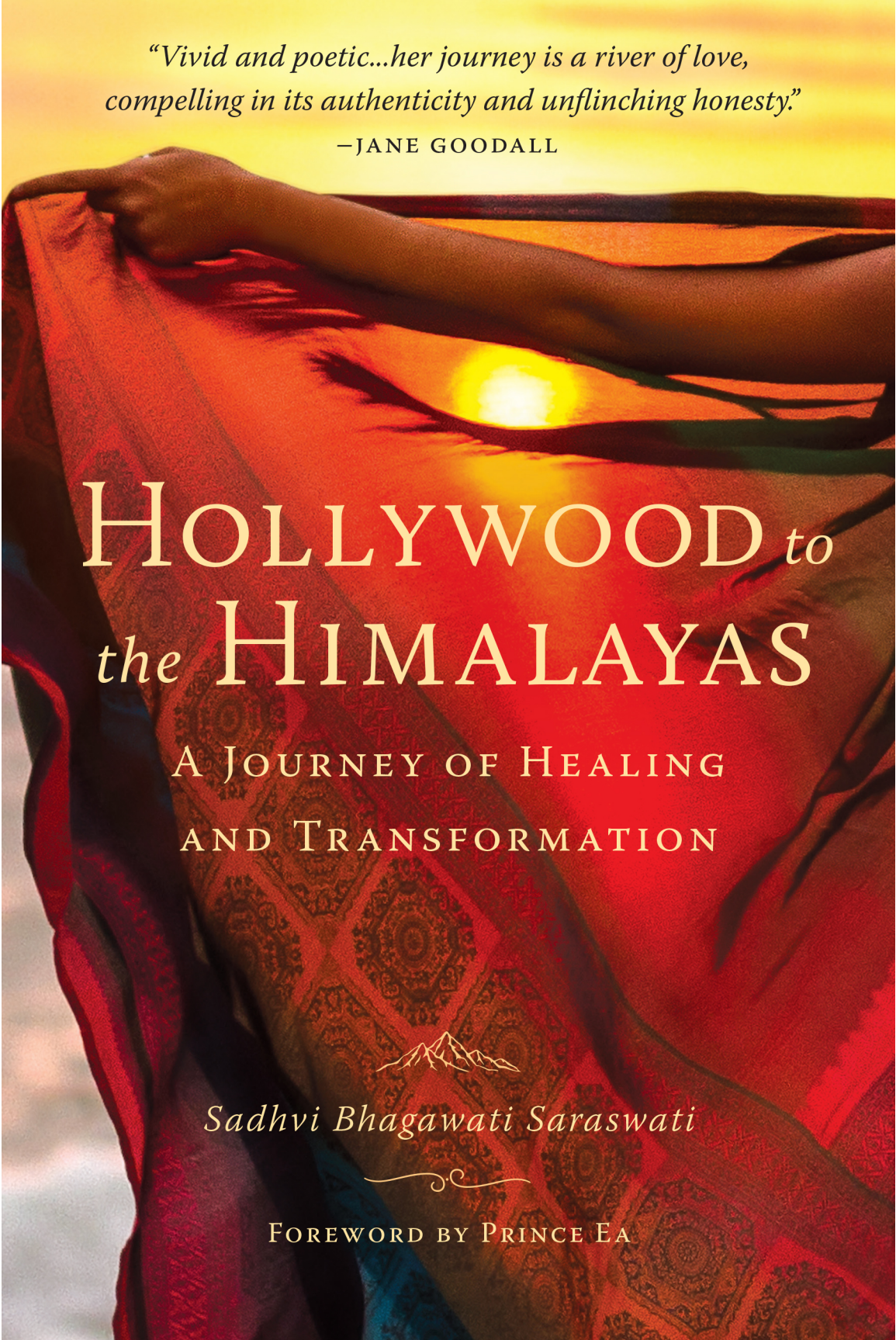


The background of the book cover is a photograph of a person's arm and hand holding a vibrant red and orange patterned shawl. The shawl features intricate geometric and floral designs. In the background, a bright sun is visible, creating a warm, golden glow that illuminates the scene. The overall composition is artistic and evocative, suggesting themes of warmth, healing, and transformation.

