

Earning your EVEREST

May 20, 2026



Sudhigya Pant's journey to the top of the world – and the lessons it holds for us all.



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“We all stand on the exact same ground, staring up at our own unique horizons. We all carry our own heavy burdens, face our own deep fears, and have our own massive, towering mountains to conquer. Your Sagarmatha (Everest) might not be made of rock and ice, but the courage required to face it is exactly the same.

Never let the world convince you that greatness belongs only to the chosen few. You will only ever know if you can conquer your peak if you dare to step out and try. Without that first step, you will live your entire life in the shadows of your comfort or fear, never realizing the true, infinite potential hidden within your own soul.

This is for the ordinary who dare to look up. Turn the page, find your focus, and begin your climb.”

Sudhigya Pant



From the interviewer

This is a story about a dream that demanded sacrifice, discipline, and unwavering belief. More importantly, it is a story about what becomes possible when an ordinary person refuses to let an extraordinary dream remain only a dream.

Before this conversation, I imagined I would be interviewing someone who had climbed the highest mountain on Earth. I expected stories of altitude sickness, frozen fingers, breathtaking views from the summit, and perhaps some secrets about what it takes to stand at 8,848.86 metres. Like many young people, I was captivated by the achievement itself.

I was wrong.

Everest was never the true subject of this conversation. The mountain is only the backdrop for something far more profound and human: the courage to dream boldly, the discipline to prepare patiently, and the resilience to keep moving when every instinct tells you to stop.

What surprised me most was that there was no talk of extraordinary talent or superhuman ability. Instead, there were countless mornings when motivation disappeared, moments of self-doubt, difficult conversations with family, and the decision to take one more step each day, long before anyone else was watching. The summit was simply the visible consequence of years of invisible work.

At first glance, summiting Everest may appear to be just one individual's personal triumph. But no triumph reaches its fullest meaning when it ends with the person who accomplished it. Its true value lies in what it leaves behind. Every accomplishment has the power to expand another person's imagination, challenge their assumptions, or give someone else the courage to pursue a path they once believed impossible. Human progress has always depended on this exchange of experience from one generation to the next, from one dreamer to another.

That is why conversations like this matter. To celebrate extraordinary accomplishments, and also to reveal the ordinary decisions that made those accomplishments possible.

Whether your Everest is an examination, a business venture, a scientific endeavor, a commitment to serving others, or a goal that feels impossibly distant, I hope these pages leave you with the same realization they left me with.

The summit may belong to the climber, but the lessons belong to us all.

Yugottam Koirala
Punyaarjan Foundation

“If there is
something
meaningful
you want to
pursue, take
the first
STEP.”



Lukla Airport, situated at 2,860 metres, marks the beginning of the Everest journey. For hundreds of climbers who arrive in Nepal each year with the dream of reaching the summit, this is where that dream takes its first step.



Summit of Mera Peak
6476m, Sankhuwasabha.
[Date: November 5, 2022]

Do you remember the first moment when Everest became more than just a mountain to you? How did that dream begin to take shape?

The biggest dreams in life rarely appear all at once. They often begin as something small — a moment, a conversation, or an experience that stays with us long after it has passed.

For me, that moment came in 2021 during my first trek in the Khumbu region. While staying in Khumjung, a peaceful Sherpa village beyond Namche Bazaar, I met an old and experienced Sherpa who owned the lodge where I was staying.

During one of our conversations, he looked at me and said, “You should climb Mera Peak. It is immensely beautiful, and from the top, you will truly see the world.”

Those words stayed with me. They sparked a curiosity that slowly grew into a passion for climbing.

Small, steady steps

I did not go from my first trek straight to Everest. A mountain like Everest cannot be approached in one decision. It has to be earned, one climb at a time.

On 5 November 2022, I stood on the summit of Mera Peak (6,476 m). It was a long and demanding climb, but the view from the top was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The Sherpa’s words were true. Standing there, I felt a new excitement about where this journey could take me.

On 11 April 2024, I climbed Lobuche East (6,119 m). This was my second major climb and the point where I began to understand the discipline that mountaineering requires. I learned how to ascend fixed ropes using a jumar, manage descents, and handle heavy equipment in freezing conditions.

