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This book is dedicated to my guru,

SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI,

affectionately known as Gurudeva.

*His unconditional love for me and personal commitment to my
unfoldment is at the heart of what has inspired me to write this book.
He has given me the greatest gift, the teachings and tools I need to know
myself and experience the divine within me, and the foundation of what
he taught me is contained within the pages of this book.*

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>
---------------------	-----------

PART 1: A LIFE OF PURPOSE AND JOY

<i>Chapter 1 • Foundations for a Concentrated Mind</i>	3
<i>Lesson 1.1: Living a Purpose-Focused Life</i>	5
<i>Lesson 1.2: Taking Charge</i>	9
<i>Lesson 1.3: Desire, Life's Supreme Force</i>	15
<i>Lesson 1.4: Making the Case</i>	19
<i>Chapter 2 • Setting Up for Success</i>	23
<i>Lesson 2.1: Life Is Meant to Be Lived Joyously</i>	25
<i>Lesson 2.2: Manifesting the Life You Want</i>	28
<i>Lesson 2.3: Death, the Greatest Impetus</i>	30
<i>Lesson 2.4: The Law of Practice</i>	38
<i>Lesson 2.5: Intention and Obedience</i>	46
<i>Lesson 2.6: The Power of Small</i>	51

PART 2: THE INEFFABLE MIND

<i>Chapter 3 • Understanding the Mind</i>	59
<i>Lesson 3.1: The World's Most Powerful Tool</i>	61
<i>Lesson 3.2: The Mind's Great Secret</i>	66
<i>Lesson 3.3: The Mind as a Mansion</i>	74
<i>Lesson 3.4: Awareness as a Traveler</i>	78

Chapter 4 • Where Awareness Goes, Energy Flows	83
<i>Lesson 4.1: The Importance of Terminology</i>	85
<i>Lesson 4.2: Awareness in Daily Life</i>	88
<i>Lesson 4.3: Awareness the Dog</i>	94
<i>Lesson 4.4: The Story of Energy</i>	98
<i>Lesson 4.5: Emotion's Magnetic Power</i>	103
<i>Lesson 4.6: The Mycelium of the Mind</i>	109

Chapter 5 • Mastering Awareness	115
<i>Lesson 5.1: Defining the Purpose and Goal</i>	117
<i>Lesson 5.2: Moving Awareness in the Mind</i>	121
<i>Lesson 5.3: Bringing Awareness to Attention</i>	127
<i>Lesson 5.4: Detaching Awareness</i>	130
<i>Lesson 5.5: The Steward of Awareness</i>	137

PART 3: WINGS OF THE MIND

Chapter 6 • Unwavering Focus	143
<i>Lesson 6.1: Please Don't Drug Me</i>	145
<i>Lesson 6.2: Defining Concentration</i>	152
<i>Lesson 6.3: Distraction—the Mental Plague</i>	156
<i>Lesson 6.4: Integrating Focus into Life</i>	162
<i>Lesson 6.5: Establishing Concentration Rituals</i>	171

Chapter 7 • Willpower—Life's Greatest Force	181
<i>Lesson 7.1: Defining and Understanding Willpower</i>	183
<i>Lesson 7.2: Three Ways to Develop Willpower</i>	189
<i>Lesson 7.3: Integrating Willpower into Life</i>	195
<i>Lesson 7.4: Establishing Willpower Rituals</i>	201
<i>Lesson 7.5: The Source of Willpower</i>	207
<i>Lesson 7.6: Doing the Deep Work</i>	210

Chapter 8 • Cogitations on Concentration	215
<i>Lesson 8.1: Technology and Concentration</i>	217
<i>Lesson 8.2: The Wheels of the Mind</i>	225

<i>Lesson 8.3: Ruminations on Focus</i>	231
<i>Lesson 8.4: Offspring of Focus</i>	237
<i>Lesson 8.5: Demystifying Focus</i>	245

PART 4: A PANACEA FOR THE MIND

Chapter 9 • The Four Foes **255**

<i>Lesson 9.1: Being Present—the Remedy</i>	257
<i>Lesson 9.2: The Root Cause of Worry</i>	264
<i>Lesson 9.3: Conquering Fear</i>	271
<i>Lesson 9.4: Overcoming Anxiety and Stress</i>	277