*"Vivid and poetic...her journey is a river of love,
compelling in its authenticity and unflinching honesty."*

—JANE GOODALL

HOLLYWOOD *to* *the* HIMALAYAS

A JOURNEY OF HEALING
AND TRANSFORMATION



Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati



FOREWORD BY PRINCE EA

PRAISES

"Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati is a great teacher of spirituality and consciousness. Her inspiring wisdom illuminates the path to healing, happiness, and inner peace."

DEEPAK CHOPRA

"Courageous, Relatable, and Inspiring! Sadhvi's story will touch your heart and show you that the path to the divine is available to everyone."

PRINCE EA

"Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati describes in vivid and poetic prose the journey that took her, a Stanford graduate, from a life of privilege in America to a simple existence in an Indian ashram. She speaks of her transformation from a disturbed adolescent to a woman who has found spiritual enlightenment; and how she was able to renounce the pleasures of the material world and physical desire through the agency of an inspiring and inspired Guru, the beauty of nature, and a sacred river."

"Her journey is a river of love, compelling in its authenticity and unflinching honesty. Sadhvi transports the reader to a world and way of thinking that most will be unfamiliar with, and this book is a must for anyone who is interested in exploring different paths to fulfilment and to the Creator."

JANE GOODALL

"For so many of us, the road to the Divine sometimes begins with deep trauma. And, then Grace is bestowed upon us and we blossom in the holiness of love. Hollywood to the Himalayas is filled with wisdom and truth about the powerful revelations that unfold on the path to a deeper relationship to the divine. This is a beautiful book."

REV. IYANLA VANZANT,
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF *IYANLA, FIX MY LIFE*

"This is a book in which every sentence is a reflection of love and the wisdom of love. Sadhvi's journey is a lucid illustration of how her search for the Divine is taken with every step and every breath in a world ostensibly of the mundane. She speaks of her pain as a source of knowledge, as she shows how Divine love and light, ever present, leads her to an academically informed, humorously inspiring, inevitability of love as lived activism in the service of one and all."

DR. AZZA KARAM, SECRETARY GENERAL, RELIGIONS FOR
PEACE; FORMER SENIOR ADVISOR, UNFPA

"This true story shines a bright light on the path to becoming more deeply spiritual. Sadhvi courageously shares her life lessons, illustrating the infinite possibilities when we consciously seek connection to the divine."

JACK CANFIELD, COAUTHOR OF
CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL SERIES

"This very special book chronicles a unique transformational journey of an American woman who overcame childhood abuse and trauma to lead a life of service as a global spiritual leader. A beautifully written account of awakening that offers ancient wisdom for modern-day issues. I highly recommend this!"

MARCI SHIMOFF, AUTHOR OF *HAPPY FOR NO REASON*, *LOVE FOR NO REASON*, AND *CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE WOMAN'S SOUL*

"In Hollywood to the Himalayas, Sadhvi unfolds deeply personal experiences that offer the reader most important and valuable insights on how to become resilient, self-empowered. Beyond the lessons offered, Sadhvi's wonderful writing style evoked a movie-like vision in my mind; it is a compelling story that made it hard to put this book down."

BRUCE H. LIPTON, PhD, STEM CELL BIOLOGIST, EPIGENETIC
SCIENCE PIONEER, AND AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING
BOOKS *THE BIOLOGY OF BELIEF*, *SPONTANEOUS EVOLUTION*
(WITH JIM BHAERMAN), AND *THE HONEYMOON EFFECT*



"There is not one of us who hasn't suffered. For many, it is the suffering that gives one insight, wisdom and clarity. Sadhvi's journey is one such story that leads to India and her relationship with her Guru and with the Ganga. Yet, it is much more because it is also a story of the power of forgiveness, compassion, grace and love to set one free. Profound, engaging and ultimately liberating."

