refused to take any money. The hospital was the only establishment that was open. I spent the night sleepless and shivering in the cold. I spent the entire night talking to the security guard at the hotel. I could hear distant gunfire once in a while.

What I got to know in the next two days is something the media never told. What we read and what we see in the news is not the truth; it is what the politicians want us to know—a one-sided version.

It surprised me to find how ideologies differ between people living in the same nation.

What is democracy for you could be oppression for your fellow citizens.

That two-day trip changed my perception of myself as a person and of our nation. I realised I was not as brave as I thought I was. Most of us spend our lives in a personal bubble surrounding ourselves with people who share our opinions, habits, and lifestyle because it feels safe and comfortable.

Learning happens when we leave our comfort zone and are forced to deal with new and unfamiliar situations. Adventures can be found in the simple things that you won't even think of doing back home. Travelling is your perfect opportunity to push yourself to the edge and take a leap of faith.

Travel to seek the truth and the adventures of a lifetime will follow you.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

New research from Australia confirms that travelling alone is awesome and solo travel can lead to a 'personal feeling of freedom, relaxation and self-discovery'.

When you travel more, you become connected with the world, let go of false egos, and will stop impressing people around you.

We are no more 'human beings'; we are 'human doings'. We do most of the things to impress others.

At one point in time, I was very concerned about the way I dress and the way I look. A few creases on my shirt used to rob me of my confidence for the entire day. A small scratch on my car needed an immediate paint job. Losing my phone disappointed me with the financial loss. I lived the first twenty-six years of my life trying to impress people. Solo travel changed me for good.

Now, I don't care anymore about the dents on my car or what I wear. I treat my car as an object that takes me from place to place. My clothes are just accessories that protect my body and my dignity in public. I don't care about objects anymore and making money is no longer my priority. Having a place to live with food on the table and a family to share are essentials. I

treat anything over and above as my luck and luxury. If luxury happens, I let it happen. If it doesn't, it's all right with me.

I still earn because the disposable income of my own can do better for humanity than most others—things like running a not-for-profit and writing this book. Since I had disposable income, I was willing to contribute every rupee this book generates to educating children from rural India.

Henry David Thoreau was an American naturalist and philosopher born in 1817. His writings inspired Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy and Martin Luther King Jr. Thoreau's work had influenced the American Civil Rights Movement.

Thoreau^{[11](#)} advocated living a simple life with nature. When he was twenty-eight, he ventured into the woods to learn about simple living. He constructed a small cottage, which is 10 by 15 feet at the end of a lake called the Walden Pond. He lived in the house for two years and wrote. His writings inspired humanity to embrace nature.

Thoreau believed that humans are wasting their lives running after money. They are so busy with work that they have stopped enjoying life. A simple and self-sustained life surrounded by nature is what we are supposed to live for. He was a minimalist in today's terms. Many people started their travels into nature after being inspired by Thoreau's thoughts. He is the reason behind Gandhi's simple lifestyle and dressing.

In 2003, a study by the American psychologists Thomas Gilovich and Leaf Van Boven discovered that experiences bring more happiness than material possessions. Experiences help us grow, develop, and contribute more to our identities than having materialistic things.

There is loads of introspection and self-realisation that happens when you solo travel, you will be able to connect with a higher purpose than you.

According to a survey by Lonely Planet.

- 44 per cent of the solo travellers mentioned that their moral values have increased.
- 41 per cent of them started thinking about social injustice and poverty issues.

Travel is a fantastic self-development tool because it moves you from your culture and shows you how a different society lives with a different value system and culture. This kind of experience makes you re-examine what is important in your life and what is not. It throws light on the thought of whether we are living life in the best possible way or not. Knowing about the past makes the present less unfamiliar. The whole point of travelling is to break down boundaries and find out what interests other people.

We are so fortunate to be born at this point in time in the history of humanity. While flying in a plane above the clouds, we are living the dreams of many great men who looked into the sky centuries ago and wondered what it is like to see from above. When you travel alone, there is tons of introspection that happens that makes you look at the earth from the moon and all you see is a small sphere and universal humanity. You don't see any religions or borders—everything seems insignificant. You will start seeing the world from an eagle's view. I call it the 'solo traveller's view'.

Studies proved that employees who take frequent breaks to travel perform better. That's one reason why most companies ensure employees take a mandatory two-week leave in a year. In fact, the Indian government also

encourages its employees to travel by offering a Leave Travel Allowance (LTC) every year.

LEARNING

Whenever Albert Einstein had a problem, he used to step out of his office and take long walks into the woods without thinking anything about the problem but focusing on nature. He is used to wandering the vast gardens of the university admiring nature. Eventually, he used to end up finding answers to his problems. In 1835, twenty-two-year-old Charles Darwin uncovered the theory of evolution on his travel to the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Solo travel makes you more creative. We can focus our attention more on writing when we are travelling. 70 per cent of this book was written during my solo travels to the Himalayas.

In a study done on a group of Taiwanese solo travellers, they mentioned that solo travel increased their attitude towards self-learning, made them more generous towards their communities, made them better at managing stress and better control over having material desires. Solo travellers are more intelligent and intelligent people solo travel.

Basically, intelligent people get more satisfaction by spending quality time with their own selves. The wisdom you gain from a dozen solo trips to unknown lands is equivalent to the wisdom you get from being educated at a premium university. Most of the learning in the top business schools does not come from lectures or case studies; it comes from what we learn from our fellow students.

Apart from high scores and academic achievements, universities like Harvard, Oxford and Stanford admit students based on their culture and

backgrounds. They want students to learn from each other's cultures and lifestyles. This gives the students immense exposure in understanding what life is all about.

The same thing happens when we travel. You become a better thinker, explorer, and compassionate person, which makes your life fulfilling.

Benefits of solo travel:

- You will become more compassionate to strangers.
- You will become more brave and independent.
- You will become more self-confident.
- Nature's beauty can inspire spiritual feelings in you.
- You will realize that the world is filled with good people who want to help.
- You will eventually end up with another killer habit of falling in love with reading.

TRAVEL OPENS YOUR HEART AND FILLS YOUR LIFE WITH EXPERIENCES AND STORIES.

A friend of mine told me about this fascinating island in Scotland called the Isle of Skye. When I asked him what's so special about the place. He told me that it's so fascinating that it's all right if one was to die after visiting the island. Such is the beauty. I was just five years into my career and the trip sounded expensive.

Five months later, I was gasping for breath while trekking The Storr—a rocky hill on the Trotternish peninsula of the Isle of Skye. It was indeed a breathtaking experience. It was heaven on earth. A part of my heart still beats for the highlands of Scotland.

Instead of upgrading my car, I upgraded my life with a three-week trip. It was worth a hundred times the money I spent.

STONED GADGETS PVT LTD.

In 2015, I started a business-to-business e-commerce startup selling gadgets in Bengaluru. I invested everything I had. I was out of cash by the end of the fourth month, another miscalculation of probability.

Our sales figures were drowning. We were supposed to hit revenue of 25 lakh rupees per month to survive, but we barely touched 4.8 lakh rupees in the first four months. We achieved only 4.8 per cent of our target.

Expenses tripled, and the softwares were crashing every other day. It was the second time in my life that I had hit rock bottom. I was broke again. I sold my car to a friend to pay the office rent and to take care of expenses for the next two months. My other co-founder left. I failed miserably. I was left all alone. I felt it was better to fail fast and decided to close the company.

