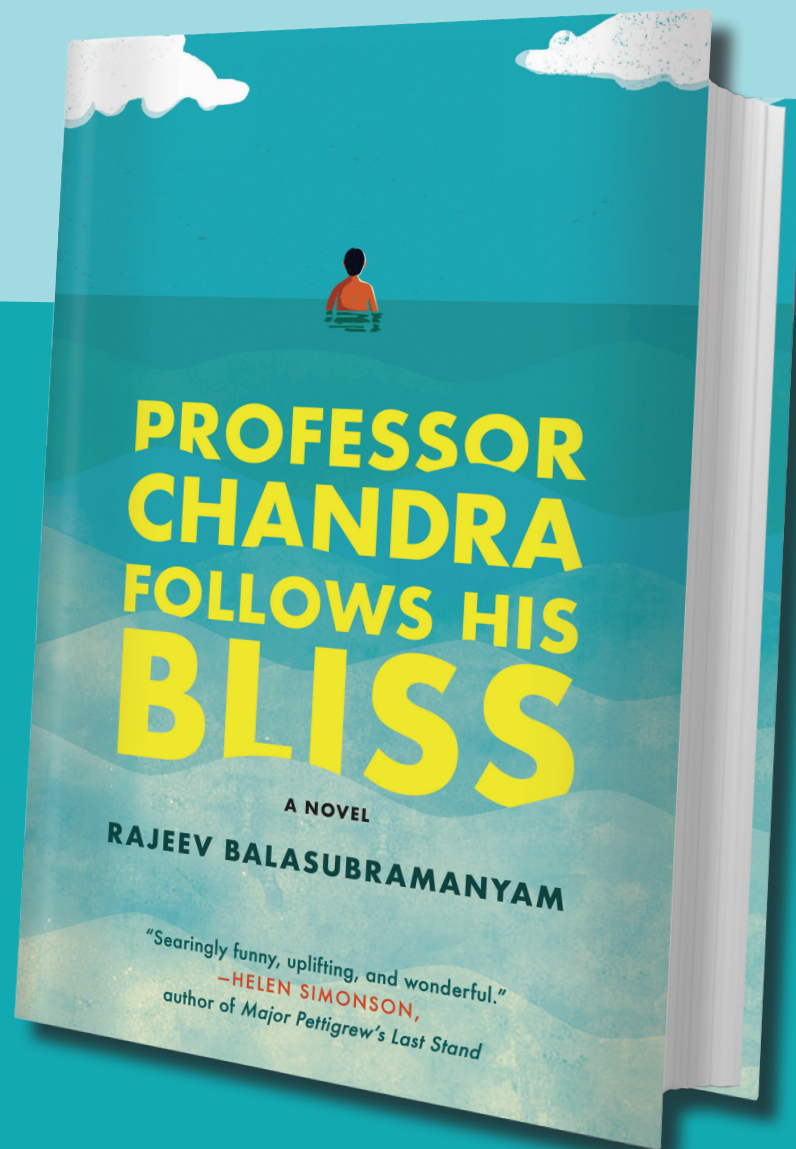


If **Professor Chandra** can find his bliss,
so can your **book club!**



"Searingly funny,
uplifting, and
wonderful."

—**HELEN SIMONSON**, author of
Major Pettigrew's Last Stand

"I gave myself over
to Professor Chandra's
journey as he opens
himself to self-examination,
family healing, and a more
courageous experience of
being alive."

—**ELIZABETH LESSER**,
New York Times bestselling author
of *Broken Open* and co-founder
of the Omega Institute

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR



Dear Reader,

I had wanted to write a novel about an economist for some time. I grew up inside the world of Indian development economists; my father was one; I studied it myself, ended up doing a Masters of Philosophy in Development Studies at Cambridge, but eventually, like Professor Chandra, I ended up going down a very different path.

I grew up in a materialist world, without religion or spirituality or much wisdom. Everything was intellectual, everything oriented toward achievement or success. I started to meditate because this way of life wasn't enough, it wasn't working, it didn't even make a dent, as far as I was concerned, in dealing with unhappiness.

In 2014, I was given a fellowship to help me combine my writing practice with my meditation practice. I ended up being funded to travel the length and breadth of the United States, going from meditation retreat to meditation retreat, living, in effect, as a travelling monk, a period I described as my American Pilgrimage.

When I returned to London, and then Berlin, after leaving California, it was the middle of winter, grey and rainy, and I was renting a room with two friends who were in the process of divorcing. It seemed to get dark in the middle of the afternoon, and I often awoke to violent shouting. To cheer myself up, I started writing *Professor Chandra Follows His Bliss*, revisiting my American Pilgrimage and California.

My intention was to show a healing process in action, to reveal how happiness is so often up to us, even if we don't realise it, how even the most unconscious or egomaniacal of us can be redeemed through making small changes, focusing a little more on love and a little less on success. I wrote it to make myself happy and it did, so my true heartfelt hope is that it can do the same for others.

Sincerely,
Rajeev Balasubramanyam

ENGAGE THE SENSES



Here are some suggestions to help enhance your 5 senses while hosting your book club.