JAMES R. DOTY, MD, PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR
OF *INTO THE MAGIC SHOP: A NEUROSURGEON'S
QUEST TO DISCOVER THE MYSTERIES OF
THE BRAIN AND THE SECRETS OF THE HEART*

"This inspiring and motivational book is a real page-turner. I believe it's the feminine version of the classic spiritual memoir, Autobiography of a Yogi."

JOHN GRAY, AUTHOR OF *MEN ARE FROM MARS,
WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS*

"A compelling account and an inside look at a great ashram, offering a Western woman's remarkable odyssey of trust in Indian spiritual culture and her powerful healing journey."

JACK KORNFIELD,
AUTHOR OF *A PATH WITH HEART*



"Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati was a student at Stanford seeking science-based solutions to her emotional wounds and childhood trauma, hoping to heal herself and then others. On a trip to India, in an unexpected twist of fate, she experienced a remarkable, divine healing, on the banks of the Ganges River. For those on a spiritual path, this book is a rare glimpse into connecting with the divine."

ARIELLE FORD,
AUTHOR OF *THE SOULMATE SECRET*

"While Dorothy had to go over the rainbow to discover there is no place like home, Sadhvi found her true home on the banks of the Ganges wrapped in the arms of the Divine. This enlightenment story will make your heart melt and your jaw drop."

JUSTIN MICHAEL WILLIAMS, AUTHOR OF *STAY WOKE*

"Hollywood to the Himalayas is filled with soulful, deep insight and dynamic wisdom. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati's honest, courageous, powerful story and resonant words radiate healing energy palpable to the heart and mind, borne of her authenticity and spiritual transformation. Study this book and allow your soul to sing."

MICHAEL BERNARD BECKWITH, FOUNDER AND SPIRITUAL
DIRECTOR, AGAPE INTERNATIONAL SPIRITUAL CENTER;
AUTHOR OF *LIFE VISIONING AND SPIRITUAL LIBERATION*

"Upon leaving Stanford and a highly privileged life in the West, Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, a non-seeker, found herself in India. On the banks of the Ganges, she experienced a profound healing and transformation from her years of suffering from sexual abuse and eating disorders. Today, twenty-five years later, she is considered one of the preeminent female spiritual leaders of our time. This revealing and deeply personal story is an inspiring demonstration of grace in action."

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

"Hollywood to the Himalayas is a rare, intimate glimpse into the private, faith-filled journey one takes as they surrender all that they thought they were, for who they truly are. Love. This powerful book is a raw, honest, and heartfelt expression of Sadhviji's continued commitment to her service to humankind. It is an inspirational offering, from her soul to ours, reflecting back to us that the spiritual path can be tender, messy, funny, fierce, illuminating, blissful, awkward, deeply wondrous, and both very human AND divine. I am so grateful for her willingness to share her personal stories about the complexities of Self-discovery, as well as the profound teachings that she learned along the way. This book is transformative and recommended for all on the path who seek a relationship with the power of Source within themselves, each other, and this world."

SEANE CORN, AUTHOR OF *REVOLUTION OF THE SOUL*;
COFOUNDER OF OFF THE MAT, INTO THE WORLD

"What an extraordinary book! Sadviji's writing is personal, funny, wry, loving, earnest, self-reflective and incredibly engaging. And her story! Wow! The journey from being in pieces to being at peace, from being a brilliant student at Stanford to living a life of devotion in India with her beloved teacher is a teaching for us all. Although we may not move to India, we can move from being hooked on our personalities to realizing what is and has always been breathing through us, loving us, blazing us. If one person can do and be this, so can we all. Thank you, Sadhviji, for reminding us of what is always here, always possible. I won't be the same after reading your book."