That is when I went on a solo trip to the Himalayas for two weeks and ended up working in the Chai shop in Mana. I came back rejuvenated, borrowed some money from my younger brother, and restarted.

The money was not sufficient to buy goods to sell. I was badly in need of someone who can give me gadgets on credit for me to resell. It was next to impossible for someone new to the business to get credit. It takes decades of trust.

Softwares can fail, business processes can crash, but human effort is something that cannot be beaten.

I made the boldest move of my life. I signed a cheque for one crore and convinced the B2B head of Flipkart that I can sell their products in bulk to corporate clients. That day, I had only 3.8 lakh rupees in my bank account, it was like a suicide. They gave me credit for fifteen days; post which the cheque gets deposited, and I needed to have the money in my account at any cost. I needed to sell at least 10 lakh rupees worth of gadgets in the next fifteen days.

I knew I would be jailed if the cheque got bounced and I will lose my face in front of the whole world. In the next eleven days, I knocked on the doors of over fifty-seven companies, made a minimum of five hundred phone calls to prospects. My first order came through. It was for 23 lakh rupees.

Between December 2015 and May 2016, we sold 8.5 crores worth of gadgets while being profitable. I did six times the target I aimed for. We were valued as a 2.1 million dollar company by mid of 2016. You can read our balance sheets from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs website.

Everyone joined back once the money started flowing. I bought my car from my friend. He was kind enough to give it for the same price I sold. Our success story was covered in the news.

I didn't do it for the sake of making money. I did it for the people who believed in me. I did it to instil confidence in people who worked with me.

That trip to the mountains helped me reflect on my mistakes and shortcomings. It threw me into a killer sales mode. I turned 10 lakh rupees into a profitable 13.4 crores company in less than eight months.

The Himalayas and books always helped me.

TRAVEL IS NEVER AN EXPENSE

I do not consider travelling or buying books as an expense. There is money involved, but sometimes spending on things that matter to you and the world are worth every rupee and time spent.

When you start seeing life from the perspective of a solo traveller, apart from becoming a minimalist, you will also realize that money or your possessions are not your top priorities. Your priorities will start revolving around your health, passions, relationships, and your contribution to society.

Next time, before you plan to buy a new phone or a piece of furniture, stop for a second and think:

- What experiences can you get with the same money?
- By owning those things, who are the people you are going to impress?

Understand whatever money you are spending to buy things is nothing but your time converted to money. On an average, an Indian buys a car that costs a little above his annual income. If you are earning 12 lakh rupees per annum, ideally you will own a car costing about 12 lakh rupees. So, to own a car you are spending one year of your time, which you traded to earn your income.

I want you to think if the car is really worth giving 365 days of your valuable time on earth?

You might want to spend the same amount on experiences like travel, which enhances your thinking and makes you a better human. It will cost you about 12 lakh rupees to solo travel around the world for half a year. It is worth giving a year of your time to travel around the world for six months.

Tips for solo travel:

- Pack minimally, only for your necessities.
- Don't carry a camera. You will be busy clicking pictures and miss the real beauty of admiring nature. Your mind is powerful enough to retain such memories.
- Carry Kindle instead of paperbacks.
- Make as many friends as possible with the locals. The easier start will be at the place you eat or stay.
- A book and a pen are mandatory.
- Always tip people, reserve 20 per cent for tipping.
- Never negotiate, you are making memories, so let the other person have a good day too.
- In case, you are travelling to a known place where you have your friends or extended family. Stay in their house and buy something for the family with the money you might have spent if staying in a hotel. That way, you not only make them happy by investing your time, you build a stronger relationship with them.

This habit can't be developed with discipline. You need to fall in love with travelling. Fortunately, solo travelling releases the same amount of dopamine that is released when you are in love.

If I have to give one piece of advice for you to fall in love with solo travel, read the book *Into the Wild*. It's the story of Christopher McCandless, a twenty-four-year-old American adventurer. He travelled across North America with almost no money. His experiences are a boon to humankind. Unfortunately, he ended in a tragic death because of starvation.

This book will make you cry out of pain and pleasure. The book was later made into a movie. I insist you read the book instead of watching the movie. Reading the book will give you the pleasure of pausing, thinking,

and digesting every experience that was described. Reading the book is a journey of a lifetime. This will make you pack your bags.

MY MISSION

I remember as a child, I had no clue what I wanted to do in life. I used to lie that I want to become an engineer as most of my friends wanted to become one. My parents loved it when I said I want to become an engineer.

In 1997, an astronaut from America visited my school. I was awestruck listening to his experiences and started dreaming of becoming an astronaut. Most of the time, we don't know what we want in our life. Until we come across someone who is doing something exciting, we start making plans to do the same.

My immediate goal is to travel across India to promote the five habits.

I want to solo travel on a two-wheeler visiting orphanages in each state. I want these kids to know the true essence of life lies in giving back. I want them to understand the essence of volunteering and reading. I want them to start dreaming of travelling, volunteering, and impacting lives when they grow up.

Poverty is the mother of all evils. It drives humans to do the most inhuman things. I have noticed that a poverty-ridden childhood is the root cause of a disturbed adult life, which eventually impacts society.

Around 40 per cent of crime in today's world is committed by people who grew up in foster homes as orphans or as children of single parents. The upbringing of a child is most crucial to society. If they are taught the right value systems from their childhood, they can grow up into responsible, law-abiding citizens.

Imagine if our parents told us in our childhood that money is the last thing we need to chase and success is not what lies in our bank account. We all could have been creative individuals following our passions, helping others, and could have made the world a much better place.

I want these kids to know the truth that real happiness lies in giving back and making memories. I can imagine how it is going to inspire them. They will start thinking about doing the same thing when they grow up.

I want to be that astronaut who walked into my classroom who left that everlasting impression on me.

You can also contribute by spreading the same message wherever possible. Follow before you preach. You will be able to talk from your heart.

“The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically.”

– KUREK ASHLEY¹²

DROMOMANIACS NEVER DIE

I traded many of my dreams for a bigger payslip without realizing I did. People get so busy buying a house, a car, and getting a good education for their kids. When we look back, sometimes it feels like this is not what we wanted to do. When we have limited time left on earth is when we realize that this entire running is stupid. Everything appears to be so tiny that we regret that we wasted our time.

Bronnie Ware worked in Australia as a nurse in a palliative care centre. While on her job attending to people at the last stages of their life, she was able to capture the dying regrets of more than a thousand people.

The top five regrets of the dying:

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
- I wish I hadn't worked so hard.
- I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.
- I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
- I wish that I had let myself be happier.

We are born in pain and we die in pain. Our only escape is how we spend our time in between. As of today, I feel lucky not to have any regrets; I had my share of fun and a ball of a time on this planet and will continue doing what I am doing.

I wish all the people whom Bronnie Ware interviewed did solo trips, read a lot and volunteered. They could have slept peacefully without any regrets. In fact, Bronnie Ware was my inspiration to conduct interviews with the thousand senior citizens.

SOLO TRAVELLERS NEVER DIE. THEY LIVE IN THE STORIES THEY TELL.

It's the journey, not the destination that matters. Those who do not travel alone tend to experience more loneliness than those who do. It is more important for people who feel lonely and depressed to go on a solo trip to get over their emotions. They will return as a confident and happy person.

Pain and suffering are the greatest teachers. They bring more wisdom and learning to us. Pain helps us to grow from the inside out.

