

GRATITUDE

DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS late MARY JACOB AND E. JACOB

PREFACE

While crafting this book, I grappled with the dilemma of how to classify it. It doesn't neatly fit into the category of a novel, lacking the fictional elements typically associated with that genre. It comprises some of my memoirs, yet it goes beyond the traditional bounds of such accounts. Unlike memoirs and autobiographies of celebrities and notable figures (which I am not), typically serving as didactic accounts providing admirers with profound insights into the lives of those they admire, what I wish to share is a compelling and unique story, one that everyone may experience on their own, with my thoughts serving as the backdrop.

Biographies of fame chronicle the journeys of individuals who have overcome challenges, achieved remarkable success, or made significant societal contributions. Readers turn to these real-life narratives for inspiration, aiming to extract valuable lessons from the subjects' experiences and apply them to their own lives. My biography is not about a monumental success story of mine but about exploring the profound depth that life holds, transcending the conventional notions of success.

As the author, upon reflection, I recognize that even though my life may lack monumental victories, there is a compelling need to share the insights gained from the experiences I've undergone and the journey I've traversed. My story intricately interlaces elements from my personal journey as I share my thoughts. I believe that these reflections and opinions, solely my own, may carry a message intended, to some extent, for the broader world.

I have always held the belief that life events unfold under divine guidance. The primary objective of penning down this book is to express profound gratitude to the Almighty, the countries and people I have lived among, and the various individuals I have had the privilege of being associated with. Very Particularly, It is an acknowledgment to God, Supreme Being who reigns over everything, of His Grace, coupled with the thoughts that have shaped my existence.

At least a few may wonder why I invoke God so much while articulating personal thoughts and experiences. It is because I recognize that whatever little I possess is a result of His blessings, and I am compelled to reciprocate this divine benevolence with expressions of gratitude in any way possible. This book stands as a manifestation of that very sentiment. It is a compilation of thoughts, a testament to the journey I have undertaken, and ultimately, an earnest expression of gratitude.

Having a religious faith or not having it is a personal right for every individual. I have often found myself pondering the enigma of disbelief, that curious state of atheism where simplicity lies in faith, yet the path of unbelief appears daunting. Or is it perhaps the reverse? The paradox I've encountered in my contemplations is that the individuals I've crossed paths with, who identify as atheists, often exhibit a peculiar idleness in their demeanour. Their rationales against embracing belief often strike as shallow, lacking in substance when subjected to thoughtful discussion. The world of belief, or the lack thereof, is like a cosmic comedy.

As a staunch believer, I must admit that I often considered myself a victor in conversations or dialogues with my atheist friends. Unfortunately, none of those with whom I engaged in such dialogues have changed their minds thus far. I deemed my victory in a dialogue when the

opponent lacked a suitable and appropriate answer or when they resorted to violent reactions instead of maintaining a healthy dialogue.

Many contend that trusting in science is a superior choice to placing faith in a divine entity. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that belief in God need not be in opposition to the embrace of scientific understanding. These realms, it appears, are already in communion, and the notion that belief in science must stand against belief in God, or vice versa, appears less a wise argument and more a flawed premise. My understanding is that, Science and God are an odd couple that solves mysteries together.

It appears to be a matter of leading a disciplined life, adhering to a few moral tenets, that some find burdensome and thus yearn to distance themselves from the constructs of religion and divine beliefs. While it would be an oversimplification to assert that all atheists lead lives astray from societal norms, it is evident that for some, atheism serves as a convenient refuge for their moral lapses. Not all atheists are moral renegades. Some simply find atheism a bit more fashionable.

Moreover, for a select few others, atheism seems to be a means of courting public attention, portraying themselves as intellectual luminaries or scholars who choose a path distinct from the ordinary citizen. They often proudly don the badge of "enlightened thinkers," although, more often than not, it appears to be a facade, concealing a more complex reality.

