

THE INWARD FIRE SERIES

Booklet Four

WHEN THE SEEKER STOPS OPTIMIZING

*Māyā, Responsibility, Surrender,
and the Freedom to Just Be*

Sasidhar Valluru

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Cover image: AI-generated concept artwork based on the Booklet Four theme - māyā as mist, veil, threshold, starlight, and the hazy light beyond.

Author's Note

This booklet began with a compliment.

A slightly dangerous compliment.

Some people saw the earlier booklets and said, "I did not know you could write on these subjects," or "I did not know you could write such deep stuff."

That interested me.

Not because I wanted applause. Applause is sweet for a minute and useless after that. What interested me was the assumption hiding behind the compliment.

These were people who had known me for years. They had seen me work. They had seen me in artificial intelligence architecture, leadership, delivery, documentation, business analysis, project management, mentoring, and the usual professional circus where one is allowed to be considered useful.

So I asked them a simple question.

What do you think I am actually good at?

The answers varied. AI architecture. Leadership. Grasping power. Wide range of subjects. Ability to inspire and mentor. Documentation. Business analysis. Project management. Delivery excellence. Yada yada.

Then I asked the next question.

If you think I can go deep in those areas, why assume I cannot go deep here? Why is philosophy, spirituality, theology, or whatever polite bucket people want to use, treated as a different species of intelligence?

The answers became more interesting.

People said, "Everyone is good at some things and not good at others." Some spoke of different kinds of intelligence. Someone good at art may not be good at math. Someone good at logic may not be good at music. Fair enough. Nothing wrong with that.

But when I pressed further, another word appeared.

Opportunity.

People had not necessarily failed at many things. They had not necessarily lacked the capacity. They had not even tried long enough to know. They were afraid the boss would judge them. They were busy earning a living. They worried about the cost of a hobby. They had no audience. No setting. No permission. No mental space. No occasion.

Not to trivialize any of that. Life is not a motivational poster pasted over a leaking wall.

But if we strip the answer further, opportunity often becomes priority. And priority, when stripped still further, becomes optimization.

That is where māyā smiles.

This booklet is about that smile.

It asks what happens when the seeker stops treating life as an optimization problem. It asks whether responsibility is always dharma, or whether it can become ego wearing a clean shirt. It asks why Vyāsa could accomplish so much and still remain dissatisfied. It asks why Nārada, the cheerful troublemaker, keeps chanting and remains free. It asks why Śrī Rāma in the forest, Samvartaka before power, Arjuna in Pātāla, and the child in a railway journey all point toward the same inward correction.

Just be.

Not do nothing.

Not escape.

Not become useless.

Just stop pretending that the whole bloody universe is waiting for your optimization model.

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Opening: The Question Behind the Compliment

The first booklet asked how the seeker stands when dharma is tested, when māyā is named, when power is humbled, when knowledge is warned, when surrender becomes the final shelter, and when even the familiar gods seem silent.

The second asked how silence becomes sound. Not sound as noise. Not sound as entertainment. Sound as Om, nāda, rhythm, language, art, grief, offering, and the strange background current that keeps playing even when the world breaks.

The third turns toward language. The mother tongue. Chandas. Yati. Prāsa. Alaṅkāra. Story. Metaphor. The tongue as instrument. The question there is whether language remains merely clever, defensive, social, and worldly - or whether it learns to bow.

This fourth booklet begins from a more ordinary doorway.

A compliment.

A slightly surprised compliment.

People saw the earlier booklets and said they did not know I could write this kind of deep material. The sentence was harmless. Even affectionate. But I heard the small assumption sitting behind it.

They were not surprised that I could think. They were surprised that I could think here.

That difference matters.

Because many human beings do this to themselves and to one another. They box capacity into approved domains. This person is technical. That person is artistic. This one is spiritual. That one is practical. This one is intellectual. That one is emotional. This one is a leader. That one is a poet.

As though Bhagavān issued people like department-wise purchase orders.

So I asked them what they thought I was good at.

The answers came easily enough. AI architecture. Leadership. Grasping power. Wide range of subjects. Ability to inspire and mentor. Documentation. Business analysis. Project management. Delivery excellence.

Then I asked: if you think I can go deep there, why assume I cannot go deep here?

The answers became slower.

Some said people are naturally good at certain things and not others. Some spoke about different intelligences. Some said artistic ability, mathematical

ability, leadership ability, emotional intelligence, and spiritual depth are not the same.

True enough.

But that was not the end of it.

I pressed further. Why are people good at some things and not others? Is it because they tried and failed? Is it because they never tried? Is it because they tried once, felt foolish, and quit? Is it because no one gave them an opening? Is it because they had no money, no time, no space, no teacher, no audience, no permission, no mental state, no occasion?