In 2014, at the age of twenty-nine when I had a devastating breakup, I was so depressed that I quit my job, gave up all my material things and started

travelling solo for the first time. I packed my bags with minimal stuff and little money. I travelled for forty-five days across India.

I came back as a confident man. I was happy to restart my life from zero.

In the next couple of months, I cleared all the rounds of interviews for a national political party. They selected me to contest as a Member of the Legislative Assembly representing them in the 2014 general elections. Unfortunately, I disappointed the entire cadre. I lost badly and was the poorest performer of the party in the entire country.

I was happy that I did my best. I didn't mind spending all my savings fighting in the election. Sometimes losing money is worth the experience.

Self-improvement comes from learning from your mistakes and recognizing your weakness.

Books were my best friends while I was travelling and when I had no one to talk to. My reading habit helped me become a better version of myself. Like most of you, I was lost in the race of making money and buying things I did not require impressing people whom I never cared about. Solo travel made me realize who I was, and what I am supposed to do.

LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS OF SENIOR CITIZENS:

96 per cent of the people we interviewed responded that the best experience in their lifetime happened in their travels.

Here is a challenge for you

- Plan for a weekend solo trip to a nearby place where you have never been to.
- Carry as minimal money as possible.

- Inform your family and leave your phone behind for a day.
- Carry a book with you. It will come in handy when you don't have company.
- Take notes of whatever comes to your mind.
- Make friends with at least two strangers.

After this short trip, you will come back home as a different person. You will become an old friend to yourself. Try taking frequent short trips for a few months before you head for the longer one.

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

– **MARK TWAIN**

It’s high time you paid your respect to Mark Twain.
Go pack your bags!

LIVE A 100 LIVES

Can you remember any millionaires or heroes of the past centuries? It is difficult, right?

But we remember:

- A poor stonecutter named Socrates.
- A thief from the gutters of Paris named Francois Villon.
- A poor farmer from Scotland named Robert Burns.
- A child labourer from England called Charles Dickens.

“A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one.”

– GEORGE R. R. MARTIN^{[13](#)}

These men are avid readers. Ideally, we remember readers who became writers and changed the world.

HISTORY OF READING

Reading is one of the oldest habits of human civilization. In 1991, while extracting the Blombos caves near Cape Town in South Africa, archaeologists found stones marked with crosshatch lines. Claiming it to be the earliest known drawing in human history. The early man drew it around

73,000 years ago. It was a pictorial representation of symbols that were read as texts.

The discovery was so fascinating that it proved all the religious texts wrong as each religion claimed about humans reading ability in different ages. Humans had the ability to read and draw symbols while he was still a hunter-gatherer.

There are about 6,500 languages in use right now and in the next fifty years, half of them will be wiped out—starting with the ones without a script. What you speak in your mother tongue today is not the same language as it used to be a few centuries ago.

Here is what someone wrote in 1833.

“Unless the present progress of change (is) arrested....., there can be no doubt that, in another century, the dialect of the Americans will become utterly unintelligible to an Englishman.”

The words are the same, but the way they are put across is different. That’s one reason why we find it very hard to read Shakespeare and of writers from the past centuries. Most books are rewritten to match the present readers’ vocabulary. When books are rewritten, not only the vocabulary but the context also is changed to match today’s generation’s interest.

Why do you think there are always new versions of religious books being released?

My grandmother at the age of eighty-six told me that *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, what we read today, was not the same ones she read sixty-five years ago. There are many additions of characters and stories. None of us living now have actually seen or read the first religious books. All

religious books were printed in the fourteenth century after the invention of the printing press.

All books, which are in circulation, could have been the 100,000 versions of the original. This went on till the internet arrived, which made it difficult to change the versions.

WHY READ?

Apart from imparting knowledge, reading makes you more empathetic. It helps you see the world from different angles. As a result, we end up becoming better at understanding others' perspectives. Reading improves health, and it makes us take informed decisions rather than emotional ones.

A recent study proved that people who read over three hours per week live 23 per cent longer.

Many of us misinterpret quotes about reading. We assume it is to do with reading academic books in which most of us have less interest. Reading out of the compulsory academic books is what this habit is all about. People who read a lot end up getting better-paid jobs than those who don't.

A study done on 5,280 people born between 1920-1956 proved that people who read a minimum of ten non-educational schoolbooks in their childhood ended up with 21 per cent more income.

Any reading is good. But reading non-fiction is highly recommended. Non-fiction book not only brings facts to your table but also enriches you with information that is not found in schoolbooks. Reading helps in delayed gratification. It is the process of putting pain first and postponing pleasure. Delaying gratification is to control your impulses.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MARSHMALLOW TEST:

Psychologist Walter Mischel Conducted a test in 1972 on a group of thirty-two children aged between three to five. They were left with a marshmallow on the table and asked to wait for fifteen minutes. If they eat it, they get nothing, but the children will get another one if they wait for fifteen minutes. After twenty years of observing the thirty-two participants, kids who waited longer for the second marshmallow did pretty well in their education and life compared to those who didn't.

Most of us are born with the ability to control gratification, and for the rest, reading books helps. Research proves that children who study in schools with bigger libraries did reasonably well in their careers than those who did not study in such schools.

LOVE FOR READING

My love for reading started in my school library. We had two periods in a week called the library period dedicated to reading books. I started with comics and moved to fiction and then non-fiction as I grew up. I clocked over 2,000 non-fiction books that included hundreds of biographies. Spending time in the school library helped me in clinging to the habit of reading.

Reading books helped me in getting a better job compared to most of my peers. In early 2000, India was in need of lakhs of English-speaking graduates. I was a below-average student but had better command over my vocabulary and could talk about topics out of my schoolbooks. I could crack many interviews with these skills.

Most of the time, it's the economy or the wave the country rides that pushes our earnings. Matching that need happens only by reading a lot.

ATTUNEMENT

Reading increases attunement. Attunement is the reaction we have to the other person, and it is how we adjust according to others and build relationships.

Reading helps us discover more about human behaviour. We understand that people don't change much physically, but their personalities do every five years. We become a totally different person. Very few of our intrinsic values stay with us. Apart from them, everything is different about us. That's why we see great lovers breaking up, childhood friends parting ways, and the best couples breaking their marriage.

Avid readers realize that there is no point in holding grudges or hating someone for a long time. It's better to forgive and forget, as we are no more the same person when we were hurt, and the one that hurt us has also changed.

READING TO PASS TIME

Most influential leaders who walked this planet were imprisoned at one point in time or another, and while in isolation, many of them picked up the habit of reading, and they never stopped.

Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Akbar Ganji and Ho Chi Minh were among the few who read and wrote in prison. They transformed the lives of millions across the globe. Great thinkers like Aristotle's success was in the last twelve years of his life, which came after reading and learning for many decades.

You need not overload yourself with information. If you do not follow what you read, there is no value addition in reading so many books. This is what

I learnt over a very long period of time. Reading should become a habit like running, exercise, and meditation.

PARENTS WHO READ

Reading builds character. Reading and observing the actions of others—mostly our parents, builds the human character. We do not remember what our parents tell us. We always remember how they behaved. Most criminals are made on the pillion seat of a motorcycle. Children, while travelling with their parents, watch their parents skipping the traffic signals and breaking the rules.

They notice their parents lying over phones. This affects the child a lot in their upbringing. They tend to lose respect for law and moral values. It is very important for a parent to be cautious of their behaviour when their children are around.