Is it then religious are all perfect individuals and criminals all of them are atheists? I don't think that also is correct because we find good and evil are found among both believers as well as non-believers. The incidents of crime taking place right within the very sanctum sanctorium of religious places are also recorded at several occasions. Therefore, punchline is that: Good and evil don't discriminate between believers and non-believers

However, those without faith do not have the same opportunity for redemption as those who have faith. If they possessed even a modicum of trust in God and a hint of remorse for their actions, they could seek repentance and return to a life of faith. They may choose to mend their ways because they believe there is someone watching over them and that there is life after this one. On the other hand, those lacking faith may not feel compelled to change their criminal ways.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some violent events worldwide are linked to religious motivations, and according to studies, religious faiths are sometimes more susceptible to violence than secular ideologies. Karen Armstrong has pointed out, "The prevalent belief that religion is the root cause of the world's bloodiest conflicts is central to our modern conviction that faith and politics should remain separate."

Despite the fact that violence is regarded as a sin in the majority of religions, there remains a puzzling prevalence of violence committed by those who adhere to these faiths. It is crucial to recognize that religion and faith encompass more than just the performance of rituals aimed at pleasing a higher power; they are also intended to cultivate individuals with the proper values and outlooks that can, in the end, foster the development of a more virtuous society.

It is inevitable that, leaders within religious communities should seek wisdom on how to enhance their roles in building morally evolved societies. In the contemporary world, three

foundational pillars religion, science, and politics need to be strengthened in order to make the world a more harmonious and desirable place to inhabit.

Various forms of religion have emerged from a quest for wisdom or have been rooted in wisdom itself. The pursuit of knowledge about God can be seen as the beginning of wisdom. Being wisdom is a more abstract and subjective concept, encompassing knowledge, experience, discernment, and the capacity to make sound judgments and decisions, it often involves a profound understanding of human nature, ethics, and the broader implications of actions and choices. It is less concerned with empirical facts and more focused on the "why" and "what matters" questions in life. Wisdom typically emerges through reflection, learning from mistakes, and considering the long-term consequences of one's actions.

In the global landscape, atheism, in its various forms, may need to exist to a certain extent as a counterbalance to extreme religious actions. However, faith, in its pure form, must also flourish for the betterment of humanity's future. It is through the coexistence and respectful engagement of diverse perspectives that we can strive for a more enlightened and harmonious world.

Conversely, Science, widely recognized, functions as a systematic and empirical methodology for comprehending the natural world. As we know science is a process involves observing, experimenting, and analysing phenomena, ultimately leading to the development of theories and explanations firmly grounded in substantial evidence and the scientific method. The primary objective of science is to uncover objective truths pertaining to the physical, biological, and social aspects of the universe. It often grapples with questions surrounding "how" and "what," striving to elucidate and predict occurrences through the application of empirical data and logical reasoning. Science follows its distinct path of wisdom and doesn't necessarily preclude the concept of God, thereby complementing the quest for understanding in a distinct yet valuable manner.

I believe in the modern world it is not detrimental if an appropriate balance between religion and science is allowed to thrive within the political sphere. Environmental concerns, resource depletion, political conflicts, and other self-inflicted challenges pose substantial threats to our collective coexistence. It's vital to strike a balance between pursuing scientific curiosity and addressing these immediate challenges. Leaders should be attuned to what combination best suits the society they govern. The coexistence of both elements, along with a touch of atheism which may mean incorporating ideas from Atheist Scholars can form a harmonious blend, and the role of politicians in selflessly working to construct a healthy society is pivotal in forging a world characterized by peace and progress.

As I guide you through my thoughts within the pages of this book, I wish to openly acknowledge that there may be some deviations from the original events I describe. This is due to occasional lapses in memory, and at times, for the sake of convenience and without compromising the essence of the subject, I may have made intentional deviations to enhance the reader's enjoyment. Additionally, I refrain from mentioning names of individuals or places unless I feel it's necessary and comfortable to do so, aiming to avoid any potential controversies.