GENEEN ROTH, AUTHOR OF THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER *WOMEN FOOD AND GOD* AND OTHER BOOKS
INCLUDING HER LATEST, *THIS MESSY MAGNIFICENT LIFE*

In Hollywood to the Himalayas we join a journey of a borderless and courageous heart that learns three treasures: becoming closer to God everyday, serving humanity, and being happy. Sadhvi shares lessons of compassion and letting go learned from unflinchingly addressing abuse and suffering, lessons of extraordinary joy resulting from blessings of love and healing, insights of wisdom gained from modern and ancient disciplines of learning, guidance and transmission from an authentic teacher/disciple relationship, and inspiration to keep learning and serving. The integrity and clarity of her account (and ascent) is powerful and may rub off on the reader. If it does you will not be the same.

JONATHAN GRANOFF
PRESIDENT, GLOBAL SECURITY INSTITUTE

HOLLYWOOD
to the
HIMALAYAS

HOLLYWOOD *to the* HIMALAYAS

A JOURNEY OF HEALING
AND TRANSFORMATION



SADHVI BHAGAWATI SARASWATI



MANDALA

SAN RAFAEL LOS ANGELES LONDON

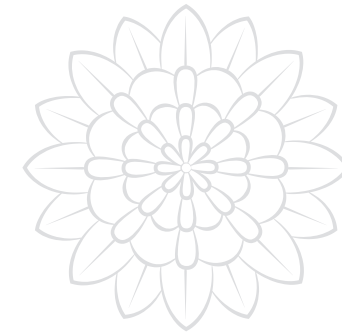


"In the West, you sit around in a dark room discussing the details of the darkness. You measure every molecule of darkness. How many protons? How many neutrons? How many electrons make up these atoms? How long has it been dark? From whence did this darkness come? Is it darker than it was yesterday, or is it perhaps getting slightly less dark? You go around and discuss the way the darkness makes you feel. You encourage each other to express your frustration at sitting in a dark room. It goes on endlessly. In the East, we run our hands along the walls looking for the light switch. We know that once the switch is found and the light is turned on, it no longer matters how dark it was or what the molecules of darkness were made of, or where the darkness came from. What matters is now there is light."

PUJYA SWAMIJI

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FOREWORD

It was once said that people don't remember what you say to them, but they will always remember how you made them feel. From the first moment I was introduced to Sadhviji, she has always made me feel deeply loved and accepted.

We met in the garden of the Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, one of the holy cities of India. It was an early spring afternoon, five years ago, and we were surrounded by my traveling companions and a small film crew from UPLIFT, a conscious media organization I work with. We were making a documentary on the sacredness of water. At the time I did not yet know of the profound, life-changing impact the Ganges River had upon this American-born holy woman.

I will never forget the smile on her face when we met. Not only did her mouth and her eyes smile, it felt as if her heart was smiling directly at me.

Just before sunset, Sadhviji led our group to the steps on the banks of the river to participate in the daily aarti ceremony. With dozens of young boys in yellow robes surrounding her, Pujya Swamiji, her Guru, began to sing ancient Hindu chants with tablas and harmoniums providing the bass line. At one point, a few of the young boys began handing over large brass lamps containing small flames. Sadhviji made sure I was given one to slowly raise in circles as part of the ritual.

I was as humbled and in awe of this beautiful ceremony as I was wide eyed and open hearted. From that magical meeting, we quickly became good friends;

we continue to meet up when we can, whether it is in India, Los Angeles, or Boulder, Colorado, and we've done several video conference webinars together.

This book shares Sadhviji's remarkable story of leaving behind her privileged life in California to experiencing awakening, healing and transformation in the Ganges to becoming a world spiritual leader.