Studies suggest that parents who read seldom break the rules.

THE BOBO DOLL EXPERIMENT:

Social psychologist Albert Bandura's famous 'Bobo the doll' experiment showed how dependent we are on imitation. The experiment was on children with a room full of toys.

When an adult started hitting a Bobo doll, the children slowly started doing the same over a period of time. It shows how children unconsciously imitate adults. A parent who is a reader tends to develop a better character and seldom breaks the law.

In Bagdad's book market, books are left in the street at night unguarded. Iraqis believe that the reader does not steal, and a thief does not read. This is what reading does for you—it builds your character.

If you are a young parent, it is very important to read to your kids. My parents were modest people from middle-class backgrounds. They never spent much on themselves, but they used to buy us a lot of books, including comics and monthly magazines. My younger brother and I used to spend most of our Sundays reading books. Every month we were given pocket money only to buy comics and storybooks.

My father used to subscribe to *Reader's Digest* and the *Soviet Union* magazine. They were a little expensive compared to buying regional magazines. My father and my grandfather are avid readers, so my father didn't mind the spending. I used to enjoy reading a lot of Russian culture and facts around the world from *Readers Digest*.

The only asset my grandfather left us, is two big iron trunks full of books. I read most of them and preserved the rest. If you are a parent, start buying books for the kids even if they don't read. Eventually, they will catch up.

Any reading is good. Reading fiction takes your imagination to the next level. You will become a better thinker, as you will start understanding the other person's perspective pretty well. Most of the time, you live the character of the people in the books. Authors of fiction make you feel and think like the protagonist—who ideally is one with moral values and ethics.

Diana Tamir, a renowned psychologist who works at the Princeton Social Neuroscience lab, found out that people who often read fiction have better social cognition. Using brain scans, she found out that people reading fiction are more skilled at understanding how others think and feel.

LIVE A 100 LIVES

We have only one life, but those who read can live several lives. Reading autobiographies and memoirs is very crucial. We learn a lot about eminent

men and women. We learn from their experiences, challenges, and mistakes. I read hundreds of autobiographies, and it changed the way I think.

Reading autobiographies is getting back into time and having conversations with exceptional humans. It helps us understand how people lived and thought at different periods in history. It is like hanging out with great humans who walked this earth.

You make friends with their characters, ultimately falling into good company. They say we are the average of the people we spend the most time with. If you start spending time reading autobiographies and memoirs, you become the average of their characters.

By reading books written by great humans. You can make friends with Gandhi, smile at Mark Twain's jokes, listen to the lectures of Socrates, go on adventures with Ernest Hemingway and see the world through the eyes of Helen Keller, which she never had.

While reading Louis L'Amour's memoir, I felt like I was walking with him all the while. I was thinking what he was thinking and doing what he was doing in my mind's eye. It was an out of world experience. Reading autobiographies is spending hours with the great souls. I urge everyone to read some autobiographies or memoirs of great people so that you get a chance to live their lives.

"Upon the shelves of our libraries, the world's greatest teachers await your questions."

– LOUIS L'AMOUR¹⁴

FAKE NEWS

We believe fake news is new to this generation and we think it is because of the people having access to the internet and the latest social media apps. Well, it has existed for centuries. The truth is fake news existed for thousands of years—Mostly in religious texts!

Earth is 4.5 billion years old, and humanity has existed for 2.5 million years. The oldest religion we knew that still exists is just five thousand years young. We knew nothing about any of the religions that existed before this.

There are many miracles written in religious books that don't happen anymore. Why?

In an age of abundant information and credibility being questioned, it's hard to impart new beliefs systems. That's one reason we hardly find witches and 'babas' that perform miracles.

The literacy rate across the world in the eighteenth century was 11 per cent. Very few humans could read and write. All the religions and religious books that exist today were written before the seventh century.

Having fewer literates and most people having less access to information, it was easy to fool most of the population.

FLYNN EFFECT:

Jakob Pietschnig and Martin Voracek, Psychology professors from Vienna, worked with 3,987,892 participants covering a time span of 105 years (1909–2013). They found evidence that human IQ has been increasing over time.

IQ test was invented a century ago, and since then the IQ scores of humans have been increasing steadily. A person with an average IQ today is considered intelligent if born in 1921. It's called the Flynn effect.

The human IQ level in the eighth century was averaging around 85-90. It's the current IQ level of a 12-13-year-old. Majority of the humans used to think and live like early teenagers of today's time. Very few, who had higher IQ's authored books, innovated, painted, and founded religions.

Few rebels could question the credibility of religion and its books. People who questioned were punished or ostracized.

As literacy rates grew, it became hard for new religions to form as people started questioning the credibility of the information written in the religious books.

Today an eight-year-old with access to books and the internet can't be fooled so easily compared to a forty-year-old who lived in the early 1900. You need to read at least 50 non-fiction books in your lifetime to have a mind of your own. Else you are under someone's influence. When you read more books, your knowledge of worldly matters improves, and you do not fall for lies.

“When a thousand people believe some made-up story for one month—that's fake news. When a billion people believe it for a thousand years—that's religion.”

– YUVAL NOAH HARARI¹⁵

NOT ALL TEXTBOOKS LIE

In India, the content of the state syllabus is controlled by the state and the central syllabus by the central government. The academic syllabus can only

be revised once every five years.

An article in *The Times of India* dated June 26, 2021, highlighted an issue between Andhra Pradesh ruling party and the opposition. The previous government inserted a chapter about building a massive capital by them into the school textbooks. The change in government now foiled the whole idea of the massive capital. Now, the current government wants to remove the chapter as it is giving mileage to the previous government, which is the opposition now. They are eager to replace it with the achievements of their political party. They want to ingrain their success stories into the young minds who could be their potential voters. The fight arose, as they will have to wait for another two years to remove the story.

The central syllabus has far more issues like this. Textbooks can't fake universal subjects and theories—the game is played in literature, history, and languages.

There are enough articles in the international news and by WHO as to how India downplayed the COVID-19 numbers. I overheard a conversation about how a district collector was instructed by his superior not to declare over a thousand cases in a week. When in reality, the count was almost double.

Flaws in the education system and textbooks are not unique to India. It is across the globe. In the book *Surely you're joking Mr. Feynman*, Dr. Feynman, winner of the Nobel Prize, exposed how ratings for textbooks printed for the State Board of Education in California were so screwed.

Most members of the rating committee didn't even read them before giving their ratings. Based on the ratings the publisher gets selected, whose books

would become a part of the student's education. Due to lethargy from the rating committee, students ended up reading books of lesser standards.

The point I am trying to drive using the above facts is that governments lie in tons. These lies come in the news and some in textbooks, and people who do not read out of their prescribed academic books end up believing the lies.

HOW COUNTRIES BRAINWASH CHILDREN

Our neighbour Pakistan is no stranger in terms of brainwashing their children, like how India puts Hindu sentiments into textbooks, citing them to be a part of literature and history. Pakistan goes the extra mile in incorporating anti-Indian sentiments in innocent minds.

If you were born in Pakistan, you would definitely grow up with animosity towards India because you read in your schoolbooks how India ill-treats its minorities. Not directly from textbooks, but from our childhood, we were always fed in our minds that Pakistan is an enemy nation, where it is just a neighbouring country with a culture different from ours.

This is not unique to India or Pakistan. This contrast is visible all over the world, especially in countries dominated by religion.