While I strive to avoid controversy of any kind, it's essential to acknowledge that expressing my original feelings or thoughts may not always circumvent it. I firmly believe in the freedom of expression, and if my sincere thoughts happen to contradict established beliefs or cause discomfort to individuals or organizations, I extend my apologies. It is not my intention to hurt

anyone's feelings, but rather to engage in an open conversation. Please consider these expressions as the opinions of an ordinary individual without prominence, dealing only with personal perspectives. I am open to receiving recommendations, corrections, or explanations from anyone that could further enlighten me on these subjects. I warmly welcome you to explore these pages, inviting us all to engage in a dialogue for the benefit of common good and shared enlightenment.

JOURNEY OF A PERSONAL AWAKENING

Frequently, I have pondered the notion that God appears to exhibit favouritism towards His followers on many occasions. This perspective seems evident when scrutinizing some historical events and perusing the biographies of renowned figures from around the world.

Does God exercise partiality among humans? It is possible that our human perspective shapes this impression, and the Highest may have reasons beyond our comprehension for such apparent favouritism. God may choose to reveal some of these reasons, but He retains a shroud of mystery around many of His actions, as is His prerogative. While believers often assert that certain events are God's handiwork, it is essential to acknowledge that God's justice operates differently, guided by a universal purpose that may not align with human notions of fairness.

I have experienced such instances of favour at many points in my life, and it has often left me wondering why I, who might not be deserving of such remarkable experiences, should be the recipient. One such early memory takes me back to my higher secondary school days, particularly during the time when I was under significant pressure to appear for a crucial practical exam in physics.

During this exam, my knowledge was limited to the principles of a simple pendulum, and I fervently prayed for the opportunity to undertake this particular experiment. Mere coincidence did not seem sufficient, so I intensified my prayers as I approached the examination hall's entrance. Each student was provided with a token bearing a random number, which corresponded to the table where we were to perform the experiment with the provided apparatus when the bell rang.

To my astonishment, my assigned number was six, but my heart sank when I realized that the subject assigned to me was a nightmarish one. Panic set in, and my prayers grew even more intense. In a desperate moment, I spotted my favoured simple pendulum on another table, labelled with the number nine. I hurried over to that table, turned my token number to nine, although I am uncertain whether my original number was indeed nine or if it was originally six. What I am sure of is that this was an act of divine intervention, either way.

The enigma surrounding this simple incident still lingers in my mind whenever I pray, serving as a constant reminder that this God will not abandon anyone during times of crisis. While it may not have been the first such occurrence in my life, many others might have passed unnoticed, chalked up to mere luck or results of my own efforts. Nevertheless, this particular incident left an indelible mark on my faith, one that has continued to grow steadily ever since.

In one's youthful days, thoughts tend to be more impassioned, dramatic, and often insistent. It could be attributed to a form of immaturity, where you're inclined to believe that every societal or familial issue requires immediate remedial action. This mindset may sometimes stem from a desire to grab attention or impatience associated with the adolescent phase. There's often a sense of urgency to transition into adulthood, believing that the world needs your input to correct its many issues and age is a barrier.

As you continue to grow and gain life experience, you come to realize that things are not always straightforward. You gradually accept society with all its imperfections and deficiencies. Maturity can be seen as learning to live in harmony with the ebb and flow of life, embracing it without excessive resistance.

Early memories goes back to a particular incident, during which my inner turmoil reached its zenith. It was a day when I had witnessed one of a close elder family member engaged in a serious wrongdoing, leaving me with no option but to confront them directly.

This situation brought about many sleepless nights as I wrestled with how to respond, even considering a violent reaction. I meticulously contemplated various preparations and options, deeply engrossed in this dilemma. However, a moment of introspection prompted me to ponder the morality of such an act. It dawned on me that seeking revenge might not be the right course of action. From within, a guiding voice persistently offered advice, and I chose to heed it.

This transformation in my perspective may have been influenced by the fact that, during those days, I was actively involved in organizing a youth forum in honour of Mahatma Gandhi. Many youths of my age joined, and our organization conducted occasional cultural programs on the first floor of our rented house. We also affiliated our organization with "Balajanaskhyam," a popular youth movement in Kerala sponsored by "Malayala Manorama," the renowned Malayalam daily. We hung a small signboard along the window at the First-Floor reading "Mahatma Gandhi Youth Organization." Gandhi's principles strongly advocated non-violence as the right path to follow. I immersed myself in prayer, seeking profound guidance on how to proceed, and my prayer was intense and sincere.

