

THERE IS NO 'POINT B'

Awakening of a software engineer

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Prologue

I wrote my first book, “Chennai to Chicago - Memoir of a Software Engineer” circa 2015. I shared the story of my journey from Chennai, to coming to the US for my Master’s, some heartbreaks, adventures, travels, and the spiritual quests that ensued. I was always seeking something throughout my life. As a kid, as a teenager, as an adolescent, as an adult, as a software engineer, traveler, writer, friend, yogi, I always sought something. I always thought, “There is a Point B and I need to get there.” I had no idea where that Point B was or how to get there. But I always felt, “Something’s missing.”

And COVID struck. With that first lockdown in March 2020 throughout the world, many succumbed. The first wave devastated the US and Europe, many watched the news in disbelief, gurneys lined up outside the hospitals, patients gasping for oxygen waiting to be treated, hospitals trying to do the unthinkable that they wouldn’t have dreamt of doing in their career - prioritizing people as to who’s worthy of saving and who isn’t.

And, on the flip side, several videos of “nature reclaiming itself” were shared on social media, like the wild dolphins appearing near the shores, wildlife roaming on the streets, beautiful silhouettes of distant mountains revealing themselves after being hidden for decades due to smog, etc. While India was beginning to let out a sigh of relief after a year of lockdowns and struggles, the second COVID delta wave devastated India in May 2021. Almost every one of the 1.4 billion people knew someone in the family who became seriously ill, or worse, died of COVID.

My dad almost died, his oxygen went down to 60, he was in the ICU for 2 weeks constantly gasping for breath, and eventually came out of the ordeal after a month. COVID sucked half his energy and only spat the other half out. He became extremely weak ever since. And to make matters worse, he fell and broke his hip a year later, which sucked whatever was left of him. As much as I would have liked to take a vacation in a mountain resort sipping hot coffee to write this book, what best time to write “There is no Point B” than tending to my bedridden dad with a hip fracture, helping the nurse clean his urine and poop, while working throughout the night on my full-time job with a terrible toothache and multiple root canals while at it.

I don’t know if COVID came with an energetic shift while it was devastating the world. One fine day, out of the blue, a very ordinary thing happened to me. I realized that “This is it. This is all there is. There is nothing more to do, nothing more to seek, nothing more needed to happen in life, I have reached the end, I am home. I am already home. This is home.” And my “something’s missing” feeling that I had been carrying for over two decades, simply dropped. My seeking dropped. There were no lights, no sounds, no angels flying from heaven, no bells and whistles, no kundalini explosions, I simply felt, very clearly, without an iota of doubt, that “There is nowhere else to go, nothing more to do, this is it, this is all there is, there is no Point B.”

All the illusions simply dropped.

It became very clear to me that the past and future have no more solidity than a mist of smoke. I did obviously know that the past and future are just memory and imagination in the brain. But it is one thing to know, and another thing for it to become a living

experience. An experience of living in the now without a past-future story. Past and future simply lost their meaning. The running commentary called “life story” that constantly gives a voiceover in our heads, like, “Things are not going to go well,” “I don’t know if I can do it,” “I was emotionally hurt 10 years ago,” “I am anxious about the future,” “He shouldn’t have said this,” “She shouldn’t have done that,” or a million variations of these, simply stopped.

I realized that suffering is a grim gloomy voiceover to an ordinary movie.

For all the stories I went through in my life, I always wanted people to tell me, “Everything will be okay.” I hopped from one place to another seeking a ‘Point B’ where “everything will be okay.” From one job to another, from one country to another, I traveled to 25 countries looking for that ‘Point B.’ I stayed in Vedic ashrams, Buddhist monasteries, Benedictine monasteries, South American Shamans, attended spiritual retreats, sometimes meditated 12 hours a day, even tried being a part-time monk for a year practicing renunciation and non-attachment seeking that Point B where “everything will be okay.”

I spent three decades of my life looking for that Point B where ‘everything will be okay.’

Until, one day, I realized that everything is already okay. There is no Point B. The is-ness, the now-ness, the present moment, is all there is. And this is-ness is infinite and tremendously beautiful.

This Book

“There is no Point B” is not some knowledge to learn or a spiritual practice to follow. It is a simple observation of what is happening. But still, I tried to quote whatever “knowledge” I came across from yogis, gurus, science, or religion, under “Story Time” throughout this book. I call it the “story time” because I don’t want to give these any more importance than just a story. It can be taken for what it’s worth or discarded freely.