SIGHT

- Set out a few vases of seasonal flowers from your garden or the market
- For décor, consider the calming powers of blue, green, pink, and violet
- Remove unnecessary clutter to reduce distractions and encourage focus

HEARING

Give your book club a soothing soundtrack by playing music at a low volume. Some suggestions for a playlist:

- “Someone Like You” by Adele
- “May It Be” by Enya
- “The Four Seasons” by Vivaldi
- “Canon” by Pachelbel

SMELL

Simmer a pan of water on the stovetop and add your favorite herbs, fruit, or spices. Some suggestions:

- A couple of cinnamon sticks, some whole cloves, a few bay leaves
- Lemon slices and sprigs of rosemary
- Vanilla pods and beans

TOUCH

On a cold day, have a hot towel ready for your guests:

- Soak a washcloth or cloth napkin, then wring out so slightly damp
- Place on a plate and microwave for 30 seconds

On a hot day, have a cold towel ready for your guests:

- Fill large bowl with ice water. If desired, add 8–10 drops of an essential oil, perhaps lavender or rose.
- Submerge washcloth or cloth napkin in water, wring out excess water, and neatly fold or roll the towel.
- Place towels in a container, such as a Tupperware or freezer bag, and put container in the freezer for at least four hours.
- When ready, remove from freezer and give to guests.

ENGAGE THE SENSES



TASTE

Enjoy some sample recipes from the cookbook
The Kripalu Kitchen: Nourishing Food for Body and Soul

Iced Lavender Black Tea

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 6 English breakfast tea bags
- 2 tablespoons dried lavender
- 2 tablespoons honey or agave nectar

Directions

1. Bring 1½ cups water to a boil in a medium saucepan. Stir in the tea bags and lavender, and remove from the heat. Cover and let steep for 5 minutes.
2. Strain the tea through a fine sieve, then stir in the honey and 2¾ cups cold water. Serve immediately over ice. You can also chill it for up to 3 days before serving.

Notes

Several teas help relieve stress and anxiety, including:

- Peppermint Tea (steep for 3-4 minutes) – *Soothe the soul*
- Chamomile Tea (steep for 5 minutes) – *Calm crankiness*
- Rose Tea (steep for 5-10 minutes) – *Ease the mind*



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Photograph by Brian Samuels

ENGAGE THE SENSES



TASTE

Enjoy some sample recipes from the cookbook
The Kripalu Kitchen: Nourishing Food for Body and Soul

Chilled Cucumber and Arugula Soup

Serves 4 to 6 (6 to 8 cups)

Ingredients

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4 cups chopped seedless cucumbers with skin, plus 1 cup ¼-inch diced cukes (about 2¼ pounds total) | 2 tablespoons thin strips of fresh mint |
| ½ cup thin strips (chiffonade) of arugula, plus ¼ cup for garnish | 1 tablespoon minced fresh garlic |
| ¼ cup thinly sliced shallots | 1½ teaspoons fine sea salt |
| 3½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice | ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper |
| | 2–3 tablespoons plain yogurt, stirred until smooth (optional) |

Directions

1. Chill 4 shallow soup bowls.
2. Combine the 4 cups cucumbers, 3½ cups cold water, the ½ cup arugula, shallots, lemon juice, mint, garlic, salt, and pepper in a blender or food processor. Pulse until almost pureed but still slightly chunky. You should still see small bits of cucumber in the soup.
3. Stir in the 1 cup diced cucumbers. Use immediately or chill the soup for up to 3 hours. If necessary, whisk the soup again just before serving. Divide the soup among the chilled bowls and garnish each with about ½ tablespoon yogurt, if desired, and 1 tablespoon arugula strips.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1.** The novel opens with Professor Chandra failing to win the Nobel Prize yet again. How does this (seemingly unattainable) goal affect who he is and how he sees the world? As a result, what was your first impression of him as a character?
- 2.** Professor Chandra feels very strongly about ideology, to the point of conflict with those around him. How has his rigid belief system shaped his character and personal life? Why do you think his particular conservative brand of economics is so meaningful to him? What do his beliefs say about him as a person?
- 3.** Why do you think Professor Chandra is still so drawn to Jean even after their divorce? How does their relationship change throughout the novel? What role does Steve play in this transformation?
- 4.** How does Jasmine's own difficult journey, which leads her to the Buddhist monastery, reflect Professor Chandra's? What are the similarities about their experience with mindfulness, and what are the differences?
- 5.** Professor Chandra's time at Esalen seems to be a turning point on his journey towards self-awareness. What lessons does he learn there? What do the other people in his workshop have to teach him? Did you learn anything from his experience?
- 6.** Of his three children, Sunny seems to receive the harshest treatment by Professor Chandra. How has Chandra's relationship with his own father informed his relationship with Sunny? What do you think this says about intergenerational family relationships, and fathers and sons in particular?
- 7.** How do you feel about the way the book ends and how far each character has come? What do you think lies ahead for Professor Chandra and for his family?
- 8.** Where does Professor Chandra's spiritual journey take him as a person? What was the most significant change you saw in his character by the end of the novel? What were the biggest challenges he overcame?
- 9.** Rajeev Balasubramanyam has been practicing meditation for more than a decade. How do you think his personal experience informed the novel? What messages about mindfulness do you think he is trying to convey through the story of Professor Chandra?
- 10.** Have there been times in your life when you decided to stop and "follow your bliss"? What is "bliss" for you?