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The Spiritual Quest of Steve Jobs: Connecting the i-dots Gazing Forward, Glancing Back

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The Making of a Creative Genius

By critical acclaim, Steve Jobs is considered to be a creative genius and a great visionary leader. More than one pundit praising Jobs' ability to transform industries with his inventions, called him a modern-day "Leonardo da Vinci."¹ He wanted to leave his permanent mark on the universe: "We're here to put a dent in the universe."² And what a mark he did leave, if influence is any measure of a person.

"I like living at the intersection of the humanities and technology," Jobs said once. When introducing the iPad 2, Jobs summarized his strategy this way: "It is in Apple's DNA that technology alone is not enough — it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing."³ It was a chance dropping in a class about Chinese calligraphy that primed the future leader of Apple with an added sense of aesthetics and which, to this day, makes the hearts of Apple customers sing.

With the passing of Steve Jobs, one cartoon (used as a featured image for this essay) stood out: St. Peter introduces Jobs to Moses with the caption: "Moses, meet Steve. He's gonna upgrade your tablets."⁴ As below, so above!

¹ Griggs, Brandon (2011). Steve Jobs praised as Apple's visionary, creative genius, *CNN*. October 6, 2011. Retrieved August 21, 2015: <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/06/us/obit-steve-jobs/>.

² Sutter, John D. "5 memorable quotes from Steve Jobs." *CNN*. Retrieved August 21, 2015: <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/05/tech/innovation/steve-jobs-quotes/>. Walter Isaacson, biographer of Steve Jobs, titles Chapter Fifteen in Jobs' biography as "A Dent in the Universe." This expression occurs at least 6 times in this biography. See, Isaacson, Walter (2011), *Steve Jobs*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 92, 94, 112, 159, 490, and 499.

³ Lehrer, Jonah (2011). Steve Jobs: "Technology Alone Is Not Enough." *The New Yorker*. October 7, 2011. Retrieved August 22, 2015: <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/steve-jobs-technology-alo ne-is-not-enough>.

⁴ Moses Meet Steve, He's Gonna Upgrade Your Tablets. A Cartoon, posted October 10, 2011. Retrieved August 21, 2015: <http://weknowmemes.com/2011/10/moses-meet-steve-hes-gonna-upgrade-your-tablets/>.

Many believe that the inner clarity and conviction that Steve Jobs attained was the result of his deep explorations into his spiritual self. It is well known that Jobs was mystified by Eastern philosophies. He went to India during the '70s as a teenager before co-founding Apple. It proved to be a life-changing experience and a great turning point in the real spiritual sense.

The Spiritual Quest Begins

After reading Harvard professor Ram Das's *Be Here Now*, and Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Steve Jobs traveled to India in 1974 with a friend, Dan Kottke, who later became Apple's first employee. His trip to India was disappointing and revelatory at once, as he himself realized and recounted: "We weren't going to find a place where we could go for a month to be enlightened."⁵ Yet in a far more important sense, during his short fling into various Indian *āshrams*, Jobs picked up the importance of cultivating inner centeredness and composure and looking at the world from the inside out. This orientation seemed to have served him well throughout his life as a leader of Apple.

Jobs' India connection, though, preceded his trip. As a penniless college drop-out, he would walk seven miles every Sunday to get a free meal at the *Hare Krishna* temple. He also retained a lifelong admiration for Mahatma Gandhi. In 1997, Apple's "Think Different" ads, which featured his personal idols, included the Mahatma.⁶

The Book That Influenced Jobs the Most

Jobs' interest in Eastern spirituality was solidified later when he dabbled in Zen Buddhism at the Los Altos Zendo. The greatest influence on Steve Jobs, however, was the book *Autobiography of a Yogi* – "the guide to meditation and spirituality that he had first read as a teenager." His biographer, Walter Isaacson, tells us, "then re-read in India and had read once a year ever since." It was the *only* book Isaacson notes that Jobs downloaded on his personal iPad 2.⁷ Jobs' credo "Actualize yourself" seems to have come directly out of Yogananda's philosophy of Self-realization.

It has recently come to knowledge that copies of Yogananda's classic autobiography were handed out at Steve Jobs' memorial, as reported by Marc Benioff, CEO and Co-Founder of Salesforce.com in a Tech Crunch Disrupt SF 2013 conference interview.⁸ Benioff shares his story of opening the brown box that was given to every guest during the memorial service. Jobs had apparently arranged to give Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* in his own memorial service as a last gift to the attendees!⁹

⁵ Imbimbo, Anthony (2009). *Steve Jobs: The Brilliant Mind Behind Apple (Life Portraits)*. New York, NY: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 42.