None of what is written in this book is new. Most are right in front of our eyes. Some pages may evoke a feeling, “Oh yes! That is so true! How did I miss it?” Some may even create a shift in awareness if we are ready.

Anything that is written in this book may feel redundant. The only bottom line is that there is only this is-ness, the present moment. Every other sentence written in this book is going to go round and round and point only to this is-ness. All the life stories, ‘Story Times,’ realizations, and everything else written in this book is only an attempt at pointing to this one truth from several dozen vantage points, which is, “There is no ‘Point B.’ The is-ness is all there is.”

“There is no Point B” is a significant observation, because seeking an illusory Point B is the cause of all suffering in this world. Suffering is the distance between ‘is’ and ‘should.’ “There is no Point B” simply means, there is no “should,” there is only “is.”

Enlightenment or liberation is only juicy as long as we play hide-and-seek with it. And once it is found, it only evokes this feeling, “Wait! What? Really? Is that it?”

Enlightenment doesn't need miracles or long dreadlocks. It is simply a recognition that 'This is it, I am already home.' I tried to write my observations in the simplest language possible without any bells and whistles.

Like some spiritual Gurus say, "Enlightenment is a big joke!"

Chapter 1: A Story Called Life

“Enlightenment is the ego’s ultimate disappointment.”

– Rinpoche

It just feels like yesterday when I sat in front of the television watching *Mile sur mera tumhara* however many times it was aired on Doordarshan in the '80s. Or, when Sam Neill and Jeff Goldblum turn their face and go agape, looking at that humongous beast for the first time in Jurassic Park with that magnificent John Williams score. Couldn't believe that happened 30 years ago. And when I had my first teenage crush, Sissel's haunting and ethereal background solo in Titanic crushed my heart. That feeling when the solo started to play when DiCaprio sinks in water, never heard such a soul-crushing voice and music in my life before, my heart felt so heavy... that was 25 years ago.

It suddenly struck me that we only have 7 or 8 decades of life, and half of it is already gone. Life suddenly feels so short!

At least until a few years ago, until my mid-30s, the grocery store clerks used to ask for my ID whenever I bought cough syrup, because, in the US, they weren't supposed to sell it to anyone under 21. Not that I looked under 21, but I may have fit that “just in case” category, maybe an older looking under 21. They didn't do that anymore, they just gave the cough syrup and sent me off my way. I even once asked sheepishly, “Don't you want to see my ID?” and the store clerk just dismissed me off, “No sir, you are fine. Next please.” Just a couple more decades, and I will be asked when I buy any ticket, “Regular, or senior?”

When I was in university in the US, I liked a girl, we used to cook and eat together, spent hours on the phone discussing a lot of things, she called me when she went to buy clothes or jewelry, “Does this look good on me?” she would ask. Once she was looking at the tiniest of the mini skirt and asked me, “How about this?” I examined it for some time and hesitated a little, but asked her with concern, “What if a strong wind blows your skirt up?” She didn’t expect that and started giggling. Then selected one with shorts, “How about this?” “Nice.” When she went to the salon, she would call me to show how pretty she looked. Once we went to some graduate students’ dinner, I put my hand out to grab a beer they had kept on the table, she was sitting next to me, looked at me, and gave me that “Don’t you dare touch it” stare, I wanted to marry her right then. One day she went to India, I dropped her off at the airport, I was in tears the whole drive back as I hadn’t expressed my feelings to her but thought about telling her when she came back. I didn’t hear back from her for a few months, no replies to my emails either. When I wondered what happened, one day I got an email from her with a subject ‘hi’ and an attachment. The attachment was her wedding invitation. It broke my heart. That was 15 years ago.

I felt lost, just took my car and spent time in the deserts and mountains in the US. That started my soul-searching journeys. Slowly I moved on, started working for a couple of years. I eventually got tired of the groundhog day life at 29, living the same days over and over, like running on a treadmill, keep running but go nowhere at the end of the day, the world becoming a huge Halloween party, everyone donning costumes from clowns to superheroes, constantly validating each other, “Am I good enough?” and I am weaving a web around me with career, money, travels, and relationships, trying to stick myself in the middle of it all like a spider.