The answer that came again and again was opportunity.

Opportunity in the broadest sense of the word.

Then I asked the next question.

Was it really absence of opportunity? Or was it priority?

You were afraid the boss would judge you. You were busy earning your livelihood. You were worried about the cost of that hobby. You wanted to maximize your job prospects, financial prospects, social position, family comfort, stability, or reputation.

Again, not to trivialize any of that. These are real pressures. Real people live under real constraints. Empty advice from people with full stomachs is one of the more irritating forms of air pollution.

Still, the structure underneath was clear.

People were optimizing.

They were solving for something. Money. Safety. Recognition. Approval. Stability. Social permission. Professional growth. Family approval. Avoidance of embarrassment. Avoidance of failure. Avoidance of wasted time.

When human beings are torn between priorities, they choose. They must choose. And because they choose, they begin to think they are solving an optimization problem.

That is where the spiritual question begins.

What exactly are we optimizing?

And who is the optimizer?

1. Opportunity Is Priority Wearing Respectable Clothes

Opportunity is a respectable word.

It sounds sober. It sounds fair. It sounds like life itself. One person had opportunity. Another did not. One person had the right environment.

Another had duties. One person had encouragement. Another had mockery. One person had money. Another had rent. One person had teachers. Another had a boss breathing down his neck like a corporate piśācha with calendar invites.

All true.

But opportunity does not explain everything.

Many times, opportunity is priority wearing respectable clothes.

A person says, "I never had the opportunity to paint." But maybe the deeper truth is: painting did not outrank income, respectability, exams, marriage, children, EMI, immigration, promotion, or fear of being judged.

A person says, "I never had the opportunity to write." Maybe. Or maybe writing did not outrank the fear of being seen before the sentence became perfect.

A person says, "I never had the opportunity to study scripture." Maybe. Or maybe scrolling, arguing, earning, performing intelligence, and winning trivial battles gave faster dopamine returns.

Again, this is not accusation. I am not sitting as judge. I am as implicated as anyone else. The only difference is that at some point the seeker in me became more curious than the ego in me was defensive.

When someone says, "I could not," I now ask quietly: could not, or did not optimize for it?

That question can sound cruel if spoken without compassion. But it can become liberating if examined honestly.

Because once we see priority, we see choice.

Once we see choice, we see attachment.

Once we see attachment, we see māyā.

Māyā is not only some grand cosmic illusion where the universe is mistaken for final reality. Māyā also appears in very practical clothing. Career planning. Family prestige. Social role. Professional identity. Fear of falling behind. Fear of looking foolish. Fear of being irrelevant. Fear of losing the race. Fear that if one does not optimize every damn variable, life will collapse like a badly maintained municipal bridge.

So we optimize.

We optimize income. We optimize reputation. We optimize health. We optimize networking. We optimize children. We optimize education. We optimize spirituality. We optimize even rest. There are people who optimize sleep so aggressively that sleep must be hiding under the bed, terrified.

And then we wonder why there is no peace.

The first movement of this booklet is simple.

Human beings are not merely deprived of opportunity.

They are often trapped by optimization.

They are trying to maximize something within a field whose ending has already been declared.

That ending is death.

Which means the next question cannot be avoided.

When death is certain, what exactly are we optimizing?

2. Māyā as the Optimization Problem

Here is the trick.

This is the damn illusion.

We want to optimize something which cannot be optimized. It does not need to be optimized. And any attempt, however sugar-coated, is simultaneously futile and foolish.

That sounds harsh.

Good.

It should.

The mind does not loosen because we politely request it. The mind is a stubborn landlord. Sometimes you have to bang the door.

For me, one of the earliest blows came through the Yaksha Prashna episode in the Mahabharata. I first read it in C. Rajagopalachari's English retelling when I was in sixth grade. I am not going to be anal about exact wording, philological precision, or whether the Yaksha literally asked the question in the exact form in which later retellings preserve it.

That was supposed to be a private conversation between Yudhiṣṭhira and the Yaksha. Even divine seers can be misquoted by publishing departments several yugas later. Let us not act like the minutes were circulated in PDF.

The point is the answer.

The question was something like: what is the most surprising thing?

Yudhiṣṭhira's answer was essentially this: every human being sees others die, knows death is certain, and yet lives as though he himself will continue indefinitely.

I had my holy moly moment right there, on that page.

Because if death is the absolute truth, what are people optimizing?

This is not a gloomy thought. It is not pessimism. It is not denial of life. It is a cleansing thought.

If the ending is fixed, the wise question is not how to own the journey. The wise question is how to travel.

Māyā survives because the mind behaves as though the journey can be converted into possession. The mind says: I will control this. I will secure that. I will maximize these variables. I will become so competent that uncertainty will surrender. I will become so rich that fear will disappear. I will become so respected that death will hesitate outside my gate and ask for appointment.