Then came Chulu (6,100 m) on 5 May 2025. That climb was special because it tested not only my physical endurance but also my confidence and determination at high altitude.

After Chulu, I realized that preparation eventually has to become commitment. Each mountain had been teaching me something and preparing me for the next challenge. Slowly, the dream that once felt impossible began to feel within reach.



Summit of Lobuche East,
Solukhumbu. Altitude 6119m
[Date: April 11, 2024].



On the way to the summit of
Chulu, just before sunrise.



Summit of Chulu.
Altitude 6060m, Manang.
[Date: May 5, 2025]



Sudhigya and his cousin Shayeet
on top of Chulu, 6060M,
Manang. [Date: May 5, 2025]

... and the climb
begins





Sagarmatha Camp 1, 6100m



Sagarmatha Camp 2, 6400m



Just Below
Camp 3, 7100 m



Sudhigya with his Sherpa
Tenzing Gyalzen Sherpa
at Camp 3, 7100m



Sudhigya and Shayeet at Sagarmatha Camp 4 (8,000 m), the beginning of the “Death Zone,” where oxygen levels are extremely low. Humans can typically only survive here for 16 to 20 hours without oxygen before vital organs shut down. From here begins the final summit push toward the top of Mount Everest.



Sudhigya just above Balcony, 8400 m on the way to the top of the world

When you first told your family you wanted to climb Everest, what was their reaction? Did their concerns ever make you question the decision yourself?

The summit of Sagarmatha belongs to the climber, but the weight of the mountain is carried by the family. When you choose to climb Everest, your loved ones begin a journey of their own. They do not battle the ice or the altitude, but they live with uncertainty, fear, and the long wait for your return.

The idea of climbing Everest became real after my expedition to Chulu in Manang. Once we began speaking with expedition operators and preparing seriously, I knew it was time to bring the dream home.

I still remember mentioning it to my father during a drive home. He smiled politely, almost as if he thought I couldn't possibly be serious.

A week later, he invited me into his office. This time, it was the lawyer inside him speaking. He didn't talk about Everest itself. Instead, he talked about responsibility. He reminded me that I had a wife and two young children, just 32 months and 7 months old at the time. Calmly and methodically, he laid out the risks, almost as though he were presenting a case in court. Looking back, I realize he wasn't trying to stop me. He simply wanted to be certain that I fully understood what I was asking not only of myself, but of the people who loved me.

My wife, however, never tried to change my mind. From the very beginning, she supported me unconditionally. To this day, I don't know where she found that strength. She remained at home caring for an infant and a toddler while knowing exactly where I was headed. If I stood on the summit, it was only because someone at home quietly carried a burden just as heavy.

My younger brother became a constant source of optimism. He never asked, "What if?" Instead, he always focused on how, when, and what comes next, giving me the confidence to keep moving forward.

My mother found it the hardest to accept. Like any mother, the thought of her son climbing Everest was almost unbearable. Yet as my departure drew closer, something beautiful happened. My parents slowly transformed their fear into support.

On the day I left for the mountain, they invited pundits to our home to chant the sacred Subha Mantra for good luck and protection. Surrounded by prayers and blessings, they gave me their final permission: Go, conquer, and come back safely. It remains one of the moments I cherish most from the entire journey.

Did their concerns ever make me question my decision?

No — but they changed how I approached it.

On Everest, your focus has to be absolute. There is a story from the Mahabharata in which Arjuna is asked what he sees before releasing his arrow. While everyone else describes the tree, the branches, and the bird, Arjuna replies that he sees only the bird's eye. That unwavering focus is what high-altitude climbing demands.

For me, the hardest distraction was not fear but love. There were moments when thoughts of my wife and children entered my mind, and I had to deliberately push them away. To someone who has never climbed at extreme altitude, that may sound cold. But on Everest, emotion can become distraction, and distraction can become danger. I knew the greatest way to honour my family was not to think about them constantly, but to stay disciplined, make good decisions, and return home safely.

Looking back, I have come to appreciate that every ambitious dream asks something not only of the dreamer, but also of the people standing behind them. Their fears are rarely expressions of doubt; they are expressions of love. My responsibility was not to ignore those fears, but to earn their trust through careful preparation, unwavering discipline, and, ultimately, by coming home.