I did a lot of crazy things for a few years into my early 30s, quit my job in the US once, sold everything, returned to India, and backpacked around India visiting ashrams and monasteries for 6 months, I came back to the US, backpacked around the world every few months, did a lot of soul-searching, published a memoir, rode a motorcycle, played djembe in concerts, lived like a part-time monk for a year practicing renunciation and non-attachment. This bohemian-hippie lifestyle made me so happy for several months, grew my hair out, went to the gym, men and women got attracted to me, “Man! You are glowing, what’s your secret?” I thought ‘This is it! I found the holy grail!’ When I was reveling in that ego bubble, a beautiful Delhi girl whom I knew proposed to me indirectly. My hormones instantly sprang into action, like the teen from that Pixar movie ‘Inside Out,’ ‘Oh my God, oh my God, a pretty girl likes me, yes I like you, I want to make babies with you, let’s get married right now!’ I used to play djembe when she sang, I knew her parents, they liked me too, I just had to take a few steps and the wedding would have happened. My hormones kept repeating this inside of me, ‘Propose to her, marry her, make babies, end of story.’ She had some family issues, she had to go back to India and found a job in Delhi. We had some email exchanges, but it felt like a mere attraction both ways. The attraction faded away after a few months. I was again in emotional turmoil. While all this was unfolding, I searched for that hippie-monk who was roaming around inside of me but was nowhere to be found.

I was always spiritual since childhood, spent a lot of time in solitude and contemplation. I used to tell my mom that I was going to the next street to play but would bicycle to the railway station and watch people scurrying everywhere with their luggage, trains arriving majestically blaring their horns, I used to stand near those gargantuan engines gazing at them. My childhood dream once was

to become a loco pilot. When I went to college, I deliberately missed the morning college bus, took the state transport buses to travel in solitude, and quietly watched the world go by without talking to anyone, reaching college around noon, earning me a nickname in my first year in college 'part-time student.' The seeking deepened when I turned 30, I wanted to find the joy that doesn't go away no matter what life threw at me. I started trying a lot of different things, took cold showers at 4 in the morning, ate one meal a day, veganism for a few months, became a spiritual wanderer, not with a loin cloth or begging bowl in the Himalayas, but wandered from coast to coast, country to country, searching for silent retreats in Buddhist monasteries, Benedictine monasteries, Vedic ashrams, South American Shamans, sometimes meditating 12 hours a day.

And suddenly, one day, the veil cracked open, and I had a rude spiritual awakening in my mid-30s during a meditation. I encountered angels, received many blessings from Them, learned some mysteries about creation, experienced dimensions beyond the physical. It was intense, jolted me to the core, and heightened my senses for a few months. Colors looked too bright, was able to hear people whispering from 100 feet away, was able to smell divine aromas around me, was able to feel some people's feelings when they just walked by, and the most profound of all was, I temporarily lost all the attachments I had in this life and a wave of immense joy engulfed me. I felt my "ego" drop. Everything suddenly looked like... just a story. A realization that a billion stories walked this planet before me, a billion more will walk after me, a billion stories walking around right now, and I am just a grain of sand on the beach of time.

I once asked a saint why my heart broke a lot in this life. He said, "For the light of wisdom to seep through, the heart has to open.

There are many ways to open the heart, but the quickest is to break it.”

Fierce grace!

I realized I roamed around a carefree living being until age 5, when slowly I started feeling “I am somebody.” Ego. I suddenly became this “first rank holder.” Oh! “I am better than them.” That girl who gave me a love letter in my 5th standard, it did something. She thrust the letter into my hands, I still remember it started with the heading, ‘love letter,’ that’s how I knew it was one because I had no clue what she wrote, there were a lot of spelling mistakes, I even asked her, ‘Can you tell me what you wrote?’ she giggled and ran away. Did she even know what she wrote? Or did I even know what I read? But it did kindle something in me, some strange feeling that I hadn’t felt before. And I saw this girl in 9th standard, butterflies fluttered in my stomach. *Wow! What a feeling that was! What was that?* I wanted to be her friend. Whenever I smiled at her, she smiled at me too, there was some energy between us without words, I wanted to be near her, I liked her very much. Every time I saw her, I felt so happy. Even thinking about her felt happy. *Why is that?*