As usual, early one morning, as I made my routine trip to the dairy to collect our daily supply of milk, I yearned to find an answer from within, as this matter couldn't be disclosed to a third party. I was resolved to base my decision on the final advice I received from my own inner compass.

Then, something remarkable happened. I noticed a truck on its side with bold lettering that read, "No one is perfect in the world." It felt like a direct message to me. In that moment, all my rage and anger began to dissipate. I made the conscious choice to let go of the disturbing scene I had witnessed and to move forward, maintaining my relationships as usual. Looking back, I realize that it was the right decision and this was a significant turning point and the first sign of my personal growth.

In my perspective, divine intervention is not reserved for a select few but is available to all who choose to embrace it. This inner calling is quite common, and anyone who decides to listen and appreciate it is more likely to receive it. However, intentionally declining this call repeatedly may lead to disconnection from such communication, possibly on a long-term basis. There is an abundance of trustworthy testimonials from well-known and prominent individuals across social, political, and even scientific spheres. People from all age groups, from children to the elderly, have experienced this connection, and many offered passionate accounts of their own encounters.

I often wonder whether it is possible to scientifically prove such incidents or if science offers its own explanations for these events. As far as science is concerned, I believe the term "inner call" is not a well-established scientific concept, and it does not have a specific scientific explanation. For Science it may be a colloquial or metaphorical expression used to describe an

internal or subjective experience. Those who do not believe in a divine presence may dismiss these experiences as mere coincidences or the result of eventualities.

Prominent figures such as Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Nelson Mandela, and Abraham Lincoln openly acknowledged receiving this inner calling in many of their important decisions.

Furthermore, individuals like Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Jane Goodall, and Carl Sagan, who made significant contributions in the field of science, may have expressed their motivations in different words. They often cited personal passions, curiosity, and a deep sense of purpose as driving forces in their scientific pursuits. However, it can be inferred that they, too, were guided by the same inner voice or calling, even if described in different terms.

The distinct nature of the inner calling's voice varies from one individual to another, making it challenging to establish specific parameters. While it is not the same for everyone, there are individuals who have frequent and profound conversations of this kind, including sages and rishis in India. These experiences are not bound by region or religion, and it's difficult to categorize them in terms of geography or belief systems based on the number and frequency of such conversations.

However, it's worth noting that claims of having such conversations are relatively common among Jews and Hindus in the past era, and in modern times, these claims are also popular among Christian pastors and priests. The key point to emphasize is that it is not one's caste, religion, or geographical location that truly matters. Instead, it's the number of individuals who earnestly attempt to listen to the voice of the unknown and practice it in their daily lives who are more likely to receive such revelations.

During my high school years, we had a frequent visitor at our house, a skilled carpenter who was short and fragile in appearance. His abilities in artistic wood carving and fabrication were truly remarkable. What made him even more intriguing was his occasional ability to predict events for individuals, and astonishingly, many of his predictions turned out to be accurate.

Sometimes, without any prompting, he would predict events simply by keenly observing someone's eyes, and these predictions often came true. My parents suggested that he might have been trained in "Mukhalakhshana," an ancient practice of reading the face among Hindus. Out of curiosity, I once asked him how he was able to perform this talent, and he simply replied that it was an inner call or an inner voice he received. He couldn't provide a more detailed explanation.

He never used this skill for personal gain or financial benefits; he would share these insights only in the context of a personal relationship. If we asked him to predict specific events or about particular individuals, he would just smile innocently and politely decline. I had a close association with him, as I was fascinated by the woodworking skills he demonstrated, turning raw wood into beautiful pieces of art. The way he cut and connected pieces of wood to create magnificent furniture was truly mesmerizing.