Nonsense.

Death does not care about your calendar.

The seeker need not become morbid. The seeker simply stops lying.

The body will go. Roles will go. People will remember, misremember, exaggerate, forget, quote, misquote, and move on. The world will not pause. The market will open. Someone will complain about traffic. Someone will order tea. Someone will ask for a status update. Someone will say “deeply saddened” and then look for parking.

So what is the optimization problem?

The answer is brutal.

There is none.

There is action. There is dharma. There is love. There is duty. There is beauty. There is grief. There is work. There is art. There is laughter. There is responsibility. There is offering. There is surrender.

But there is no final worldly optimization problem worth treating as ultimate.

The whole bloody optimization problem is junked.

Not because life is meaningless.

Because life is not ours to own.

3. The Train to Delhi

Now take a train.

Hyderabad to Delhi. Or point A to point B. The exact stations do not matter.

You know the journey ends at Delhi. You know you cannot get down before the real destination in any final sense. Nobody ever did. You know the train will not stop forever because you have a preference. You know the journey has a direction you did not invent.

And yet, here you are.

Planning to buy pakodas at the next station. Arguing with the ticket collector. Getting irritated with the man on the next seat. Wondering which vendor will arrive. Hoping the train is not too late. Complaining about the berth.

Checking whether the window seat is better. Acting as though the railway system was built for your strategic roadmap.

As kids, we did something else.

We looked out of the window.

We watched the scenery. Fields. Trees. Stations. People. Cows. Vendors. Dust. Light. The whole bloody country moving past like cinema without needing a ticket. If the pakoda guy came around and my father bought pakodas, I ate. If he did not, I kept looking outside.

Sometimes my mother would pull something out of her purse. Indian mothers can pull even rabbits out of their purses. I swear. A drink. A Poppins. Some snack wrapped in a piece of paper. Some emergency thing no one else knew existed. The mother's purse is one of the fourteen lokas. I am convinced.

If Dad gave pakoda, you ate. If it was too spicy, Mom gave a drink or something sweet. If nothing came, you looked out of the window. If tired, you slept.

When the destination came, your parents woke you up a few minutes early. You did not even have to lug the bags down. You held their hand and walked out.

That is exactly how I have lived my life.

At least, that is how I understand my life now.

Sometimes Dad would get down at a station to buy something. Then the train would move and he would be nowhere to be seen. In the first couple of journeys, I panicked. Mom would calmly say he was just showing off. He liked to get onto a running train in a different compartment and then walk back.

And yes, eventually he would appear, walking back to our seats as though the universe had merely taken a small tea break.

By the third time, my fear had changed. I started egging him to get down and buy goodies.

The fear of losing him became confidence in what he could do.

And if he did not buy anything, fine.

Back to window watching.

That is exactly how I treated Bhagavān and Mata.

All my life.

Even today.

I live in the present. I enjoy the present. Not because the present is always beautiful. Not because suffering is cute. Not because the window always

shows flowers and sunlight. Sometimes the window shows garbage, heat, dust, and stations where the tea tastes like philosophical punishment.

Still, I enjoy the present because I am with Them.

That child could have chosen to sulk and sleep. But why? For three or four days, he had his mother and father full-time. They talked. Laughed. Played games. Shared food. Watched the country move. The journey itself became the most fascinating and memorable part of the vacation.

Is life not the same?

You cannot predict which seller will come at which station. You cannot know exactly how late or early the station will arrive. You cannot go back to stations gone past and renegotiate. You cannot force the vendor to carry the snack you imagined. You cannot control whether Dad gets down or stays seated. You cannot convert the journey into ownership.

You just live.

You just be.

In Their presence.

This is not passivity.

This is intimacy.

This is not fatalism.

This is trust.

This is not “I will do nothing.”

This is “I will stop pretending I own the journey.”

That shift is māyā-dissolution in daily language.

The journey need not stop.

The false ownership stops.

4. Just Be Is Not Laziness

Now comes the obvious misunderstanding.

If I say “just be,” someone will immediately think I am recommending laziness, irresponsibility, spiritual daydreaming, or the respectable Hindu version of lying on a sofa and calling it Advaita.

No.

That is not being.

That is tamas with incense.

Just be does not mean do nothing. It means stop adding false ownership to action.

It means act when action is needed. Fight when dharma demands. Work when work stands before you. Feed the child. Pay the bill. Run the company. Write the document. Build the product. Console the grieving. Correct the wrong. Protect what must be protected. Burn what must be burned. Bow where one must bow.

But stop pretending that the entire universe is suspended from your personal dashboard.