Chapter 10 • Tools in Action **283**

<i>Lesson 10.1: Regrettable Reactions</i>	285
<i>Lesson 10.2: Mental Arguments</i>	293
<i>Lesson 10.3: A Game Changer</i>	299
<i>Lesson 10.4: At the Heart of Commerce</i>	303
<i>Lesson 10.5: Focus in Business</i>	308

<i>Conclusion</i>	319
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	321
<i>Index</i>	323

INTRODUCTION

The time that I spent living with my guru as an ordained Hindu monk in his cloistered monastery was the greatest blessing in my life. I learned so much and realized I have so much more to learn. He laid the foundation for my unfoldment, knowing that this would be a lifetime of work for me and that he would not be present that entire time to guide me in person. That was, sadly, more than true, for he passed away three years after I joined his monastic order.

Seven years after he died, having spent a decade living as a monk in his monastery, I chose not to renew my vows. I ventured into the world, making New York City my home and choosing to live as a Hindu priest. In Hinduism, priests are considered householders—they get married, work, and earn a living like most householders.

I left the monastery in the second half of 2008, during the height of the global financial crisis, with two sets of robes, a thousand dollars in cash, and a MacBook Pro. The cash and laptop were a generous love offering from the monastery to help me get started in the world. Though

my physical possessions were few, I had been empowered by my guru with an array of teachings and tools that he had taught me to understand and apply in the monastery to help me with my spiritual unfoldment.

I knew that these teachings were all I needed to create the next phase of my life. I had seen them work in the monastery and knew that they would work in the world as well. These time-tested ancient teachings were anchored in universal truths. It truly did not matter where I was or what I was doing. They applied across the board to me and to anyone who grasped and understood them.

As a monk I often heard visitors to the monastery say, “It can’t be hard to live a life of purpose and joy when you live in a serene monastery in Hawaii.” I could not argue with that. Monastic life has intense challenges, but it was certainly easier to put the teachings into practice in an environment built to support that. But the experiences and results I had from implementing the teachings in my life left no shadow of doubt in my mind that they would work in the world outside the monastery as well.

I embraced a life of entrepreneurship, adopting the role of adviser to entrepreneurs, athletes, and individuals in all walks of life, helping them to understand and leverage their mind to live a life of purpose and joy. But it only made sense for me to be an adviser if I was able to successfully apply these teachings in my own life. My environment and lifestyle had undergone a very binary change. I had to come up with new ways of applying these teachings in my life as a husband, a father, an entrepreneur, and more—and continually refine how they were implemented as I grew and my clients changed.

Well over a decade now after having left the monastery, I can confidently confirm to you that, yes, these teachings work as well outside the monastery walls as they do within them. I have watched with great joy a child of seven years apply them in her life to rid herself of

anxiety. I've seen highly successful entrepreneurs and athletes use them to increase their performance and better their lives. Countless testimonials from people around the world sharing how these teachings have transformed their lives further affirmed what I had initially intuited. These teachings work well, just as they always have.

This book shares with you the foundational training that I received from my guru—teachings, insights, and tools that I learned from him, and some that I have developed myself, refined over a decade for life in the world through practical application in my life and in training companies and thousands of individuals worldwide.

If I was dying and I could share only one thing with you, the contents of this book would be it. It is my greatest gift to you. I cannot emphasize enough how life-transforming these teachings and tools are. One must simply have a burning desire to implement them consistently in one's life for them to bear results.

This book is divided into four parts. Each part is made up of chapters and lessons.

Part 1 is dedicated to the question of *why* you should lead a focused life. This is critical. Without realizing the purpose for leading a focused life, one may not be motivated to make the teachings and tools in this book a part of one's life. (The words "concentration" and "focus" are synonymous, and I use them interchangeably throughout the book.) In part 2, we begin learning about our own mind, the most important tool (*or* technology) we possess—it creates our very reality—and yet the only one that comes without a user's manual. Understanding the mind is the foundation for building a focused life. Part 3 shares how we can learn to concentrate and to develop our willpower, the two indispensable ingredients for becoming the stewards of our own mind. Part 4 details practical applications of these teachings to overcome life's most common challenges—such as fear, worry, anxiety, and stress—and to transform your productivity and

performance in the worlds of work, the arts, and sports. I also share how applying these teachings will improve your mental health and will help you to be present so that you truly experience your life.