A guy harassed some girl in 11th standard over the phone and had said my name, “This is Sriram speaking.” The girl had told everyone in the school the next day that I harassed her, saw her crying outside the principal’s office with her mother, everyone thought I was the harasser, no one believed me when I said who did it. The guy who harassed was tall and handsome, and I wasn’t, so I must be the bad guy. That started my lack feeling, from ‘I am better than them’ first ranker, to ‘I am not good enough,’ ‘People don’t like me.’ I got harassed and bullied in high school. Even a teacher harassed me in his class. When my crush looked down on me, it made a big gaping

hole in my self-worth. I couldn't study and failed in three subjects, given a "warning promotion" to 12th standard. The school labeled failures as "incorrigibles" and public-shamed them by calling them out in school loudspeakers for a 1-hour special class that started just 30 minutes before school closing, "Incorrigibles may come out to attend special class." The first day, I felt ashamed to walk out in front of everyone and just sat there after the announcement, but the principal came to the class and yelled, "Sriram! Aren't you an incorrigible? Come out!" He might as well have just stabbed me in the heart. It broke my heart every day when I walked out in shame in front of everyone as an "incorrigible," on top of the harasser label. The school was proud of this and said it out loud, "Students will remember the shame as a lesson and do well next time." Yes, school, you were right, I did remember it, not as a lesson, but as trauma and PTSD for many many years which took me more than a decade to mend back my shattered self-worth.

Every time someone harassed, the lack deepened. Feelings of "fear," "lack," "victim," "sadness," became deep-rooted.

I started tiptoeing around people, scared of getting hurt. I walked around with fear and victim consciousness. I started going from one place to another looking to fill this void, this job, that job, this country, that country, this boss, that boss... or maybe marriage. I saw many marriages where husbands abuse wives, wives humiliate husbands, parents hurt children, to varying degrees, all walking around with unhealed wounds in their hearts hurting other people. It is Psychology 101, "Wounded people wound people."

Fear, hurt, relationships, politics, bosses, subordinates, man, woman, child, everything tires. I splurged myself in travels trying to fill the void, stood on top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, looked around

Dubai deserts from atop the Burj Khalifa, gaped at the Taj Mahal, road-tripped around Iceland, ate Falafel in Istanbul, crisscrossed the length and breadth of the US, roamed around 25 countries, nothing filled the void inside of my heart.

Roaming outside was just a band-aid, the wounds kept coming back up. I decided to roam inside. I went to ashrams and monasteries. I realized the world inside of me was a million times more mysterious than the world outside.

And one day... the veil cracked... ego disappeared... taught me many things. The feeling of “I’m not good enough” that I had carried for over two decades disappeared, and realized that “I’m good enough the day I was born!” Ego death is like a real death. I felt a brilliant light engulfing me, went into the room of the divine. Anger, laziness, and fear diminished. I got a new pair of glasses to look at the world, where I realized that every experience I have is a blessing... hurt is as equally a blessing as is love... Sickness is as equally a blessing as is health... because one enhances the other, and without one, the other feels like eating when not hungry.

Sure, hurt hurts, sickness sickens, but without them, joy isn’t joyful enough.

There is a sacredness in a monk meditating in a monastery, as is the sacredness in a male copulating with a female. There is a sacredness in a cow feeding her calf, as is the sacredness in a lion hunting a deer. There is a sacredness in a mother feeding her baby, as is the sacredness in a soldier fighting for the country. Our life is sacred, people in it are sacred, and whatever part they played, days or years, is sacred. I just crossed the intermission in my life movie, I am looking forward to the second half, and I sure know the climax,

“Tears, giggles, shame, pride, romance, heartbreak, failure, success, sickness, health... whoa! That was one heck of a movie indeed!” and I would just get up from my seat and go home, unscathed. I am grateful for the full gamut of experience this life has given me, there was no emotion I did not go through, which made a great plot for a memoir. I hope life will give me some opportunity to meet some people, look them in the eye, and say, “Thank you for playing your part in my life.”

Bowing my head down in reverence and gratitude, I thank everyone for playing their part in my life.

Love expanded me, hurt deepened me, and looking at a few strands of gray hair, and through all the tears and giggles of 40 years, I take a deep breath in with contentment... I’m not a walking past, I’m fresh in the now. There is nowhere else to go, nothing more to do. This is it. This is all there is. The is-ness, the now-ness, the present moment is it!