After I grew up, I saw people speak of mindfulness, meditation, breathwork, presence, and the rest. Now there are apps on electronic gadgets to help people breathe. There is a whole “breathe” app. Marketing is on steroids. People now need a gadget to tell them to inhale and exhale, as though the body had been waiting for Silicon Valley to rediscover the nose.

That is not a ridicule of the great teachers.

Osho, Sadhguru, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and others in their own ways have repeatedly told people not to believe blindly, not to borrow truth second-hand, not to convert the living search into dead ideology. Seek. Observe. Be aware. See for yourself.

I take that seriously.

I may differ from them in places. I may use a different vocabulary. I may come through Bhagavān, Mata, Rāma, Vyāsa, Nārada, Hanuman, Kāśī, grief, and lived experience rather than through their exact doorway. But I am not writing against that current. In many ways, I am amplifying it.

Do not believe lazily.

Do not perform spirituality.

Do not outsource seeing.

Observe.

Seek.

Be.

Some practices help. Some teachers help. Some methods help. But the modern world has a genius for turning every simple truth into subscription revenue. So the warning is not against breath. The warning is against forgetting how to breathe until a product manager packages it back to us.

Being is not an escape from duty.

It is the purification of duty.

The one who is lazy says: why act?

The one who is restless says: I must control the outcome.

The one who is surrendered says: action is here; let it be offered.

That is the difference.

The seeker who stops optimizing does not become useless. He becomes less noisy.

He does not abandon responsibility. He stops converting responsibility into self-importance.

He does not abandon intelligence. He stops making intelligence the throne of ego.

He does not abandon planning. He stops worshipping planning.

He does not abandon excellence. He stops making excellence a begging bowl for identity.

He does not abandon life.

He abandons the false claimant.

That is why “just be” is not small advice. It is terrifying advice.

Because the ego can tolerate activity. It can tolerate spirituality. It can tolerate even suffering if it remains the hero of the story.

But just being?

That threatens the ego’s employment contract.

5. Śrī Rāma in the Forest: Duty Without Optimization

When Śrī Rāma was in the forest, what was he optimizing?

Everyone knows about the battle of Lanka. There is enough material on that. Epics, retellings, TV serials, pop-culture noise, some good, some cringe-worthy enough to make even a patient ṛṣi request earplugs.

But Rāma’s great battle in the forest against fourteen thousand demons is not always held with the seriousness it deserves.

There was no army.

No vānaras.

No Hanuman.

No bridge.

No grand Lanka spectacle.

No Matali’s chariot.

No divine stage lighting.

He was on foot.

He had ordered Lakṣmaṇa to stay beside Sita. I am no expert pretending to settle every purāṇic nuance, but to my mind he did not ask Lakṣmaṇa to stay as mere backup. He did that to protect both of them. He and Sita always treated Lakṣmaṇa like their son. Bharata was his brother. Lakṣmaṇa was also son-like in that forest intimacy.

And there Rāma stood.

Fourteen thousand demons attacking from all directions. Earth, sky, and everything in between. Appearing and disappearing at will. A full 360-degree battle in the forest. Not the earlier forest of Viśvāmitra, where the sage was present and Lakṣmaṇa stood as comrade in arms. This was different. There was nothing polite or ceremonial about it.

Blood poured over his body. Armor shattered. Arrows struck. The body bore the cost.

And yet he did his duty.

Killed every single one of them.

What was he optimizing?

Nothing.

He was not planning what to do after fourteen years. He was not building castles in the air. He was not plotting empire. He was not doing some deep tapasya after renouncing the world. He was not standing outside life. He was inside it completely.

Bhagavān was just being.

Living one day at a time. In the moment. Oblivious to noise. Fully available to dharma.

In that moment, he did his duty.

As he had all his life.

As he would in the remaining.

That is the correction to lazy interpretations of “just be.”

Rāma was not passive.

Rāma was not inert.

Rāma was not optimizing.

He was aligned.

That is the difference between restless action and dharmic action. Restless action keeps asking: what will this make me? What will I gain? What will I lose? How will this look? How will I secure the next step? How do I protect the self-image?

Dharmic action asks: what stands before me?

Then it acts.

This is why the Gita begins on a battlefield and not in a spa.

The seeker does not escape action.

The seeker stops owning action.

Rāma in the forest shows the same truth in another form.

Do what must be done.

Do not become the owner of the universe while doing it.

6. Samvartaka and Arjuna: When Nothing Is Left to Optimize

In the first booklet, Samvartaka appeared as a man with nothing to lose except māyā.

That is the key.

A man with possessions can be threatened. A man with reputation can be manipulated. A man with ambition can be bought. A man with fear can be bent. A man with social dependency can be isolated. A man hungry for validation can be controlled by withholding praise.

But what do you do with a man who has already burned dependence?