My goal in this book is not to inundate you with tools. I am a firm believer that we do not need many tools in life. Rather, a few tools that are aligned and serve in fulfilling our purpose in life are sufficient. These tools are to be understood well and then consistently applied.

You will not find any magic, shortcuts, or hacks in this book—only a clearly defined, step-by-step, and goal-oriented approach to living a focused life, not as a mental exercise for its own sake, but for what it gives you. That’s why I live a focused life.

The ability to concentrate has opened untold possibilities for me and given me a life that I could not have imagined for myself. I attempt to share with you, within these pages, a sliver of the rewards of a focused life.

Read these teachings carefully. Strive to grasp them. Be unrelenting in your efforts to implement them in your life. These teachings are life-transforming, but only if you put them into practice—and even more, only if you truly desire to transform your life. Without a strong and sincere desire for transformation on your part, all the contents of this book would matter very little.

Your biggest gift to me, should you ever wish to say thank you for these teachings, is to truly understand the contents of this book and master awareness in the mind. It is my wish, as you embark on the study of this book, that you will adopt the attitude that you are at the beginning of the path—you are eager, enthusiastic, open to learning, and know absolutely nothing.

PART 1

A LIFE OF
PURPOSE AND JOY

Chapter 1



FOUNDATIONS FOR A
CONCENTRATED
MIND

LESSON 1.1

Living a Purpose-Focused Life

There is nothing more important than knowing who you are, the path that you are on, and its final end.

~ GURUDEVA

It was a cold and windy winter evening in Munich as we hurriedly walked toward the restaurant we were heading to. As much as I love walking around in this old Bavarian city, my favorite place in Germany, I was eager to get out of the cold. It wasn't long before we arrived at our destination, and the warmth of this quaint restaurant with its well-worn hardwood floors was a welcome embrace. We made our way to a table in the corner, draped the chairs with our layers of winter wear, ordered some wine, and continued the conversation we had been having on the walk here.

I was spending the evening with one of my dear friends, Moritz, a German entrepreneur whom I have known for a few years. He reached over to his glass of wine, took a sip, placed it back on the table, and asked me, "If you say that knowing one's purpose in life is so important, critical, in fact, then why do you always talk about the mind and focus? Why do you not start with teaching people how to find one's purpose in life?"

The wood chair creaked as I leaned forward and responded, “We discover our purpose in life with our mind. To do so, we need to have sufficient understanding and mastery of our mind, plus the ability to focus it. Only then can we maintain a state of self-reflection consistently over time to come to a clear and definitive conclusion of our life’s purpose. So, though it may appear that seeking one’s life purpose is where we should start, it is, in fact, not the case.”

I continued, “When I ask people what they want in life, most people respond with some version of ‘to be happy.’ You often hear parents saying to their kids, ‘We just want you to be happy.’ Happiness should never be pursued. Rather, one should pursue a lifestyle where the by-product of living that lifestyle is happiness. For example, I have a glass of wine with one of my dearest friends in my favorite city in Germany and I feel happy. So the key is then to have good wine with good friends in Germany.”

Moritz laughed and responded with, “I’ll toast to that!”

“Cheers!” I smiled as we clinked our wineglasses.

It was warm inside, but sitting next to the window I could feel the cold desperately trying to seep in through the glass. “It’s a sequential process,” I shared. “Having a good understanding of the inner workings of the mind and the ability to focus is the foundation of what is needed to discover our purpose in life. Our purpose defines our priorities, and our priorities define the lifestyle we should lead. The by-product of living a life that has been defined by our purpose is happiness.”

Moritz responded, “Well, when you put it that way, it all makes sense why you would want to start with understanding the mind and learning to focus.”

“When we can live a purpose-focused life we can live a rewarding life.”

This book will give you the foundational teachings and tools necessary to understand and leverage the mind and the power of unwa-

vering focus. Understanding these two things—your mind and how to focus it—will allow you to begin the process of discovering your life’s purpose, and subsequently defining your priorities and focusing on them, thus enabling you to live a life of purpose and joy. In the upcoming chapters, we will learn, among other things, how to use these learnings to live in the present as well as to heal many of the ailments that plague our mind, such as worry, fear, anxiety, and stress.