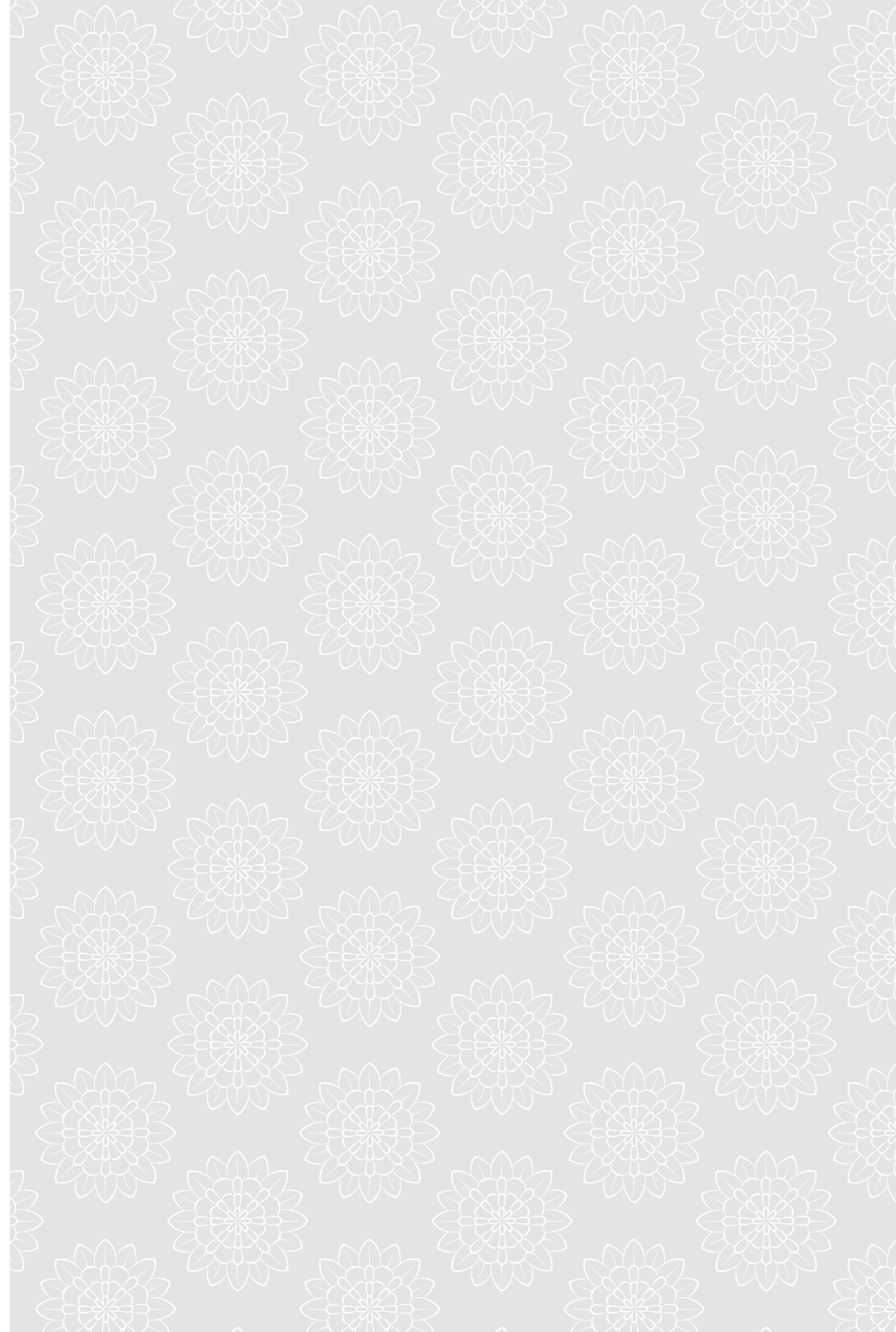
So often in spiritual circles there appears to be a certain priesthood or special type of person who is truly allowed in and accepted. In India, this is still mostly true. Even though she was once escorted off a stage for being the only female present among the religious leaders, Sadhviji generously and elegantly provides her wisdom and shakti to all who come in contact with her.