What do you take from him?

What do you offer him?

What do you threaten him with?

That is why Samvartaka becomes terrifying. Not because rage is holy. Not because anger is liberation. That would be childish and dangerous. He is terrifying because the usual handles are gone.

Māyā works by offering handles.

This will make you important. This will make you safe. This will make you admired. This will make you needed. This will make you feared. This will make you remembered. This will make you spiritually impressive. This will make you look like someone who has gone beyond all this while secretly checking who noticed.

Samvartaka stands outside that bargain.

He has nothing left to optimize.

That is why he can burn Agni itself.

Again, do not reduce that to spectacle. The meaning is inward. When the seeker has no remaining bargain with māyā, even cosmic forces cannot handle him in the old way.

Arjuna in Pātāla offers another angle.

When Arjuna fights the Nivātakavachas, there is no normal battlefield logic left. He is not optimizing comfort, reputation, or future positioning. He is in an impossible situation. This is not Savyasachi as a man simply using alternate arms when tired, or shooting in dual directions for technical glory. This is Arjuna placed where ordinary calculation collapses.

In such moments, action becomes pure.

Not because the warrior disappears physically.

Because the claimant disappears.

When you do not even attempt to optimize - or more accurately, when you stop faking that you can optimize - something is unleashed.

You gain union with Bhagavān. You are His, and He is yours. Now it is His job to act. The actor is inconsequential. The action is inconsequential. The result, needless to say, is inconsequential.

The whole bloody optimization problem is junked.

This is not annihilation.

This is freedom.

The body may still fight. The mind may still calculate within the local needs of action. The hands still grip the bow. The reins still need holding. The arrow still needs releasing.

But the inner center has changed.

Earlier: I act, I own, I gain, I lose.

Now: action moves through the instrument.

That is surrender in battlefield language.

7. Responsibility: The Last Sophisticated Trap

Whenever one speaks this way, someone will say: easy for you to say; I have responsibilities.

Fair.

People do have responsibilities. Children. Parents. Spouses. Teams. Employees. Debts. Health. Work. Society. Promises. Duties. And none of that should be dismissed by throwing Sanskrit at it like turmeric powder on a wound.

But responsibility is also one of ego's most sophisticated hiding places.

That must be said carefully.

Responsibility is real.

But the sense “only I am responsible for everything” is often false ownership wearing dharma’s clothes.

I have moved homes, cities, jobs, countries. I have been in different roles, different circles, different battles. True, I spent a large amount of time with some specific people I call my team. But that was not because of the variables I kept changing. Looking back, I was not even changing them in the way people imagine. I took what came by.

People who know me sometimes say I was lucky. That I had a supportive team. Maybe. Grace often looks like luck to people who do not want to use the word grace.

Their counterargument is usually responsibility.

They say they cannot simply be because they have responsibilities.

And yet many are not happy. Not peaceful. Not even content with what they have and what they do.

That is worth examining.

Responsibility without surrender becomes restlessness.

Responsibility without humility becomes self-importance.

Responsibility without bhakti becomes control.

Responsibility without clarity becomes fear dressed as duty.

I am not going to use sentimental stories here. I am not going to say, “Even if you are not around, life will continue and your children will flourish.” That sounds too much like movies. Yes, people rise from difficult circumstances. A rickshaw driver’s child can become IAS. An orphan can rise. Humans are ingenious. Fire in the belly can overcome many circumstances.

No questions there.

But upward movement does not necessarily mean inward freedom.

Useful, yes. Comfortable, yes. Worth gratitude, yes.

Ultimate, no.

The deeper question is not whether ambition can move a person upward.

The question is whether upward movement gives peace.

The answer is not guaranteed.

This is where Vyāsa enters.

Because if accomplishment could settle the heart, Vyāsa should have been the most settled being in the room.

He was not.

8. Vyāsa's Disillusionment: When Accomplishment Does Not Settle the Heart

Vyāsa Maharshi was not merely accomplished.

He is the very definition of accomplishment.

He organized sacred knowledge. He stood in the middle of civilization's memory. He shaped lineage. His seed was the Kuru clan. He saw what happened. He wrote the Mahabharata. He gave the world the Gita as we received it. He touched, spoke to, and moved around Bhagavān's own play in ways ordinary writers cannot even fantasize about without getting a headache.

He is one of the Chiranjeevis.

And yet, there he was.

Disillusioned.

Desolate.

Unsettled.

Then Nārada comes and directs him toward singing the glory of Bhagavān. Thus comes the Bhagavatam. This is not something we need to invent. The Bhagavatam itself establishes Vyāsa's dissatisfaction and Nārada's intervention.

But the question that stayed with me was why.

Why dissatisfaction?

What could be missing after so much?