I’ll share with you a step-by-step process of understanding how the mind works so that you can learn to control and direct it. You will also learn how to focus. In addition, I will share with you a range of simple, practical, but highly effective tools to help you become good at controlling the mind and focusing. You will learn ways to implement these tools easily and consistently in your daily life to sustain your progress toward the goals you want to achieve. Don’t expect to master any of these tools by the end of the book; rather, expect to get a good and solid understanding of how these tools work, and practical techniques for applying them in every aspect of your life. It’s your consistency in applying these tools in the coming weeks and months that will determine how much you actually benefit from them. Eventually, if you are consistent enough in your application, you will find that your mental patterns, your habit patterns, start to change, and you will create a different lifestyle for yourself.

The ability to focus is one of humanity’s greatest assets. It is at the core of all human success and endeavor, because the ability to concentrate is what helps a person manifest their goals in life. Most people want to experience some version of happiness, contentment, enlightenment, or other such uplifting feelings, but they do not know how to attain such states because they are never taught that the key to creating the life they want is concentration. Additionally, most people are never taught how to harness and direct the powers of concentration as a tool for manifestation.

Now, the question will be asked, “Do I need to live a focused life?”

My answer is “No.” You absolutely do not *need* to live a focused life. Living a focused life is a choice, and we all have the choice of whether we want to or not. It’s your life, and you should decide how you want to live it. That said, living a focused life supports you in having a more rewarding life.

There is a reason you are reading this book, and I hope it’s because something inside you is telling you that leading a focused life or a purpose-focused life will improve the quality of your life and bring greater meaning to it.

What’s the difference between a focused life and a purpose-focused life? A focused life is one in which you are able to give whoever and whatever you are engaged with your undivided attention. You are fully present in all your experiences and thus creating a truly rewarding life, though your experiences are not driven by a greater overarching purpose. A purpose-focused life, on the other hand, is one in which your life’s purpose defines your priorities, and your priorities drive what you focus on. Your life is lived very intentionally. You make wise choices each day based on your life’s purpose: who you spend time with, what you spend your time on, what music you listen to, what books you read, what shows you watch, what foods you eat, and more. You give who and what you are engaged with your undivided attention, but the who and what are intentionally chosen.

Ultimately, the goal of this book is to help you live a focused life or a purpose-focused life and reap its boundless benefits.

LESSON 1.2

Taking Charge

We have the choice of what we focus on in life. This choice is not always easy. Sometimes, if not often, it is extremely difficult, but we do have the choice.

When I was a monk living in my guru's monastery, I met a man from the island country of Mauritius who always smiled. He was, for lack of a better word, interning at the monastery for a few months, and during this time I got to know him. One day I asked him, "Why are you always smiling?"

He looked at me and said, "My father died when I was very young. My widowed mother had to raise me and my siblings all by herself, and we were quite poor. Every morning my mother would wake us up, get us to stand in a line, and then make us all laugh for five minutes. That was how we started our day."

I cannot even begin to tell you how that story has impacted my life. This lady, faced with the loss of her husband and forced now to provide for her children and herself, made the choice of how she would

start her day. She chose what she wanted her kids to focus on. She chose what to impress on their malleable subconscious first thing in the morning. Little did she know that her actions would ripple half-way across the world to Hawaii in the living example of her son and then be told in a book one day.

Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison only to be released, topple South Africa's racist system of apartheid, and become president. This is a great lesson of a person who chose what he would focus on in his mind while in prison.

These are two examples of people who took charge of their mind and made the conscious choice of what to focus on in life. We cannot leave it up to our environment to determine what we focus on. The outcome would be disastrous. We must take charge of what it is we wish to focus on in life. We also cannot leave it to our mind, because the mind has no ability to discriminate between what is good for you and what is not good for you.

If my mind knew what was good for me, I would be perfect. Every time I picked up a bowl of French fries, my mind would say, "Have three fries and then have this bowl of salad, it's healthier." But my mind doesn't say that. My mind says, "Yes, go for it. Have that bowl of fries, and put on extra ketchup, because it's really, really good." And then, "Have some of these onion rings, too."

The mind has no idea what is good for you and what is not good for you until you have trained it to discriminate between the two. Once you have trained and programmed the mind to be able to determine wisely what is physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually uplifting to you, then it can help you make better choices in life.