A READER WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS NO ENEMY; IT'S PEOPLE WITH INDIFFERENCES.

BOOK BAN

In 1960, China's ex-leader and dictator Mao Zedong, founder of the People's Republic of China, burnt lakhs of books and killed many intellectuals, accusing them of being anti-government and revolutionary.

HERE IS WHAT MAO DECLARED IN HIS OWN WORDS IN 1958.

“The First Emperor only buried 460 alive scholars, while we’ve buried 46,000. When we suppressed counter-revolutionaries, didn’t we also kill some counter-revolutionary intellectuals?”

Until his death in 1976, Chinese citizens were deprived of all books, except the one written by the dictator Mao. You can imagine the wisdom of someone who grew up in this era in China. Even today, many non-fiction books are banned in China. India also joins the bandwagon with China and Pakistan in banning books in the name of patriotism and religion.

Tobacco and alcohol, which take away lives and happiness from families, are freely flowing in India. In comparison, many books containing free speech and expression are still being banned. Now you can understand that you are brainwashed from your childhood with selective fake news and knowledge passed on through school textbooks, which is decided by the politicians for you to read.

DIGITAL DEVICES AND KIDS

According to a 2020 study, preschoolers spend about two hours daily on their smartphones. The number of hours goes up with age. Skipping from page to page and app to app takes away their attention span. This could lead to irreversible damage done to their attention levels.

We need to start inculcating a habit of self-reading to kids at very young ages. Kids to whom parents read every day tend to catch up with the reading habit. Effective learning does not happen through apps. Kids get connected to a real human rather than an app.

ADDICTION TO NEWS

The most played channels in India are the news channels. Try to recollect the most important news stories that you read or watched last week. Probably, you might be able to think of one or two big events that might have impacted you directly or indirectly. But you cannot recollect the major headlines you read or watched.

Because most headlines are not supposed to be headlines, they are junk that keeps feeding the excitement of the viewers or the readers. Mostly it would be celebrity gossip or tragic news, and very few can be informative, like inventions and about the environment.

All news channels and papers survive because of advertisements. They make very little money with subscriptions. To attract the readers and viewers, most of the time they come up with news capturing human drama and emotion but not information required to enhance our IQ and knowledge.

Reading a lot of news rewires our brain negatively. If you keep reading news quite often on your phone or skip pages of a newspaper regularly, most of the time, you are feeding junk to your brain and in a short burst of attention. This will take a toll on your attention spans over a longer period.

Try this exercise of staying away from the news for a week and start investing your time in books. The knowledge will stay with you and your attention spans will get back to normal. You will be able to think more clearly and stay calmer. If you still want to stay abreast with what's happening. Avoid the regional news and read only the headlines of a national newspaper.

NO TIME TO READ

In the year 2018, when I was running four projects at the same time, I was so busy that I wished every day to have ten more hours. I ended up reading eighteen books. I carried my kindle everywhere I went. I read when I was waiting for people, on the flight, train and wherever I could.

If you really want to learn and if you keep it on your top priority, along with your health and family, you will find excuses to read. Learning should be your lifelong exercise.

WHAT BOOKS TO READ?

I love reading non-fiction and am fond of listening to the same genre of audiobooks. My car is my mobile library. In the last four years, I clocked about 1,200 best sellers only through the Blinkist app. There is always confusion about which book you should read and what you ought to buy. About 50 per cent of my library was books I never wanted to read, and 20 per cent I never wanted to buy.

Like most of you, I used to end up reading the ones readily available in the library or Amazon.

In the past few years, I started to read books written by eminent men based on the authors who influenced them. For example, you can skip reading Leo Tolstoy, Henry Thoreau and Plato, if you read books written by Mahatma Gandhi as most of his writings are influenced by these people.

You can skip century's worth of content; get to the point that is more relevant to Gandhi's time. You can directly jump to Aristotle, skipping Plato and Socrates. Socrates mentored Plato and Plato was Aristotle's teacher.

Likewise, if you follow this pattern, you can end up reading books that are time-saving and more relevant.

I am not claiming my logic to be foolproof. But, with billions of books available and the little time we have, to maximize our learning, you will have to trust me with this logic. I started following the pattern for many years and got into selective reading.

HOW TO GET INTO READING?

The easiest way to sell someone a pup is to give it to the potential buyer's children for a day. Try to get it back the next morning. You won't get the pup back no matter how hard you try. Everyone in his or her family has fallen in love with it.

The same thing happens when we buy books. Buy as many as possible, even if you don't intend to read them immediately. Maybe in a few weeks or months, you will end up reading at least a few of them, and once you fall into the reading habit, you will never leave your book puppy.

TIPS:

- Pick books above your age and level.
- Read the ones, which you find difficult to understand.
- Pick topics out of your purview.
- Use a pen to mark things that interest you.
- Before you buy the book, skim read it.
- Identify the major theme and the author's intent.
- Take breaks every twenty minutes, analyse and reflect and don't read for more than an hour continuously after taking a break. Reflection is most important to understand a book.

"If you don't like to read, you haven't found the right book."

– J.K ROWLING

Do this exercise:

1. Looking back over the past ten years, how much do you think your thought process changed on a scale of one to ten?
2. How much do you think it will change in the next ten years?

Your thirty-day challenge:

Buy any five non-fiction books, aim to finish them in thirty days.

If you were a beginner, I would recommend:

- *As a Man Thinketh* (non-fiction) by James Allen.
- *Animal Farm* (fiction) by George Orwell.
- *The Great Gatsby* (fiction) by Scott Fitzgerald.
- *The Magic of Reality* (non-fiction) by Richard Dawkins.
- *Tuesdays with Morrie* (non-fiction) by Mitch Albom.

These are easy and short reads, to begin with. Rate yourself as to how much your thought process changed after reading these books on a scale of one to ten. It will amaze you to know what reading does to you.

LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS OF SENIOR CITIZENS:

Over 86% of respondents advised the next generations to be more educated than them.

Of course, it comes from reading the right books!

The grass is never greener on the other side. The truth is, the grass is greener where it's watered. Go water your garden.

Enrich yourself and the world by reading more books and by living a hundred lives.

STAY CURIOUS: THE WHY HABIT

In 399 BC, a Greek philosopher was accused of corrupting the youth with his rebellious thoughts and also for his refusal to accept the city's gods. He was sentenced to death. Though he had an opportunity to escape, he refused and spent his last day in prison. Today, we regard him as the father of ethics and western philosophy.

He is none other than Socrates!

He is one of the great men who influenced the modern world. His contribution to humanity is priceless.

“Smart people learn from everything and everyone, average people from their experiences, stupid people already have all the answers.”

– SOCRATES

Socrates' determination to make the world a better place led to his death. He rebelled against human stupidity. He urged the youth to always stay curious. He was the questioner of everything and everyone. One of Socrates' biggest contributions to the world came in the form of his beloved student, Plato. Plato is the founder of the first Platonist school of thought and spirituality.

STAY CURIOUS - BUT WHY?

Staying curious will make you act rationally while applying logic. We know far less about ourselves than we feel we do. Curiosity will make you ask the right questions. It helps us understand the world and ourselves better. Sometimes it is difficult to digest facts and feel stupid about us. I want you to understand the truth. To know the truth, you need to open your mind and stay curious. I want you to start questioning authority.