I tried connecting the dots. Maybe one day I will ask someone more formally trained in these matters. But honestly, I do not need validation for the core intuition. It fits too well.

Vyāsa had seen too much.

He had been too close to the book.

That does something to a person.

When you are close to a work, you begin to feel responsible for the outcome. When you are close to a team, you begin to feel responsible for their choices. When you are close to a civilization's turning point, you may begin to feel responsible for history itself. This is not ordinary ego. It is the refined ego of responsibility.

Much more dangerous.

Because it looks noble.

Krishna did not come in the middle of Dvāpara. He came toward the end. His purpose was not merely the war. The war was an instrument. His purpose

was not merely the Gita either. That private one-on-one conversation was spread later by Vyāsa. The larger purpose was to set up human leadership to weather and soften the impact of the coming Kali Yuga. To modify the world order so that humans were ready.

If I can think about this, Vyāsa certainly could.

And then what happened?

The moment Krishna left the world, the Pandavas quit everything and walked off toward the heavens.

Imagine that.

If I quit and then every manager, vice president, and senior leader under me took sanyāsa, it would be devastating to someone watching. They did not stand up another Arjuna. Another Bhīma. Another Yudhiṣṭhira. Where are the books written by these people? Where is the leadership school they left behind? Where is the trained bench?

Kali still came.

And here we are.

That must have been a massive letdown for Vyāsa.

I can empathize with that.

You do not need a whole bunch of religious knowledge to feel this. Any leader who has built something and watched people fail to carry the flame properly will understand. The wound is not merely failure. The wound is discontinuity.

Leaders ought to breed more leaders.

Not walk away.

And yet, even that sentence must be surrendered.

Because if responsibility becomes ownership, even leadership becomes māyā.

Vyāsa's disillusionment may not have come from lack of accomplishment.

It may have come from subtle ownership of the outcome.

That is the hardest thing to drop.

Not laziness.

Not incompetence.

Not selfishness.

The noble burden.

The feeling that I must make this whole thing turn out right.

Māyā loves that one.

It looks almost holy.

9. Nārada: The Happy Troublemaker Who Knows the Secret

Nārada is too easily misunderstood.

People turn him into a comic messenger, a celestial gossip, a conflict-maker with a vīṇā and excellent timing. He appears, says something, trouble starts, and then the story moves.

Fine.

That is one layer.

But look deeper.

Why is he always content?

No family. No job. No fixed domestic drama. No kingdom to protect. No institutional burden. No board meeting. No quarterly target. No family WhatsApp group asking who is bringing sweets. He moves, appears, disturbs, chants, and remains strangely free.

He does not seem like the grandest decision-maker in every crisis. When the gods have problems, they often go to Brhaspati. Or to Brahmā. Or to someone with the proper cosmic designation. Nārada appears more like a catalyst than an administrator.

And yet, he knows something.

He chants Bhagavān's name.

Constantly.

Maybe that is not a side detail. Maybe that is the whole point.

When Vyāsa and Nārada met, I do not imagine it as a small advice session. I imagine Vyāsa already knew the answer somewhere inside. Nārada merely became the sounding board for a torn soul.

Perhaps Nārada said something like this:

You are disillusioned because you thought the outcome was yours.

You wrote. You saw. You organized. You carried memory. You were close to Bhagavān's play. But closeness to the play does not make you the owner of the play.

Nārāyaṇa does this again and again.

In every Manvantara, He descends. He balances. He teaches. He tries again. Matsya came at the end of the previous Manvantara, before Vaivasvata Manu began the current one. You witnessed Krishna, the eighth avatāra in this familiar sequence, come and go. Buddha will come. Kalki will come. We are

in the twenty-eighth Mahayuga. The cycle goes on until the seventy-first. A kalpa must complete. This Brahmā must go. Another vidhātā will come. Hanuman waits, chants, meditates, remains.

Look at the scale, Vyāsa.

You know this.

Why then this disillusionment?

Just because you wrote so much, understood so much, and stood so close does not mean you get to demand that the yuga obey your emotional preference.

Being too involved, too close to the book, does this.

Go with the flow.

Surrender.

Sing His glory.

Wait.

Hanuman knows more than you think. He learnt from Sūrya himself. He was closer to Rāma than most beings can even imagine. In this iteration, he was asked to just be - on the flag. Presence. Witness. Strength. Not the central actor as before.

So much for responsibility.

Just be.

Just live.

Surrender.

Surrender if you want māyā to dissolve.

Surrender if you need solace.

This imagined Nārada is not reducing responsibility. He is purifying it.

The point is not: do not lead.

The point is: lead without self-ownership.

The point is not: do not build.

The point is: build as offering.

The point is not: do not care.

The point is: care without claiming cosmic authorship.