That is why I believe every summit is a shared achievement. One person may stand on the top of the mountain, but the journey belongs to everyone who had the courage to let them climb.



(Sudhigya with his wife Sabina Pokhrel and two kids, elder: Atharva Pant and younger: Aaravya Pant)

Most people only see the summit photo, but not the arduous journey. What was the hardest part of the journey for you?

The world celebrates the photograph taken at 8,848.86 metres: flags unfurled, rays of sunlight stretching across the horizon, and the expression of triumph. But a summit photo captures only a fleeting instant. It shows nothing of the hundreds of hours of suffering, discipline, and sheer force of will that made that moment possible.

When people ask me what the hardest part of climbing Everest was, they often expect me to describe a crevasse, the cold, or a terrifying passage through the Khumbu Icefall. Yes they were hard, but they were not the greatest test. The true, unrelenting challenge of Sagarmatha is fought within the mind. It lies in the discipline of showing up every day, enduring discomfort, making sound decisions under exhaustion, and continuing forward long after motivation has faded.

The training begins long before the mountain

Long before base camp, there are months of training when excuses must disappear from your vocabulary. "I'm tired" or "I'll rest today" are thoughts you learn to acknowledge but not obey. Every session asks you to push a little further than feels comfortable, to deliberately break your body down so it can return stronger.

Yet there is one lesson every aspiring Everest climber should understand before they begin. No amount of training can truly prepare you for the suffering that awaits on Sagarmatha.

The mountain operates on a scale that cannot be recreated in a gym or even on smaller expeditions. The altitude, the cold, and the exhaustion combine into something entirely different. So why train so much if it can never fully prepare you?

Because training is not about eliminating hardship but changing how you deal with it.

Physical strength matters, but resilience matters more. Every difficult workout teaches your mind that discomfort does not have to dictate your decisions. Every time you choose to continue when stopping would be easier, you strengthen the habit of perseverance. The mountain will always demand more than you think you have.

The descent tests you most

People often assume the summit is the finish line. But really, it is only the halfway point.

Standing on top of the world is an extraordinary moment, but it is also a dangerous one. The exhilaration can easily replace caution. Your oxygen supply

is diminishing, your energy reserves are nearly gone, but every decision must still be made with the same clarity. Many climbers have reached the summit only to lose their lives on the way down.

By the time you begin the descent, your body is profoundly depleted. In those moments, you are no longer moving on motivation or excitement. You are relying on habits forged months and years earlier. Your body asks to stop. But it is your mind that replies, "Just one more step." Then another. And another.

That is how you make it home.

Learn to love the grind

Everest taught me a lesson that extends far beyond mountaineering.

If your happiness depends only on reaching the summit, you will spend most of your journey dissatisfied. The summit lasts minutes. The work that earns it lasts months or years.

Whatever your goal may be, do not become attached only to the outcome. Learn to value the early mornings, the setbacks, the repetition, and the days when progress feels invisible. Those are the moments that shape you.

Pain is not something to seek, nor is it something to fear. It is often the price of meaningful growth. When your body is exhausted, your preparation is what carries you forward. When your motivation disappears, discipline remains.

The mountain eventually taught me that success is not measured by standing on the summit. It is measured by having the strength, humility, and discipline to come back down safely and return home to the people who were waiting for you.



(Training at Khumbu
Iceball near Base camp,
Solukhumbu)



(Crossing the notorious ladder section in Khumbu Icefall, 6000m)

Was there ever a moment on the mountain when you seriously considered turning back? What helped you make the decision to keep going?

Until I reached the Hillary Step, turning back never seriously crossed my mind. The climb was difficult, but my focus was unwavering. I was simply putting one foot in front of the other.

Sagarmatha, however, reserves some of its hardest tests for the very end.



The Hillary Step, located at approximately 8,790 metres on the southeast ridge of Mount Everest, is one of the final and most challenging obstacles before reaching the summit.

When I reached the Hillary Step, I found myself caught in a long bottleneck of climbers. At sea level, waiting in a queue is an inconvenience. In the death zone, it can become dangerous. We stood exposed in freezing temperatures while the wind stripped away what little warmth remained in our bodies. Behind me, a guide was shouting for people to move faster, and the tension spread quickly through the line.