⁶ Trip to India as a teen was a life-changer for Steve Jobs. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved August 21, 2015: http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2011-10-07/news/30253986_1_steve-jobs-story-of-apple-computer-steve-wozniak. Jobs also alludes to his Sunday free meals at a *Hare Krishna* temple during his 2005 Stanford speech.

⁷ Isaacson, Walter (2011). *Steve Jobs*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 527.

⁸ Marc Benioff on the Invisible Hand of Steve Jobs | Disrupt SF 2013. Interview retrieved August 22, 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rO_Vs4M29k.

⁹ Walter Isaacson in his biography, *Steve Jobs*, lists a number of books that influenced Steve Jobs: William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Plato, Clayton Christensen's *Innovator's Dilemma*, Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Chogyam Trungpa's *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. See: Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, p. 35.

Paramahansa Yogananda was the first great spiritual master of India to live in the West for a long period (over thirty years). In what may be described as the most intimate, first-hand account of a master's spiritual unfoldment, Yogananda, in his *Autobiography*, memorably chronicles his encounters with many saints and sages during his youthful search throughout India for an illumined teacher; ten years of training in the hermitage of a revered yoga master; and the thirty years that he lived and taught in America. It also records his meetings with Mahatma Gandhi, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, Luther Burbank, and other celebrated spiritual personalities of East and West. The *Columbia University Press* review extolled *Autobiography of a Yogi* in these glowing terms: "There has been nothing before, written in English or in any other European language, like this presentation of Yoga."¹⁰

Autobiography of a Yogi: "A Book About Yogis by a Yogi"

Hailed as "a book *about yogis by a yogi*,"¹¹ it is indeed a rare marvel of self-mastery through mind-control and self-realization. Here is an illustration of the great power of love and of the mind over matter, narrated in the inimitable style by Yogananda in this book:

"The secret of improved plant breeding, apart from scientific knowledge, is love."

Luther Burbank uttered this wisdom as I walked beside him in his Santa Rosa garden. We halted near a bed of edible cacti. "While I was conducting experiments to make 'spineless' cacti," he continued, "I often talked to the plants to create a vibration of love. 'You have nothing to fear,' I would tell them. 'You don't need your defensive thorns. I will protect you. Gradually the useful plant of the desert emerged in a thornless variety."¹²

Holy Curiosity and Divine Sense of Wonder

Steve Jobs learned some important lessons from the book: the importance of holy curiosity and sense of wonder,¹³ self-effort, self-realization and, above all, fearlessness in facing life and death. Jobs, who in his 2005 Stanford Commencement Speech memorably described death as "very likely the single best invention of life,"¹⁴ departed from this world exclaiming: "Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow."¹⁵ In the same speech, signaling the importance of loving what we do, he noted, "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do."¹⁶

¹⁰ See reviews published on the back cover of 1972 edition of *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

¹¹ *Op. Cit.* Wentz, W.Y. Evans (1972) in a preface to Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles, CA: Self-Realization Fellowship, vii.

¹² *Ibid*, 411.

¹³ One thinks here of Carlyle's observation in *Sartor Resartus*: "The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder (and worship), were the president of innumerable Royal Societies and carried . . . the epitome of all laboratories and observatories, with their results, in his single head, is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye." Cited in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, p. 384. *Autobiography* is full of such soul-uplifting insights.

¹⁴ Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address. Retrieved August 22, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLC>.

¹⁵ Jones, Sam (2011). Steve Jobs' last words: "Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow." *The Guardian*. October 31, 2011. Retrieved August 22, 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/oct/31/steve-jobs-last-words>. Legend has it that, at his death in 1951, Ludwig Wittgenstein's last words were "Tell them I've had a wonderful life." See, Monk, Ray (1990). *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, New York, NY: Macmillan, 579.

¹⁶ Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address.

Humility, the Hardest of Leadership Virtues

Reflecting on the cartoon referred to in the opening of this entry, Nick Gier quips: “If there is a heaven, then Steve Jobs has not only met St. Peter and Moses, but he’s also been pitching his great ideas among all the saints of human history. They will learn a lot from him, and perhaps they will teach him a little humility.”¹⁷

Perhaps, nature does not like to give two gifts to one person. If flair for novelty was Steve Jobs’ greatest gift, it certainly did not come wrapped in the gentle cloak of humility. Nevertheless, his constant effort to remake himself, to self-actualize his total potential, does seem to point to an unremitting commitment to spiritual quest — the hallmark of all good and great leaders. Of all virtues, said Ben Franklin in his famous *Autobiography*, humility is the most difficult to cultivate. By the time one gets to be good at it, one becomes proud of it!