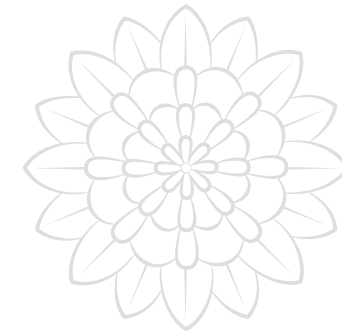
For me, *Hollywood to the Himalayas* is a spiritual "tell all." She tells everything: the ups, the downs, the stuff you never hear a person in her position express. From the dark details of her childhood abuse and trauma, to her feelings of desire, to her experience as a woman, even after taking vows of celibacy, Sadhviji shatters the myth that we need to be perfect and makes spirituality accessible, which is how it should be.

God's grace is available to all no matter what you look like, where you come from, or any thoughts or actions of your past. That is the healing message of this book: to understand and to know that there is no recipe or perfect formula to connect to the Divine.

Sadhviji models for us, at the deepest level, that in the true teaching of the spiritual traditions, healing and grace are always possible.

PRINCE EA





PROLOGUE

“Now There Is Light”

SUMMER 1996

I opened my eyes at the end of my first darshan in India to hear Pujya Swamiji saying, “Yes?” I was the last one in the room, and he addressed me in English: “Yes?” I rose quickly from my place, went in front of him, and bowed low, trying to remember the protocol. Then I sat back on the soles of my feet and saw him looking at me—or, rather, *into* me—with a love that seemed to permeate every cell of my body and every corner of my psyche. It was not a personal love, not directed at me, but a love so vast and available, it didn’t matter how many others were swimming in it too—there was room for all. “Yes?” he repeated.

I had nothing to say. I could have sat forever in the ocean of his gaze, but his eyes were waiting for me to speak.

“Pujya Swamiji,” I whispered. “Fear runs my life. I have a sense of anxiety all the time, even when I don’t know what I’m afraid of.”

"You fear because you don't trust," he said after a brief pause. I thought he would continue, but he didn't. Just that—lack of trust.

"Really horrible things have happened to me that have made me unable to trust." And I told him the full story of my twenty-five years: childhood sexual abuse and abandonment, struggles with bulimia, for which I was hospitalized several times. It was a story I'd told many times, and it never failed to elicit sympathy, open arms, and praise for how strong I am.

He just looked at me and asked, "Are you going to take this to the grave with you?" *Oh, God, no*, I thought—*of course not*.

"Are you going to let it go on your deathbed, just before you die?"

"No, of course," I replied. "I don't want to take this unbearable pain to my deathbed," which was surely six or seven decades away.

"Will you let it go a week before you die, a month before you die?" he continued to ask, never shifting his gaze from its lock on my heart.

"Swamiji, I don't want to take this to my grave or my deathbed. I don't want to hold onto it until a week or a month before I die. I want to be free of it as soon as possible. I'm in therapy with a wonderful psychologist. I'm processing it all so I can heal and move on with my life."

He continued to look at me calmly, with neither sympathy nor judgment. His presence stretched so wide, it was able to hold the love that poured from his eyes, the pain I'd experienced, and even the perpetrator, my biological father. In his gaze, there was room for everything.

Then he said, "You are waiting for someone to come and draw the line for you. You are waiting for someone to come and say, 'Now you are done.' But no one will do that. You must draw the line yourself. The choice is yours. You can carry this pain to the grave, you can give it up on your deathbed, you can give it up a week or a month before you die, or you can give it up tonight."

Tonight? Seriously? I didn't speak, but he must have heard my thoughts. "Yes, tonight," he said. "We have a beautiful ceremony at sunset called the *aarti*. I will tell the priest to give you the oil lamp so you can wave it and pray with it. Then go to Ganga and give her your pain. Take her water in your hands and give it all to her. Just give it to the river. If you give it, she will take it."

He patted me gently on the head as he stood and walked out of the room. Only as the door clicked shut behind him did I remember to bow.

"Just give it to the river?" I wrote over and over in my journal, smiling as I replayed in my mind the swami's touching yet nonsensical instructions. Fortunately,

I was being treated by doctors and psychologists who knew what to do. Abreactive therapy, extended trancelike regressions back to the abuse, behavior-modification techniques that made even the simple task of eating into "work," and the passage of time—these were answers to my pathology. I wasn't about to rely on a river to wash away my problems.