Nārada is happy because he has no optimization problem.

He has nāma.

He has movement.

He has Bhagavān.

That is enough.

10. The Flag, the Chariot, and the One Who Just Is

Hanuman is one of the most powerful answers to this booklet, but he cannot be fully treated here. He deserves the next one.

Still, he must appear briefly.

In the Rāma avatāra, Hanuman is action. Leap, search, strength, humility, intelligence, service, speech, war, devotion. He burns Lanka. He finds Sita. He carries mountains. He stands before Rāma not as a performer of devotion, but as devotion embodied.

In the Krishna avatāra, he is on Arjuna's flag.

Think about that.

He is not asked to repeat the same form of service. He is not asked to dominate the battlefield. He is not the hero of that iteration. He is present. He witnesses. He strengthens. He remains.

The same being who once crossed the ocean now just is.

On the flag.

That is not reduction.

That is maturity of service.

The ego wants to repeat its favorite form of usefulness. It wants to say, "Last time I crossed the ocean, burned the city, carried the mountain. What is my role now?"

Bhakti does not ask that.

Bhakti asks: where do You want me?

If Bhagavān says leap, Hanuman leaps.

If Bhagavān says sit on the flag, Hanuman sits on the flag.

If Bhagavān says remain for yugas, Hanuman remains.

If Bhagavān says chant, he chants.

There is no optimization problem because there is no self-owned career path.

This is why Hanuman is not merely powerful. Power alone would make him another impressive being in a universe full of impressive beings. Hanuman is peace in strength. Strength that has surrendered its self-importance. Capacity without restlessness. Knowledge without arrogance. Service without bargaining.

That is rare.

That is why he belongs to the next booklet.

Booklet Five must ask why some beings remain. Not as fantasy leftovers. Not as immortality ornaments. As witnesses. Vyāsa, Hanuman, Aśvatthāma, Vibhīṣaṇa, Bali, and the others each preserve a different lesson across the yugas.

But for Booklet Four, Hanuman gives us this much.

Sometimes the highest service is not dramatic action.

Sometimes it is presence.

Sometimes the one who once crossed the ocean is asked simply to remain.

Sometimes it is simply being on the flag while another warrior fights his Kurukṣetra.

11. Surrender Is Not a Service We Render to Bhagavān

There is one final confusion to remove.

People speak as though surrender is something Bhagavān needs from us.

That is shallow.

Bhagavān does not need anything.

One who has everything, who is everything, does not sit around waiting for our coconut, our incense stick, our clever Sanskrit pronunciation, our temple receipt, or our emotional bargaining.

Temples are for us.

Rituals are for us.

Chanting is for us.

Offering is for us.

Surrender is for us.

Not because Bhagavān is indifferent. Because Bhagavān is complete.

We go to temples and break coconuts and think we are doing Him a service. Then, as part of the bargain, we ask for boons, relief, success, deliverance, visa, promotion, marriage, child, health, court case, stock grant, or whatever else the mind has queued up.

Nothing wrong with asking. A child asks. A child complains. A child can tug at the mother's sari and ask for impossible things. Bhakti allows that. Parent-child intimacy allows that.

But at some point, the seeker must understand.

The service is not to Bhagavān.

The service is to our own disturbed instrument.

We need the temple because we forget. We need the ritual because the body must be trained. We need nāma because the mind runs like a monkey that drank coffee and discovered venture capital. We need pūjā because gesture disciplines emotion. We need surrender because otherwise we remain restless, torn, anxious, optimizing, comparing, bargaining, and calling the whole mess responsibility.

Bhagavān does not need us to surrender.

We need surrender for peace.

That is why the line “Bhagavān expects surrender” must be handled carefully. In one sense, yes, scripture speaks that way because the seeker needs direction. But ultimately, Bhagavān lacks nothing. He is nirguna, nirākāra, nirañjana. Beyond the qualitative aspects we fawn over. Beyond our psychological projections. Beyond praise and blame. Beyond the transaction.

We are made of Him.

We do not need to aspire in the worldly sense.

We do not need to optimize.

We need to remember.

We need to align.

We need to offer.

We need to be.

And because we still have body, mind, senses, memory, desire, fear, habit, grief, ambition, and all the usual internal bureaucracy, we need surrender as practice.

The choice is ours.

We can continue being born again and again, entering the cauldron, optimizing, grasping, fearing, desiring, fighting, claiming, losing, and starting over. Bhagavān will not begrudge that. There is no eternal hell in the way some other traditions imagine. No permanent purgatory. No final judgment day where the cosmic accountant adjusts spectacles and reads out our grocery bill of sins.

There is consequence.

There is karma.

There is learning.

There is return.

There is grace.

There is freedom.

The door is not locked.

The mist is not ultimate.