His first prediction about me left me in shock. As a teenager, I found myself receiving advances from two of my female neighbours and was wrestling with the decision of whom to choose. I couldn't comprehend how my carpenter friend could understand my inner turmoil, but one day he clearly and directly addressed the psychological struggle I was going through. It was exactly

the same day I received a one-line letter from the second one stating only, "Not going in circles but wish to say straight, I love You."

He cautioned me to be cautious because more such invitations were likely to come, and he predicted that these relationships wouldn't last. Furthermore, he warned that accepting an invitation from any of them at this age could lead to embarrassing situations. Despite my amazement at his ability to uncover my inner thoughts, my immature mind decided to go against his advice and chose one of the girls, who also happened to be the daughter of a teaching couple at my school.

Both of her parents taught me in different subjects, and they hailed from two different communities. It was widely known in the school that they had fallen in love during their college days and had married against their parents' wishes. I believed that they would understand the hearts of two young people in love since they had experienced a similar situation. I thought that if they found out about my relationship with their daughter, they would be more accepting.

The passionate conversations and meetings with the girl didn't last long and were soon discovered by her parents. It was incredibly embarrassing for me to witness the teacher crying loudly in front of me in a closed teacher's room, while her husband angrily shouted at me.

My young and fragile mind couldn't handle the situation, and I began to tremble. The scene concluded with a stern warning from the husband, who told me that his wife's tears were the first she shed after their married life, and I was the reason for it. He threatened that if he noticed any further advances from my side towards their girl, he would take drastic action.

I managed to escape the situation as he opened the doors, and I decided to stop the relationship abruptly. The cruelty I exhibited was in my failure to respond to the girl, who desperately tried to communicate with me later in various ways, but I lacked the courage to respond. The relationship thus came to a definitive end.

I once traversed the street where her house was situated and noticed her watching me from the balcony. She hurriedly chased after me, but upon reaching me, she discovered my elder sister in my company. Disappointed, she made a U-turn and retreated.

Years later, when I shared this story with a classmate, her comment hurt me more than ever before. She said, "The worst thing you did was not communicating with your girlfriend at least one last time, explaining what had happened. Instead, you left her to assume and harbour bitter feelings." I still believe that her statement was accurate, but if I had communicated with her, it would have set in motion a sequence of other events, including her response to her parents and the subsequent repercussions that might have had a lasting impact on both our futures. I think it was my inner voice that deterred me from reaching out to her again.

I didn't forget my carpenter friend, and I rewarded him for predicting my situation so accurately. But my amazement regarding the carpenter extended beyond his initial predictions. One day, he began addressing me as "Mr. Engineer" whenever he saw me. I initially thought he was joking due to my keen interest in observing his carpentry work. When I asked him about this, he smiled and said, "Because you will become a great engineer in the future, and when you achieve that position, remember my words."

I laughed it off because my greatest ambition at the time was to become a journalist or a famous writer. After completing my schooling, I was determined to pursue courses in literature and work toward becoming a renowned journalist, novelist, or writer. I was already involved in literary activities, published few small works and had attended several literature workshops conducted by the famous Malayalam newspaper group, Malayala Manorama. I was steadfast in building my dreams in that direction.

However, as the final days of my schooling approached, I faced a significant challenge in deciding which course to pursue further. My peers and even family members, who were experiencing financial difficulties, urged me to choose a professional course as my first priority should be earning an immediate income. They believed that a career in the literary field takes time to become a seasoned writer, and until then, financial constraints could hinder my progress. Ultimately, I yielded to the pressures of my circumstances and selected an engineering course to pursue.

In my engineering profession, I accomplished significant goals, surpassing many of my classmates. The words of that frail, old carpenter echoed in my mind as my engineering career flourished. I worked with several engineering and construction companies in India initially and later in several Middle Eastern countries. My career advanced from Site Engineer to Project Engineer, then to Project Manager, and finally to Project Director in a reputable Engineering Consultancy.