For fifteen or twenty minutes, I felt frustration creeping in. I began wondering whether the delay would cost us the summit or, more importantly, compromise our safety.

Then I caught myself. I realized that my frustration was serving no purpose. It wasn't going to make the line move any faster, and it certainly wasn't helping me make good decisions. At that altitude, mental clarity is one of your most valuable resources, and I could feel mine slipping away.

So I made a conscious decision to let it go.

Instead of staring at the climbers ahead of me, I looked out across the Himalayas.

For the first time since leaving Camp IV, I allowed myself to simply take in where I was.

Far below, I could see the blue waters of Gokyo Lakes and Gokyo Ri, where my fascination with these mountains had first begun in 2021.

On the horizon stood Mera Peak and Lobuche East, mountains that had prepared me for this climb. I could even trace sections of the route back toward Everest Base Camp, now just a scattering of tiny coloured dots against the glacier.

Standing there, I realized I was standing in a place that very few people on Earth will ever get to experience.

The bottleneck had not changed, but my perspective had. What had felt like wasted time became an opportunity to pause, reflect, and appreciate the journey that had brought me there. My breathing settled, my heart rate slowed, and my patience returned. Once I stopped fighting the situation, I could focus again on the only thing within my control: taking the next step when it was my turn.

That experience taught me a very important lesson.

In life, there will be moments when you do everything right and still find yourself unable to move forward because of circumstances outside your control. Those moments are deeply frustrating, but frustration rarely changes the situation. More often, it only drains the energy and clarity you need to respond well.

When you encounter your own version of the Hillary Step, pause instead of reacting. Look back at how far you have already come. Remember the earlier challenges you once thought were impossible and the progress you have already made.

Eventually, the line moves, and when it does, you want to be ready – not exhausted by anger, but steady, patient, and prepared to keep climbing.



Flashback to Gokyo ri, 5300M, Solukhumbu.
[Date: October 30, 2021]

After all the preparation, what was going through your mind in the moments you stood on the summit? Was it what you expected?

People often imagine that reaching the summit triggers an explosion of raw, overwhelming emotion like crying, cheering, or a surge of ego. But for me the reality was something entirely different.

When I was about 30 metres away from the top, I looked up and saw the iconic prayer flags fluttering against the deep blue sky. In that moment, a wave of profound anticipation hit me, This is it. The years of sacrifice, the freezing mornings, the relentless discipline, it is all about to be complete.

But the exact moment my boots stepped onto the highest point of Sagarmatha? I went completely blank.

There was no noise in my head. No celebration. Nothing.

Perhaps that is what truly happens when you achieve a monumental dream. Your mind empties itself. It was just the raw beauty of nature and me. Standing up there, looking down at the curved horizon of the Earth, I experienced a level of stillness and silence that I have never felt anywhere else. It wasn't an emotional high, but a state of pure, divine calmness. The universe was silent, and my soul was entirely at peace.

Then comes the pain

But the mountain has a brutal way of breaking that spiritual silence. You quickly realize that the summit is not the end of the journey, it is merely the halfway marker. The true mission is to reach the top and come back down safely. Only then is the summit truly earned.

The moment I looked around, took my photos, and decided, "Now, it is time to go back down," the pain came back.

Instantly, the human body remembers its physical reality. The moment I turned my back to the summit, all the pain came rushing back at once.

This is exactly where preparation and training are important. Anyone can stand on the summit when adrenaline is pumping, but it takes an armored, highly disciplined mind to guide an exhausted, shutting down body back down the steep ice walls.

Calmness in triumph

When you achieve your grandest goals, whether you pass that impossible exam, launch your dream company, or reach the pinnacle of your career, do not seek to shout from the rooftops to feed your ego. Seek the quiet. Seek the blankness.

The greatest reward of reaching a high summit is the absolute peace it gives your mind. It proves that you have mastered your inner chaos.

But never forget that the top is a temporary home. Greatness isn't just about reaching the peak, it's about having the humility, the mental toughness, and the deep reservoir of discipline to safely navigate the journey back down, handle the aftermath of success, and prepare yourself for the next climb. Celebrate with silence, guard your focus, and respect the journey all the way to the end.