The light is not elsewhere.

But the seeker has to stop clutching the fog and calling it strategy.

12. The Gist

If I had to compress this booklet into one flow, I would say this:

A compliment exposed a question. People were not surprised that depth was possible. They were surprised by the domain in which depth appeared. That led to another question. Why do people develop some capacities and not others? The answer first looked like opportunity. Then it became priority. Then it became optimization.

That is where māyā entered.

Human beings are constantly optimizing. Career, money, reputation, family, safety, spirituality, rest, even breath. But death stands at the end, quietly laughing at the spreadsheet. If death is certain, what exactly is the final optimization problem?

There is none.

That does not make life meaningless. It makes ownership false.

The journey is moving. Stations come and go. Pakodas may come. They may not. Father may get down and return from another compartment. Mother may pull something impossible from her purse. The child may eat, laugh, sleep, watch scenery, panic, learn trust, and hold their hands when the destination arrives.

That is life.

Not control.

Presence.

Not ownership.

Trust.

Not optimization.

Being.

Śrī Rāma in the forest shows that being is not laziness. He fights fourteen thousand demons without army, vānaras, Hanuman, chariot, spectacle, or future-planning. He does what dharma places before him. Blood on the body. Armor shattered. Duty alive. No optimization problem.

Samvartaka shows what happens when a man has nothing left to lose except māyā. No possession, reputation, ambition, fear, or hunger for validation remains as handle. Such a being becomes spiritually unmanageable by the false world.

Arjuna in Pātāla shows action in the impossible field. Not technique as ego. Not Savyasachi as circus. The warrior in an impossible situation, where calculation collapses and Bhagavān acts through the instrument.

Responsibility then appears as the last sophisticated trap. Responsibility is real. But self-ownership disguised as responsibility is māyā with a better vocabulary. Vyāsa's dissatisfaction shows that even vast accomplishment, knowledge, authorship, proximity to Bhagavān, and civilizational work do not settle the heart if the subtle claim remains.

Nārada, the happy troublemaker, knows the secret. Chant. Move. Disturb where needed. Sing Bhagavān. Do not own the play. Even if one has written the book, one does not own the yuga.

Hanuman on the flag gives the next doorway. Sometimes service is action. Sometimes service is presence. Sometimes the one who once crossed the ocean is asked simply to remain.

So the teaching is not “do nothing.”

The teaching is: stop carrying the false center.

Act.

Fight.

Write.

Lead.

Love.

Grieve.

Build.

Protect.

Laugh.

Eat the pakoda when it comes.

Look out of the window when it does not.

Hold Their hand when the destination arrives.

Bhagavān does not need our surrender. We need surrender because we need peace.

The world says optimize.

Māyā says optimize.

Fear says optimize.

Ambition says optimize.

Even responsibility says optimize.

But the seeker eventually sees through the mist.

The journey was never about ownership.

It was about traveling in Their presence.

That is enough for a seeker to begin. Not to sound learned. Not to decorate the ego with another spiritual theory. Not to win an argument against people who bought the premium version of the breathe app.

But to live, act, surrender, and just be.

Epilogue: The Witnesses Who Remain

After optimization is junked, another question naturally appears.

If the body is not ultimate, if worldly accomplishment is not final, if knowledge itself does not guarantee peace, why do certain beings remain?

Why Chiranjeevis?

As a child, I never fully understood this. Why would immortality be allowed? And even if it were allowed, why would Aśvatthāma, the man who attempted foeticide, find a place? Why in the heavens would such beings be tasked to assist Kalki in a future age?

The first answer came when I understood that the immortal part is not the physical body. The ātman is anyway not destroyed. So Chiranjeevitva cannot merely mean the body refusing to die like a stubborn old tenant.

The special thing is different.

They remain in this loka.

Bhu-loka.

They may appear, disappear, assume forms, move across planes, or stay hidden. But they are not done with the world. They remain as witnesses.

Vyāsa remains as witness that knowledge, authorship, proximity, and experience are not enough without surrender.

Hanuman remains as witness that strength finds peace only in nāma, service, and the body treated as temple because the Lord is installed within.

Aśvatthāma remains as witness that devotion mixed with darkness must atone, and that Bhagavān may punish without abandoning the possibility of learning.

Vibhīṣaṇa remains as witness that mercy is not weakness, and that true strength does not need corporate “trust but verify” language before giving refuge.

Bali remains as witness that even cosmic overreach can be repositioned by grace.

The Chiranjeevis are not fantasy leftovers.

They are preserved lessons.

They remain because the human lesson is not finished.

That is the next door.

Booklet Five:

The Witnesses Who Remain

Chiranjeevis, Memory, Atonement, Mercy, and the Long Work of Bhagavān

End of Booklet Four