The field of engineering and construction, in particular, is one where you're often not confined to traditional working hours. If you're passionate about your work, the demands of the job can turn it into an enjoyable, round-the-clock endeavour. It is a demanding field where the environment is not always cozy, and unless you enjoy the ruggedness, you may not advance as a good engineer. I can sincerely say that I enjoyed my job throughout my career.

Unfortunately, the relentless pressures in my profession rarely allowed me to revisit my literary skills. However, when the construction industry faced a global financial recession, especially in the Middle Eastern country where I worked, I lost my job, later my business ventures in same field faltered, and I found myself virtually jobless.

A profound reality, which I had overlooked for an extended period, has now manifested itself. Age discrimination in the job market has become increasingly evident, particularly after the age of 60. Although the law does not explicitly prohibit individuals from taking up employment at this age, employers are showing a growing preference for younger professionals, even for top positions.

This preference is fuelled by considerations such as lower wage expectations and the perception that younger workers are more motivated and technologically savvy. This marks a departure from an era when experience conferred a certain advantage, a dynamic that has changed in recent times due to various factors. The emerging trend of age discrimination is indeed significant and raises concerns about its implications in the job market.

Furthermore, organizations stand to gain significant advantages by fostering inclusive and diverse environments that recognize and appreciate the contributions of employees across various stages of their careers. Prioritizing the value of a multi-generational workforce and offering continuous learning and skill development opportunities can serve to narrow the divide between different age groups in the workplace.

However, I am still apprehensive about the potential implications of this situation. Primarily, it might result in a depletion of valuable experience and expertise within the workforce. Seasoned professionals with years of experience often bring a wealth of knowledge and a perspective refined by time, which can prove highly beneficial to organizations. Additionally, excluding older individuals from top positions solely based on age rather than merit has the potential to impede diversity and restrict the array of perspectives in leadership roles.

This concern extends beyond the confines of the workplace, potentially fuelling age-related stereotypes and biases within society. It is imperative for employers and society at large to acknowledge and rectify the undervaluation of individuals of all ages in the workplace.

While legal frameworks in numerous countries prohibit age discrimination, enforcing these laws remains a formidable challenge. It might be beneficial for individuals and advocacy groups to heighten awareness regarding the significance of age diversity in the workforce. They can advocate for fair treatment irrespective of age, fostering a collective understanding of the value that each age group contributes to the professional landscape.

Fostering inclusive and diverse environments within organizations, where the contributions of employees at all career stages are valued, holds significant benefits. Highlighting the importance of a multi-generational workforce and offering opportunities for ongoing learning and skill development can effectively narrow the gap between various age groups in the workplace.

The global population of elderly individuals is on the rise, primarily due to advanced healthcare facilities. Countries like China and Japan are already grappling with a surge in their aging populations, and this trend may soon become a global phenomenon. Furthermore, older individuals are actively adapting to new technologies, undergoing training, and displaying heightened motivation.

The notion that, true endeavors in life commence around the age of 40 has undergone a transformation. Given the improved health standards of the new generation, it is apt to consider age 60 as the new 40. Rather than succumbing to disappointment about this evolving reality, the older generation now bears the additional responsibility of adapting to new technological demands prevalent in the current environment. By actively seeking training, staying self-motivated, and facing the daily challenges of life, they can navigate this phase with resilience and enthusiasm.

My advice is that young entrepreneurs initiating their own start-ups should allocate a certain percentage of their staff positions to older professionals. The matured experience of these seasoned individuals can offer valuable guidance and insights that the younger workforce may not have encountered. This blend of youth and experience can contribute to a more robust and well-rounded team, fostering a collaborative environment that capitalizes on the strengths of both age groups.

Secondly, considering the inevitable progression towards old age for everyone, incorporating older professionals into the workforce becomes an act of goodwill. This act may be reciprocated in some meaningful way in the future, and those who extend opportunities to the elderly may find themselves similarly supported as they age.

Somehow for me, the new realizations and circumstances presented me with a unique advantage. At the age of sixty-two, I found myself with some idle time, allowing me to reflect on my past and reignite my innate skills and childhood aspirations in the realm of literature. It was during this period that I embarked on the journey of writing this book.