The highest authority for 78 per cent of the human population is God. Therefore, the first set of rules that take control of our lives is God and his so-called rules written in religious books.

Let's start with our curiosity about the supreme power, God, and his intentions.

“Knowing the answers will help you in school. Knowing how to question will help you in life.”

– WARREN BERGER¹⁶

INTENTION MATTERS

Let me break some dangerous ice here. While reading any book, it's vital for you to understand what made an author publish a book. So you should ask questions like:

- What is the intention of the author?
- What is in it for him in writing the book?
- Is he trying to establish his credibility in a particular field?
- Is he trying to make money somewhere in the guise of the book?
- Is he trying to rub his thoughts on the reader?

92 per cent of authors publish their books to make money. Few authors don't make money on books. Instead, they make more money through seminars and workshops. There is nothing wrong with people making money by sharing their knowledge and wisdom.

The danger is with shrewd politicians and religious fanatics who publish books. They rub their thoughts on the readers to gain more followers for their clan.

They know how to influence a person who is gullible and with a lower IQ.

- Firstly, they establish themselves as superior with some talent or experience the reader lacks.
- They play their victim cards well on how others exploit their religion/country/political party.
- They promote hatred towards others religions/countries/ideologies.
- They surprise the reader with a fact/miracle that the readers never knew.
- They give fake examples of how a miracle worked or how their political party helps.

The less experienced reader falls for their scams. Once you start believing them, slowly, it gets ingrained in your brain, leading to stronger connections in your frontal lobe. Over a period of time, your belief becomes so strong that you cease to believe anything contrary to that.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religion is a belief and worship of the supernatural. Many religions that exist today have their gods resembling human beings. However, in few

religions, their gods don't have any forms that humans can perceive. Every religion has rules to follow and practice for us to be a part of it.

In today's world, one's identity is based on his religion and place of birth. Ideally, it should not be the case. Our identity should not be based on the country we belong to or the religion we follow. Instead, it should come to us as humans, basis the ethics and principles we live for.

If there is enough emphasis on understanding the core beliefs and principles of our religion without misinterpretation, we can avoid bigotry, wars, and discrimination. The world will become a better place.

Every generation laughs at the stupidity of humans of the past centuries. Yet, we blindly follow our faith, not anticipating that the next generations will laugh at us. When we are dedicated to religious faiths or any kind of dogmas, we tend to ignore logic and human values.

“We are second-hand people. We have lived on what we have been told, either guided by our inclinations, our tendencies, or compelled to accept by circumstances and environment. We are the result of all kinds of influences, and there is nothing new in us, nothing that we have discovered for ourselves: nothing original, pristine, clear.”

– JIDDU KRISHNAMURTHY

Religion plays a crucial role in the politics of every country. All religious books share a similar good. However, they differ in the evils they promote.

Without understanding all the major religions, most leaders of today's world are the blind leading the ill.

CULT LEADERS AND GODMEN

A cult is a social group having common religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs.

- Guyana, November 1978, 918 members of a religious cult called 'Peoples Temple' committed mass suicide by drinking poison along with Jim Jones, the founder. That way, they believed they would enter heaven.
- California, March 1997, a religious movement called 'Heaven's Gate' ended with the mass suicide of thirty-nine of its members. They killed themselves, hoping an UFO would come and take their soul to a different world. The cult leader Marshall Applewhite was one among them. The members consisted of people aged between twenty to seventy from all walks of life.
- Uganda, March 2000, 778 people in Uganda belonging to the 'Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God' did the same.

If a religious preacher can abet the suicide of the followers, it is not difficult for him to make them commit other crimes. There are many cases of ignorant humans wanting to go to heaven, like the one who blew up along with Atizaz. All the terrorist activities in the world are religiously motivated. The preacher influences the feeble uneducated mind of the human to participate in such actions. Preachers tell lies and stories that never existed in religions.

The hidden agenda of a religious preacher cannot go beyond the below options:

- Impress God by attaining more followers to the religion or by making the existing followers more religious. (You don't expect your children to

impress you, how can God be so dumb in having a thought like that)

- Fame and respect from the believers of the religion. (Stupidity)
- Money and power in society. (Greed)
- Afterlife salvation. (Ignorance)
- Mental illness. (Disease)

Impressing God, greed, money, and power are all selfish motives.

If someone wants to help humans, it's not done by preaching religion but by preaching humanity. There are a million ways to serve humanity without touching religion.

RELIGION HAS KILLED MORE PEOPLE THAN ALL THE WARS AND DISEASES PUT TOGETHER.

Religious folks often have answers to questions that they don't completely understand because they believe their preacher to be a messenger of God.

If you believe your God is powerful, trust me, he doesn't require his sales team on earth.

GODMEN

One of my maternal uncles would rather die than stop believing in a particular Hindu godman. This is because his brain had strong connections between his neurons with the fact that the godman was God's incarnation.

We can't blame him for his ignorance. This came from his love for his mother, who believed in that fake godman when she was alive. She passed on her belief to her son, and he followed her. In the year 2000, my paternal grandfather passed away. All his life, he believed in a particular baba and

used to pray to him. In 2009, the baba was caught red-handed while performing a magic trick; the video still floats on YouTube.

I feel sad for the death of my loved one and for his life wasted in ignorance, believing the wrong God. Parents pass religion or faith on to their children. Very few of us have the capacity to question religion. It is blind faith for the rest of us.

I was lucky to question the origin of the belief. Reading several books and staying curious helped me differentiate between facts and fallacies.

“So you have to be your own teacher and your own disciple, and there is no teacher outside, no saviour, no master; you yourself have to change, and therefore you have to learn to observe.”

– JIDDU KRISHNAMURTHY

Stay curious about everything around you. You will become smarter only if you can understand the hidden intentions of other human beings. Get into the ‘why’ habit. Start questioning and seek the truth.

TIP: ALWAYS QUESTION THE INTENTION, NOT THE ACTION.

My action here is writing the book. My intention is to share my learning with the next generations. As promised, at the beginning of the book, the recurring money this book generates every month will help deprived children get a basic education. As long as the book sells, it will help other life forms even after I am gone.

In this book, I am exposing the truth I knew. I am expecting you to make a rational decision evaluating every bit of information I provide. To ensure that I don’t go biased with my minimal knowledge. I did the exercise of

taking opinions from a 1000 senior citizens. Fortunately, my thought process was aligned with what they shared.

Similarly, when you take advice from someone. You need to question their source of information. Many people today rely on YouTube videos and social media posts as their source of information. They carry the least credibility.

Also, you don't go to a successful lawyer to take advice on your health. Instead, you go to an expert in the field, who is a doctor. You need to learn the history of humans from a book written by an anthropologist, not from a religious author.

It would be best if you researched an author before reading their book. If textbooks can lie, private authors are no exception. Some authors struggle to manage their finances but write a book about making money. There are few with broken marriages that write about raising kids. You need to be your own judge by applying common sense.

I made a few mistakes in reading the wrong books because the title sounded interesting and had good reviews. It's easy to get positive reviews and ratings. There are tons of PR companies that can do that. Choose your author before you choose to read a book. You are giving a few hours of your valuable time. Make sure it is worth it.

GOD

I am not questioning the existence of God. I can't question things I am not confident about. I am questioning human stupidity and atrocities committed in the name of religion. None of the gods, sons of gods or his messengers had a clue of the religion that humans created in their name after they were gone.