How did you reconcile the risks of climbing Everest with your responsibilities to your family and the people who care about you?

To the outside world, stepping away from a comfortable life, a thriving career, and a family to intentionally walk into the death zone seems incomprehensible. Some might look at my decision and say it was entirely irresponsible to leave behind small, vulnerable children, a 32 month old and a 7-month old, just to pursue a personal summit.

I understand why people think that way. But I look at responsibility through a completely different lens.

Hopeful of becoming “the figure for your children”

True responsibility to your children isn't just about providing physical comfort and staying inside a safe bubble. It is about showing them how to live. It is about giving them a blueprint for courage, grit, and the pursuit of greatness.

I didn't climb Sagarmatha just for a personal summit, but for my kids as well. As Rocky Balbao (from the movie) has mentioned: “Life is no sunshine and rainbow....” Life is not always going to be fair or easy for my kids. They will face their own massive, terrifying mountains as they grow up. They will hit walls of exhaustion, doubt, and failure.

My hope is that when there is no sunshine and rainbows and they look around for the motivation to keep moving forward regardless of the situation, they will look up to their father. They won't just hear empty words about hard work, they will have the living proof carved into the history of their family that their father stared down the most formidable obstacle on Earth, mastered his mind, and returned victorious. I wanted to leave them an inheritance of realisation that they have that rigid blood in them.



Sudhigya and Shayeet with Atharva, Sudhigya's elder son, during the celebration rally organized by friends and family in recognition of their historic achievement.

Live your life and try to Inspire

Do not live a life of quiet compromise just because you are afraid of the risks. Responsibility to those you love does not mean burying your talents, shrinking your potential, or abandoning your greatest dreams to stay safe.

If you want to truly inspire the next generation, you must be willing to show them what is possible when a human being refuses to accept limits. Protect your focus, eliminate the thoughts that weaken your resolve, and climb your mountains so decisively that your path becomes a guiding light for everyone who follows in your footsteps.

Sudhigya and Shayeet in front of Mt. Ama Dablam, during their expedition





Sudhigya receives a heartfelt welcome from family and friends upon his arrival after the Everest summit.

You have spent time both in the cockpit and on mountains. What similarities do you see between flying and climbing at extreme altitudes?

At first glance, piloting an ultralight aircraft and climbing the world's highest mountains seem like completely different pursuits. In the cockpit, you are suspended in the sky, moving swiftly above the landscape. On a mountain, every metre is earned slowly, with your boots firmly planted on the earth.

The perspective, too, is entirely different. From an aircraft, you see the world as one vast panorama. On a mountain, your focus narrows. You notice the crystalline texture of the ice beneath your crampons, the depth of a crevasse at your feet, and the gradual glow of sunrise spreading across the Himalayan peaks.

Yet despite these differences, I have found the two experiences surprisingly similar.

Both place you in environments where there is very little margin for error. Whether you are flying or climbing above 8,000 metres, human beings are operating far outside the conditions they were designed for. The air is thin, the weather changes quickly, and small mistakes can have serious consequences. In both, discipline is not optional—it is what keeps you alive.

Flying taught me to trust procedures, checklists, and careful planning. Mountaineering reinforced the same habits. You are constantly checking your oxygen, your equipment, your hands and feet, and the condition of the terrain ahead. In both environments, complacency is dangerous. The moment you become overconfident, nature reminds you who is really in control.

Where the two differ most, however, is in the nature of the challenge.

When you fly, your focus is on operating a remarkable machine with precision and discipline. When you climb, there is no machine to rely on. It becomes a conversation between you and the mountain—and, ultimately, between you and yourself. Every step must come from your own body and your own resolve.

That is why climbing has taught me lessons that flying never could. Flying showed me how vast the world is. Climbing showed me how much of that journey depends on mastering your own mind.



(Sudhigya being honoured by Avia Club family, Pokhara)

You mention the need to master your mind. What did this expedition teach you about fear, success, and the limits we place on ourselves?

Sagarmatha is a great equalizer. It removes your ego, challenges your assumptions, and forces you to understand human potential in a completely different way.

Standing on top of the world does not make you feel larger than life. Instead, it teaches you how small you are — and how much you are capable of when you prepare yourself properly.