There was a time when people were sold the concept that smoking was good for you. They believed it, told their minds that smoking was good for them, and smoked themselves to death. Now, if the mind knew that smoking was bad for them, it would have said, "You idiot!

Smoking kills. Stop doing it. You're gonna kill us both." But it didn't say that because unless you give the mind the right information, it has no ability to guide you in the right direction.

That said, there is a part of the mind that does know what is good for you. It's called the superconscious mind.

The Three States of Mind

To better understand the mind, you can view it in three states. This book does not dive deep into understanding the various states of mind, but I want to give you a brief, simplified insight, as it will support many of the points I bring up throughout the book.

You can view these three states of the mind as the conscious, the subconscious, and the superconscious mind. To better understand this, imagine the mind as a three-story building, with the superconscious mind on the top floor, the subconscious in the middle, and the conscious mind on the ground floor. Let's look at the characteristics of each of these states of mind.

The conscious mind is the external mind, oriented to the world around us, and is tied to our five senses. It is the instinctive part of us, and I often refer to it as the instinctive mind. It governs, for example, our hunger and thirst, the basic faculties of perception and movement, procreation, impulsive thought processes, and more.

The subconscious mind is our intellectual mind. It is the seat of reason and logical thinking. You could also say that the subconscious mind is our "hard drive." It records all the conscious mind's experiences, whether those experiences are remembered or not. Additionally, it stores impressions and habit patterns, and also governs involuntary physiological processes.

The superconscious mind, as Gurudeva describes it, is "the mind of light, the all-knowing intelligence of the soul." At its deepest level,

the superconscious can be described as spiritual consciousness or non-dual consciousness. The superconscious is the source of creativity, intuition, profound spiritual experiences, and more.

Viewing the three states of mind as a three-story building, we can make the following conclusions. To impress something upon the subconscious mind, we would need to go through the conscious mind (we would have to go through the first floor to get to the second floor). Intuition, which comes from the superconscious mind, must pass through the subconscious mind to get to the conscious mind for us to perceive it. A cluttered subconscious would make it difficult for intuition to get through.

Of these three states of mind, only the superconscious knows what is good for you. It is, after all, the all-knowing intelligence of the soul. This is a problem because people mostly function in the conscious and subconscious mind, with an occasional flash of intuitive wisdom coming through from the superconscious mind.

The subconscious mind basically doesn't know what is good for you unless you have trained it to know. To train it, you must first have a good understanding and control of the mind in general. Then you have to gather the right information, digest it, form clear conclusions, and input these conclusions into the subconscious in an organized way, so the subconscious can use these conclusions to guide you. This is when the subconscious becomes an incredible asset. A clarified subconscious working in harmony with the superconscious is an unfathomable power you are entitled to.

In today's world, the tsunami of information that barrages us daily devastates the very landscape of our subconscious mind. The subconscious dies a slow death of information indigestion, leading to the inability to make decisions (even simple ones), confusion, overthinking, anxiety, stress, and more. We consume information faster than a starving man would food, but do not give any time to the processing of that information and the critical stage of forming clear conclusions.

This act debilitates the subconscious. More and more people are simply unable to make decisions or even to know what they want in life.

At any point in time during the day, your awareness is functioning in one of these states of mind (and we will learn about awareness in chapter 3). How you act and react to experiences in life is based on which of these states of mind your awareness is in. Ultimately, you should be in charge of where in your mind your awareness goes.

In taking charge of your life, you should also not leave the outcome of your life to your environment or, God forbid, “the Universe”! To all the people who say, “The Universe is going to guide me,” I can assure you that Jupiter, Pluto, and Uranus are not sitting around figuring out how to solve the complexities of your life. Your mind is a tool. You are in charge of it. Understand how it works and focus it to create the life you want.

The earlier in life you learn these teachings, the more time you will have to apply them in life and reap their benefits. Even if you have a decade left to live, you can still leverage these teachings to live the most amazing decade of your life. This is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself. It’s also a great gift that you can give other people. As you uplift yourself and become a better version of you, you uplift everyone who is connected to you.

I remember a few months after joining the monastery I felt quite sad, as I hadn’t spoken to my family in a long time. I was missing them. Part of living as an ordained Hindu monk in a cloistered monastery in my tradition was that we were no longer in touch with the people we previously knew. One day I went to see Gurudeva in his office to share with him what I was feeling.