Afternoon became evening, and I sat on the cool marble steps lining the banks of the flowing Ganga River as the sun began its descent. As the final rays of light danced on the waters, the sound of Vedic mantras filled my ears. I stopped giggling long enough to remember my vow from the airplane—to keep my heart open, or leave India. To mock an instruction as seemingly useless as the one I had received today might be breaking my vow at the moment it was most needed—particularly as it had come from the mouth of someone revered as an enlightened master, particularly as my breath had stopped when he said it, particularly as I felt more comfortable and more at home in my own skin while sitting in his presence than I had ever felt before.

During the evening light ceremony called the *aarti*, I allowed myself to be swept away by the song, the music, the chanting, by the fire, the flowers, and the incense weaving in and out of and through each other in a dynamic tapestry of ecstatic prayer. A boy in yellow placed a flaming brass lamp in my hands. "Like this," he gestured in what looked like a clockwise movement. (Later, I learned that the motion for waving the lamp is in the shape of the Sanskrit symbol *Om*.) I faced the river, waving the lamp in clockwise circles until my time was up, and the boy took it away.

After the ceremony, as the guests began to disperse, I walked calf-deep into the river. The moon rose over the mountains and glistened on the surface of the water. The current tugged so forcefully on my legs that I wondered if I would have to give not only my pain but also my entire body to this river. As the chanting dissipated in the background and the flow of the river tried to wrest my feet from its sandy bottom, I entered a silence so deep, it was a place in itself, wrapping me in its arms. In that place of silence, I bent down into the water and carried out Swamiji's instructions.

I cupped the river's water in my hands and offered *all my pain, all my tears, and all my fear* into the water I held in my two hands. "You must forgive him,"

Swamiji had said. “Give your anger and grudges to the water, and then pour it back into the river.” I stood up to my knees in Mother Ganga until the moon was directly overhead, all the while calling forth every image that had ever caused me pain, that had caused me to dissociate, that had propelled my head into a toilet, vomiting. I recalled countless images that had formed the unbearable background of my life.

Then, in the midst of these images, I saw him—my biological father, Manny—and from this *place* of imperturbable silence, I saw not a monster but a troubled man who had made mistakes. I saw the violence and the sin he wrought upon me as simply mistakes of this disturbed being. I saw a man now far away who could no longer harm me, whose life was just as haunted by these choices as mine. And I saw a man who loved me despite his inability to express it. I saw a man I could forgive.

Tears mixed with the water in my hands, and I prayed and cried and prayed and cried, all in silence. These were tears not of yesterday, but of today, tears of release rather than terror, knowing I needed to embrace what *is* rather than what *might have been*. I called his image to mind again, stared deeply into my father’s eyes, and said, “*I forgive you.*” Then I let the water pour from my hands back into the river. “*Take the pain,*” I prayed. “*I give it all to You.*”



In the weeks and months that followed, the pain that had coursed through body and mind my entire life lost its grip. I tried recalling memories of abuse to make my body shudder again, to bring back a state of unbearableness within my own body that was far more familiar than the peace I was experiencing. I called forth every scene that had triggered terror and dissociation, to no avail. The memories were there, no less vivid than before, but I no longer identified with them. They weren’t “me.” I could no longer dissociate; there was no longer more than one part of myself into which I could split. There was nowhere to go but here, whole and complete.

The only split that remained was the part of me that *knew* the pain had been released and the part that could neither fathom nor accept concepts of spiritual healing, grace, or the possibility of a life without pain and pathology. The latter tried to shake the former back into victimization, while the part that “knew”

remained quiet and still. Slowly, over months and then years, the knowing has become pervasive.

When I spoke to Pujya Swamiji about the miraculous transformation inside me and told him that I no longer felt like the same person who identified with this suffering, he nodded and said, “Once the switch is found and the light is turned on, it no longer matters how dark it had been or what the molecules of darkness were made of, or from where the darkness had come. What matters is that now there is light.”