“What millions believe is often just fairy tales for children! The fabrications of the past are ridiculously accepted as the holies of people! Glory lies in searching the truth not in believing the irrational legends!”

– MEHMET MURAT ILDAN^{[17](#)}

BUDDHISM

There is no proof that Gautama Buddha asked or desired to make his teachings into a religion. However, over centuries, his followers created a religion out of his teachings and named it Buddhism.

Though Gautama Buddha’s fundamental teaching was ‘detachment’, around 10 per cent of the world population is now attached to this religion.

CHINESE WHISPERS

You might have played the game of ‘Chinese Whispers’ in school. The first student whispers a line in the next student’s ear, who in turn whispers what he heard to the next. Finally, when the entire class is done with listening and whispering to each other, the last person says what he heard to the whole class. Surprisingly, the entire sentence and its meaning are changed.

I CONDUCTED THIS EXPERIMENT IN A CLASS OF TWENTY-THREE STUDENTS.

1. ‘I took my dog for a walk in the park’ was heard by the last person as ‘do homework school’.
2. ‘All school buses are yellow and huge’ was heard by the last person as ‘playground is big’.

The final sentence is entirely irrelevant and cut short. Imagine what could have happened to information a few thousand years ago when books were not in print. All the religious books were orally narrated for decades from

one generation to another before they were finally written and printed after many centuries. If in a span of 20 minutes, a single sentence is changed to a completely different one, that too, between humans of the same age. You can imagine the fate of religious texts.

Facts get distorted when passed on through word of mouth. I bet none of the miracles we read in holy books ever happened. If disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis can happen. The probability of a miracle repeating is the same.

Hinduism comes up with a reason quoting 'Kali Yuga'. The gods are angry with humans that they left them to their fate, with no more incarnations. So, there will be no more miracles. I feel sad when I think that so-called gods also think and feel like humans.

If gods or their direct representatives wrote holy books, they could have had answers to basic encounters of science. Forget about the future; they didn't even have a clue about the past.

- They could have written about the big bang theory and the mass extinctions that happened to the dinosaurs.
- They could have explained the theory of human evolution.
- They could have given us formulas of preventive vaccinations and the cure to many diseases.
- They could have warned us about global warming and pollution.

Global warming and pollution were never heard of at the time these books were written. The writers couldn't expect this to happen. Hence, they never mentioned it. Many religious books got refined over a period of time and were printed with backdating of facts and discoveries. They were like Wikipedia of the past, where anyone could edit.

Though the Greek mathematician Eratosthenes discovered that the earth was round in 200 BC. It was a common belief that it was flat till a very long time. Once Europeans proved that the earth was not flat in the seventeenth century, out of nowhere, all the books had a fresh edition of stories about their founders confirming the same centuries ago.

There is a lot of good in these books. At the same time, they had distorted facts. The myths and stories in these books are more about human drama than facts that can benefit humanity.

VALUES

Ethical values are a product of historical conditions, and they change over time. A person from the middle ages certainly doesn't have the same moral values as we have today. For instance, they might say it's perfectly acceptable to burn someone who practised witchcraft.

It's a coincidence that all the miracles took place in the past. In the earlier days, no one had a clue why natural disasters happened, so a religious explanation was offered. Now we know that earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis are not caused because of God's anger but due to the rise in magma and tectonic shifts.

We had also seen people rejoicing when statues were drinking milk in 1998 (caliper effect). People started seeing the face of God in a toast or when a statue supposedly bleeds. The most powerful gods suddenly seem to be doing cheap and irrelevant tricks. This is nothing but religious people acting out of blind faith and lack of common sense.

Our personalities, morals, and social customs are a product of the time and culture we are raised in. When the religious texts were written many centuries ago, they were based on the customs and culture of that period.

Our moral code underwent significant changes during the three major economic phases of human history: hunting, agriculture, and industry.

In the hunting phase, males had the responsibility to hunt, so the death rate among males was higher. That meant there were fewer men, so a man was expected to reproduce with several women. In that period, greed, brutality and sexual aggressiveness were advantageous survival traits in mans' life.

Our modern moral standards are still subject to change like they have always been. In the next hundred years, people may have completely different opinions on what's wrong and what's right. Destroying the planet will be the biggest crime that our generation escaped being accounted for. Civilizations always face challenges; how they handle them determines whether they flourish or decay.

The below were not considered crimes in earlier days:

- Men having multiple wives.
- Punishing by death in public and in front of children.
- Having a human as your slave.
- Sacrificing and killing humans for religion.
- Killing for the honour of the family.
- Marrying a minor to the old.
- Female infanticide.

In today's culture, these are unforgivable crimes. We cannot base our knowledge and beliefs on these texts written in a time when today's crime is quite acceptable to them. The knowledge base we have today is the product of thousands of years of human innovation, humans born today benefit from

all the past achievements. Thus, with every new generation, our heritage becomes richer.

AS EDUCATION BECOMES AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE,
FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL BENEFIT ALL THE MORE.

SUPERSTITIONS

Religious ignorance comes from following what you heard without applying logic. Do not claim that you belong to a particular religion if you haven't read and understood all your religious texts.

It takes a maximum of 2-3 months of daily reading.

Most holy books threaten humans with dire consequences if one does not follow certain rituals. I find this cheap. It was definitely written by some intelligent chap who wanted more people to follow his religion by instilling fear of God.

In the Telugu version of *Vinayaka Chaviti Wratham* (the religious book about Lord Ganesha), it was written that looking at the moon on 'Vinayaka Chaturthi' without praying to Lord Ganesha would lead to unforeseen disasters. Being punished for not praying to the gods is sheer stupidity. Believers reading this will come up with reasons supporting their actions.

They don't use common sense that people following other religions see the moon and still live and prosper. That's because their belief is so ingrained in their mind that it's tremendously challenging to question one's faith that was built over several years. It is not unique to Hinduism; other religions also instil similar fears in the minds of the followers.

THE ABOLISHED ACT OF SATI.

Atharva Veda, *Rig Veda* and *Agni Purana* are a few of the religious texts of Hindus that promote the act of Sati. Sati is one of the brutal acts where the widow of a deceased Hindu is burnt alive with her husband's body. Many times it was done forcefully or after driving the women unconscious. It was a practice in a few castes of Hinduism. The Vedas claim that a woman enters heaven along with her husband if she immolates herself with the dead body. She also brings honour to the family.

Governor-General Lord William Bentick made Sati a crime in 1829. He is the first person to ban it in India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy did his best in abolishing such superstitions.

The last act of Sati was in 1987 in Rajasthan. Roopkuvarba Kanwar, an eighteen-year-old was forcefully burnt alive along with her twenty-four-year-old husband's body. She was just eight months into that marriage.

Forty-five people were charged for murder and later acquitted.

In *Mahabharata*, Pandu's second wife immolates herself after his death. Likewise, the four wives of Vasudeva immolate themselves, same with Lord Krishna's eight wives after his death. Archaeology findings confirmed that the Vedas were written between 1500-950 BC. In contrast, the Hindu religion had existed since 3,000 BC. All these texts were written centuries after the religion was born.

Few argue that the Vedas were misinterpreted. My question is simple.

- Why should it be written in a way to confuse the human mind?
- Why should it be written in riddles?
- Why can't it be told directly?

In May 2020, the oldest human (*Homo Sapiens*) fossil was found in Morocco. It is 3,15,000 years old. The previous one, found in 2018, was around 2,00,000 years old.