I said to him, “Gurudeva, I’m feeling really sad. I miss my family. I miss my friends, my relatives. And sometimes I can’t help feeling that being in the monastery might be slightly selfish, that I’m not really helping them.”

He listened patiently with undivided attention, as he always did,

and then he did something really interesting. He reached over to a box on his desk and pulled out a tissue. He spread it flat on the table and said, “You are here in the middle. Your father is in this corner, your mother is in this corner, your brother is in that corner, and your other brother is in this corner.”

Then he put his fingers in the middle of the tissue and started to pull it up toward the ceiling and said, “You are in the middle, and as you uplift yourself, look at what you are doing to everybody else: You are uplifting everyone else as well.” As he continued to lift the middle of the tissue, all four sides got lifted up off the desk.

He went on to say, “You are energetically connected to all those who are in your life. As you uplift yourself, you uplift all of them as well, so investing your time in developing yourself is not selfish.”

It was a simple yet deeply profound lesson for me. It left an indelible impression in my mind that the work I do to be a better version of myself not only impacts my life but all those around me.

The fact that you have a life is the only reason you need to take charge of it and live the best life you can. The insights, tools, and practices in this book are the fundamental teachings you need to do so.

LESSON 1.3

Desire, Life's Supreme Force

Without an inextinguishable desire, nothing is achieved. Napoleon Hill, the twentieth-century mystic, said in his book *Think and Grow Rich*, “Behind this demand for new and better things, there is one quality one must possess to win, and that is *definiteness of purpose*, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning *desire* to possess it.”

Knowing what you want and the desire to possess it. If you are clear that you want to live a focused life, then the subsequent question is: How badly do you desire it? Most don't desire it badly enough, and the lack of intensity of this desire is what ultimately causes them to not be able to live a focused life. This applies to anything we pursue.

The Wright brothers desired to fly. Edison desired to light up the night by his own means. Hillary and Norgay desired to summit Everest. Rosa Parks desired equal rights. Gandhi desired independence through nonviolence. The list goes on beyond the archives of history of the men and women who channeled the power of desire to manifest

that which they sought. The power of an inextinguishable desire can mow down all opposition and surmount any obstacle. It is the silencer of the flatulent voices of critics and disbelievers. It is the veil that shrouds the eyes of all obstacles. The supreme force behind success.

I first met my guru when I was around nine years old. My second meeting with him was when I was twenty-one years old. The very first thing that I ever said to him, in my second meeting, was my desire for my life's purpose, Self-Realization. Having stated that, I immediately asked him if he would train me and help me achieve this.

He looked me in the eyes and asked, "What are you willing to do for it?"

I responded, without any hesitation and with a conviction that had already been cemented in me for years, "I'm willing to give my life for it."

I saw no doubt in his face as he heard my words, nor did it matter to me what he thought of my statement. My desire and what I was willing to do for it was paramount. I was resolved in what I wanted. I needed a guide. Someone who had experienced the goal many times and knew definitively the path to it. It was his choice now to accept me or not as his student.

The subsequent years saw him test my desire and conviction. Challenge after challenge, test after test, I remained firmly resolved to join his monastic order and commit my life to his training and the pursuit of my purpose. Three years later, in my pursuit of Self-Realization, I left my family and the world I had known since I was born to commit my life to a Hindu monastic way of living in my guru's cloistered monastery.

This act of renunciation involved no longer communicating with my family, relatives, friends, and people I previously knew. Music, shows, foods, drinks, clothing, preferences . . . my life as I knew it was no longer to be. It mattered naught to me. My life's purpose eclipsed all other desires. My life was now to be a channeling of all other desires

to the solitary desire of Self-Realization, the ultimate spiritual attainment within the Hindu philosophy that I subscribe to.

It all comes down to how badly you desire what it is you seek. The intensity of this desire will determine what you are willing to do for it and what you are willing to give up in the pursuit of it. In my case, I was willing to give my life for my life's ultimate desire.