Overcoming fear

I have learned that fear is not something to eliminate. Fear is a natural part of any meaningful journey. The fear of failure, of not achieving your objective, or of falling short is something everyone experiences.

The difference is how you respond to it.

On the mountain, that fear pushed me to wake up in freezing temperatures, train when my body wanted rest, and pay attention to every small detail of preparation. Fear, when controlled properly, becomes a source of discipline.

And something interesting happens when you prepare completely. The fear does not disappear entirely, but it becomes quieter. When you know you have given everything to your training and preparation, confidence begins to replace doubt.

The illusion of success

One of the greatest lessons Everest taught me is that success is temporary.

My entire expedition lasted 41 days. Do you know how long I spent on the actual summit? Around 40 minutes.

Forty minutes at the top after 41 days of push, struggle, exhaustion, and uncertainty.

That ratio itself teaches humility.

Never allow a moment of achievement to create arrogance. The summit is only one moment in a much longer journey. The applause fades, the mountain remains, and eventually you have to come back down.

True success is not standing above others. It is recognizing the people who helped you get there: your family, your team, your mentors, and everyone who supported your journey.

Beyond limits

I believe many of the limits we face exist first in our own minds. We convince ourselves that we are not capable enough, strong enough, or prepared enough before we have even tried.

Breaking those limits requires three things.

First, preparation. You have to train your body and mind so that you understand your own capabilities.

Second, support. No great achievement happens alone. You need people who believe in you, challenge you, and stand beside you when things become difficult.

And finally, you need yourself. When you are facing the hardest moments and no one else can make the decision for you, the voice inside your own mind has to keep you moving forward.

Many people have dreams that feel too big to pursue. They know what they want, but they hesitate to begin. Looking back at your own journey, what do you think people need to understand about taking that first step?

The hardest step in any journey is often not the final step toward the summit. It is the first one.

Taking that first step means entering uncertainty. It means leaving the comfort of what you already know and accepting that the path ahead will not always be easy.

Facing criticism

When you decide to pursue an ambitious dream, you may face questions from others. Sometimes, you may even face doubts from the people closest to you. Your dream might go against expectations, traditions, or the path that others believe is safer for you.

“What if you fail?” People will point out the risks and the challenges.

But I do not think we should blame them for that. Often, people speak from their own experiences and their own comfort zones. They are trying to protect you from difficulty because they do not want to see you suffer.

Your responsibility is not to fight every critic. Your responsibility is to understand your goal clearly and continue moving forward.

Momentum is powerful

Many people also hesitate because they imagine the entire journey at once. They look at the size of the mountain instead of focusing on the next step.

Now I know this saying is cliché, but the reason it is cliché is because it is also true: every great journey begins with one step.

Once you leave your comfort zone, the second step becomes easier. Then the third. Slowly, what once looked impossible becomes a series of smaller challenges that you can overcome.

So do not wait for perfect conditions before starting. Life will never provide a completely clear path.

If there is something meaningful you want to pursue, take the first step. The journey only becomes visible after you begin walking.

Built, not born

When people look at great achievements, they often separate themselves from the person who achieved them.

They think, “That person is different. They have something special. They were born with abilities that I do not have.”

But I want people to understand something very clearly: I am not different from anyone else. Yes, people may see photographs of me standing at 8,848.86 metres or look at my professional background and assume that I possess something extraordinary. But the reality is much simpler.

I experienced the same cold. I struggled with the same exhaustion. I faced the same fear and moments of self-doubt that any person would face when standing before a difficult challenge.

The difference was not some special ability but years of preparation, discipline, and the decision to keep moving forward. I am an ordinary person who followed ordinary habits consistently for a long period of time.

That is what I hope people take from my story.

Every person has their own Everest. It may be a career, a dream, a personal challenge, or something that feels impossible today.

Do not wait for some magical moment when you suddenly become fearless or completely ready.











Sudhigya and Shayeet welcomed by friends and family upon arrival at Kathmandu Airport



Sudhigya with his family at his residence upon returning from the successful summit

“Start where you are.
Prepare yourself.
Take the first step.
Earn your Everest.”



(Sagarmatha Camp 2, 6400M, Solukhumbu)