The oldest religious texts describe human cultures, which appear to happen in the Iron Age. However, none of the holy books says anything about the past three-lakh years since humans inhabited earth.

“If god came back and saw what was being done in his name, he’d never stop throwing up.”

– WOODY ALLEN¹⁸

NO FEAR

I had tough times debating with my father about the flaws in the religion I was born in. He is a very pious man. But, unfortunately, his brain connections got too strong over decades of daily prayer and belief in gods. As a result, it becomes next to impossible for him to break such bonds and add logic to religion. My debate was not to put him down. Instead, it was my quest for truth.

He was heartbroken about me writing this chapter. He gave examples of writers being thrown out of countries and imprisoned for writing against religion. He assured me that I am going to aggravate a lot of influential people in society.

Maybe I will. Maybe I won’t. But, it will not stop me from telling the truth.

I sent him the following poem written by Rabindranath Tagore.

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee, into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

MANY FACES OF RELIGION

Every religion has more than one face. There are enough flaws in all religions. Logically, I am not at liberty to point at the flaws of a different religion I do not belong. It is as stupid as pointing defects in your neighbour's car when you are not the one using it.

Religions mature over time, Hinduism being one of the oldest, reached the stage of maturity. It became very liberal. Christianity is on the verge of being liberal after the crusades. However, the younger ones that were founded after Christianity are still aggressive. It takes a few thousand years for religion to lose its aggressiveness and another few thousand to become extinct. The maximum life of any religion is about 7,000-8,000 years.

No one is born a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian. We are raised as one by our caregivers, who instil their beliefs in us along with love and affection.

Don't take up religion for the love of your parents. I am not asking you to rebel against your parents. You are the extended self of your parents. They are here to protect and nurture you.

Trust me on this. You will know the true value of your parents twice in your life, once when you become one and once when they are gone. The best you can do is love them back as much as you can when they are here.

Religion is one trait that gets passed on from generation to generation: very few experiment and change religions. Most of them get lured by marketers of other religions; few with despair and disappointment in life change religions to try their luck.

Born to Hindu parents in India, I did not have the choice to choose my God till I had a mind of my own. Reading the Hindu scriptures, *Bible* and *Quran* made me realize human stupidity.

If I was not reading or exploring what other religions taught, I could have lived and died ignorantly. Reading about other religions points out the stupidity in our own.

I don't want to debate the existence of any supernatural powers here.

The human mind cannot comprehend what it does not know. Debating when both sides don't have answers is like telling your pup not to play with your socks. It cannot understand; neither can you explain.

RELIGIOUS HUMANS

The challenge with most religious people is they fail to respect other religions. There are followers of other religions who live a happy life. Not

praying to gods of my religion did not deprive them of anything. The same applies to other religions.

This is what people fail to acknowledge. When you fall in love with a particular religion, you lose the ability to grow.

When you are madly in love with someone, you will never find any faults with that person. On the contrary, everything about the person is simply fantastic; likewise, once we like a religion, our opinions never change.

If you like a particular religion or politician, it is tremendously difficult to convince you that your faith is flawed and the politician is corrupt. Even facts and logic will fail unless you have an open mind to learn.

In his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman has stated that repetition is a reliable way of making people believe in falsehoods. If you keep repeating anything over a period of time, irrespective of the fact it is right or wrong, you end up making a solid belief system that cannot be changed easily.

The fastest-growing breed of citizens in today's world is the non-believer—consisting of atheists and agnostics. However, statistics show that an increase in human intelligence will overpower religion in the next few centuries. There is a strong relationship between the literacy rate of countries and the increased number of non-believers.

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have a literacy rate of 99 per cent. They also have the highest number of non-religious citizens.

THE GOOD

Suppose you draw a chart with a family tree and go up to 1,00,000 years into history, you will realize that your great, great, great grandfather living at that point in time did not believe in any of the religions that existed today. He believed in something we couldn't yet discover due to the lack of any physical evidence.

Few studies suggest that there was evidence of humans worshipping bears as gods between 2,00,000 - 50,000 BCE. Hence, it's termed as 'Bear Worship'. Little did they have a clue that their gods will be kept in a zoo in the future.

The world population 50,000 years ago was two lakhs. In 2021 it is 790 crores.

Statistically, our ancestors could be the person who could have a lineage of over 350 crore people sharing his DNA as of date, which makes every other person our family. Just because our sibling has a different faith from us, we cannot ostracize them or fight with them.

Your curiosity made you read until this page. Use it to kill the bigotry in you. Treat every human as your sibling irrespective of his or her religion and faith.

The good from the religious books (or) teachings that humans did not manipulate:

- Islam promotes taking care of your brotherhood.
- Christianity requests you to love the neighbour.
- Hinduism asks you to stand for your family as your dharma.
- Buddhism promotes loving others as we love ourselves.

Your respect towards their teachings is to understand in depth what they tried to communicate. It happens only when you read books of your own and other religions.

I don't call these founders of religion as gods. They are humans who lived and died like any other. They are visionaries who wanted to bring humanity together for the greater good. They fought for what is right. They fought for humanity.

THEY ARE THE REBELS!

Their visions were torn apart by a few people who meddled with their teachings.

When we treat Humanity as one religion, collectively, we will prosper as a race.

Actionable advice:

- Make a list of your daily habits and write your intention behind them.
- Read as many religious books as you can.
- Follow a different religion for few months.
- Start questioning the intention of every action.

Once you are done with the above, reread the chapter again. You will find a totally unexplored dimension of thought and a different you reading it.

Playing the game of the universe, "Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious."

– STEPHEN HAWKING

My goal is to see a better world by 2121, where humans forget hatred, stop fighting for religion, borders or resources. Instead, if we think of ourselves as brothers and sisters from different mothers, we will end up fighting for what is right.

We will end up making the world a better place for the next generations.

CONCLUSION

There are many intellectual cowards in the world who fear expressing their thoughts.

They are so scared of their book getting beaten by negative reviews.

My biggest fear is dying without telling the truth and having an unpublished book in my mind.

I leave the reviews to the maturity of my readers.

I hope you learn, grow and help!

NOTES

- [1](#) Best-selling author and TIMES 100 most influential people and one of the top global thinkers.
- [2](#) Best selling American author and founder of Robert Collier Publications, Inc.
- [3](#) Youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize
- [4](#) Ghanaian diplomat who served as the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations
- [5](#) New world teacher and 20th-century philosopher
- [6](#) Father of philosophy and human ethics
- [7](#) Miss America title holder, fashion designer and veterans advocate
- [8](#) American environmentalist, author, and journalist
- [9](#) People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), India investigator
- [10](#) Thirteenth-century Islamic scholar and a Persian poet wrote this around the age of fifty.
- [11](#) Thinker and writer

[12](#) Author and life coach

[13](#) Writer and producer of Game of Thrones

[14](#) An avid traveller. Author of 105 books. His books were made into several movies.

[15](#) Historian, Professor from Jerusalem and an author

[16](#) Writer and Journalist

[17](#) Turkish thinker and Writer

[18](#) Writer and actor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am no expert or a superior in any field. I am a commoner with tons of curiosity and the will to give back to this planet. I spent more time than people of my age with books, staying curious, exploring the world and understanding human behaviour.

I believe I was born to try new things and experience everything that life has to offer. My mission is to leave this planet a better place for the next generations. I live with a passion to teach and motivate.

I AM A REBEL!