Let me also be transparent in saying that the pursuit of such a solitary desire at the expense of all else in life should not imply that I never doubted or questioned my path. I don't want to paint a picture of a superhero or a stoic monk immune to the throes of life. We often wish to paint those we hold in high regard with broad strokes of perfectionism and messianic qualities. I can assure you we are all human, every last one of us. I broke, I cried, I failed, I faltered, became desperate, got confused, questioned myself, and more. But I never gave up the pursuit of my life's purpose. That desire is ever present and is what defines what I do in life and the focus of my energy.

Anyone who tells you he has never thought of quitting is selling you a tropical island in the Arctic.

In a conversation with Joe De Sena, the founder of Spartan Race—military-style obstacle races designed to test mental fortitude and physical strength—I asked him if he ever thought of quitting any of the long endurance races he participates in. The words were barely out of my mouth before he replied with “All the time. I want to quit every race I do.” I couldn't help thinking to myself at that moment what an honest answer that was.

I can assure you that portraying a life devoid of uncertainty and imbued with perfectionism does not inspire hope but rather falsely paints a picture of a painless path to success—a picture that will leave all hopelessly disappointed by their inability to reach such heights. The glorified narrow pointed peaks of success that most people like to focus on are of but a fraction of the breadth and depth of the chasms that achievers spend most of their time crawling out of. This book

tells the story and shares the learnings of an ordinary man's journey from a distracted child to an adult who can be focused in all of his life's engagements. There are no miracles, no walking on water or splitting of the seas. Just an inextinguishable desire for a clearly defined purpose on a journey that saw more downs than ups on the path to a focused life.

One must be pathologically oblivious to anything but the belief in the fulfillment of one's desire. It is such belief in a solitary desire that eventually extinguishes the flame of doubt and unfurls a path forward to the manifestation of that desire.

Ultimately, you must want it. You must truly want what you seek and believe wholeheartedly that you can and will get it. This desire must be accompanied by steadfast patience, and acceptance that the manifestation of your desire could take decades.

To quote Hill again, "There is nothing, right or wrong, which *belief*, plus *burning desire*, cannot make real. These qualities are free to everyone."

LESSON 1.4

Making the Case

Over the years I have met countless people who were keen on living a focused life. They have expressed this desire to me in all earnestness, but most of these people never ended up living a focused life. I knew their lack of success was because their desire for leading a focused life was not strong enough. Perhaps, when they shared their convictions with me, they were going through a challenging phase in life, and the pain of it caused them to seek an alternative way of living. But often, when the pain subsides, the desire to live a different way of life ebbs away with the pain, and people default back to who they are.

Besides the lack of desire, I often wondered what else was missing to account for their failure to pursue their conviction to success. It wasn't until a chilly fall evening in Seoul, South Korea, that I learned what I felt was a key missing component in the path to success. It was October 2017, and I was invited to speak at the 18th World Knowledge Forum. The three-day event had around 3,000 attendees and an impressive lineup of speakers that included former prime min-

isters and presidents of countries, Nobel Prize winners, many CEOs of global corporations, and so on.

On one of the evenings, I was invited to a private dinner with seventy or eighty dignitaries who were attending the event. The gathering took place in a gorgeous space that was built in the style of a *hanok*, a traditional Korean house, with curved tiled roofs set upon thick timber rafters and frames. Standing in the courtyard of this simple, immaculate, and elegant home, I could not help but feel transported to what eighteenth-century Korea must have felt like. As I was standing and speaking to a couple of people, a gentleman walked up to me and asked, “Hi, who are you and what are you here speaking about?” I introduced myself to him and shared a little about my talk. He then introduced himself as a former White House chief of staff.

In our conversation, he pointed out that the primary reason why people are not successful in conveying their message is that “they do not make their case.”

I asked him to elaborate on that, and he went on to point to a speech given earlier in the day by Ban Ki-moon (the former Secretary-General of the United Nations) about environmental issues in the world. He shared that one thing Ban Ki-moon could have done to drive his point home more strongly was to make the case. He went on to say, “For example, how do we make the case to a single mother of three living in Pennsylvania who has two jobs that she needs to care for the environment, when all she can think of is caring for her kids and making ends meet? When you make the case, you can get people to buy in. You need to connect the dots for them. When you can make the case to the single mother of three in Pennsylvania, then she will buy into doing her part for the environment. But you have to make the case.”

The phrase “make the case” was a big revelation to me, and probably one of my most significant learnings that year. I have traveled the world to teach people about focus, but in this conversation with the