Capturing Steve Jobs’ Human Side

*“He wasn’t a saint. I am not saying that. None of us are. But it’s emphatically untrue that he wasn’t a great human being.”*¹⁸

This quote from Tim Cook, Apple’s CEO, shows us that spiritual leadership is not about *being a saint*; it is about *becoming a great human being*. In their recent book on the evolution of Steve Jobs as a visionary leader, Brent Schlender and Rick Tetzeli quote Tim Cook who tells the untold story of his friendship with Steve jobs. According to Cook, Jobs was a passionate person, a caring leader, and a genuine human being. He believes that Walter Isaacson’s biography¹⁹ did Jobs a tremendous disservice by unfairly portraying him as a sort of greedy, selfish egomaniac. It didn’t capture his humane side — Steve Jobs, the person.

Cook recalls that when he offered his liver to Jobs, he refused, stating, “No, I’ll never let you do that. I’ll never do that!” “Somebody that’s selfish,” Cook recounts, “doesn’t reply like that.”²⁰ According to Tim Cook, Jobs cared. He cared deeply about things. Yes, he was very passionate about things, and he wanted things to be perfect. And that was what was great about him. He wanted everyone to do their best ... A lot of people mistook that passion for arrogance.²¹

Steve Jobs had his share of human failings. He never pretended to be a saint. His 2005 Stanford Commencement Address shows him to be searching for deep spiritual answers to the perennial questions of life. In him we find a curious integration of Jim Collins’s level five leader, marked by a paradoxical combination of compelling humility:

“stay hungry, stay foolish”

and fierce professional will to make:

“a ding in the universe.”

¹⁷ Death as a Friend for Jobs, Mozart, and Don Juan. A Blog Post by Nick Gier, posted on November 29, 2011. Retrieved August 22, 2015: http://www.pocatelloshops.com/new_blogs/politics/?p=8562.

¹⁸ Brent Schlender and Rick Tetzeli, *Becoming Steve Jobs: The Evolution of a Reckless Upstart into a Visionary Leader* (New York: Crown Business, 2015), 392.

¹⁹ Isaacson, Walter (2011). *Steve Jobs*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 43; 447.

²⁰ Schlender, Brent and Tetzeli, Rick (2015). *Becoming Steve Jobs: The Evolution of a Reckless Upstart into a Visionary Leader*, New York, NY: Crown Business, 2015), 392.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Truth about Steve Jobs' Last Words!

Since early November 2015, several social media sites and blogs have been circulating a fake essay on happiness and the mis-pursuit of wealth touted as the Last Words of Steve Jobs. Some highlights of this *fake* essay are reproduced below:

- I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. In others' eyes, my life is an epitome of success. However, aside from work, I have little joy. In the end, wealth is only a fact of life that I am accustomed to.
- At this moment, lying on the sick bed and recalling my whole life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in, have paled and become meaningless in the face of impending death....
- Now I know, when we have accumulated sufficient wealth to last our lifetime, we should pursue other matters that are unrelated to wealth...Should be something that is more important:
- Perhaps relationships, perhaps art, perhaps a dream from younger days.
- Non-stop pursuing of wealth will only turn a person into a twisted being, just like me.
- Material things lost can be found. But there is one thing that can never be found when it is lost – Life.
- Whichever stage in life we are at right now, with time, we will face the day when the curtain comes down.
- Treasure love for your family, love for your spouse, love for your friends. Treat yourself well. Cherish others.
- On the face of it, it makes a good, albeit emotionally-touching, read.

The fact is: Steve Jobs *never* said these words. Not even close.

Here are some facts:

On the evidence of the eulogy by Jobs' sister, novelist Mona Simpson, who was present during Jobs' last hours, we know what Steve Jobs' final words really were. This eulogy was published in *The New York Times* on 30th of October 2011. In that eulogy, she described her brother's last moments as follows:

“But with that will, that work ethic, that strength, there was also sweet Steve's capacity for wonderment, the artist's belief in the ideal, the still more beautiful later.”

His final words, hours earlier, were monosyllables ... repeated three times.

Before embarking, he'd looked at his sister Patty, then for a long time at his children, then at his life's partner, Laurene, and then over their shoulders past them.

Steve's final words were:

OH WOW. OH WOW. OH WOW.

No one since his death in 2011 until November 2015 said anything about these purportedly last words that suddenly appeared on the Net this month.

Steve Jobs' official biographer, Walter Isaacson, who met regularly with him during his last three years of life and had over 40 exclusive interviews with him, makes no mention of the fake essay in Steve Jobs' biography. Nor do any other books about Steve Jobs mention this

quote. If Steve Jobs really wanted this wisdom to be circulated to the wider public, he would have at least mentioned something about it to his biographer or family members or anyone at Apple Inc. We have no evidence of it at all.

From all available evidence, it is clear that Steve Jobs was not afraid of death, as he made it very clear in his memorable 2005 Stanford Commencement Address:

“Death is very likely the single best invention of life...Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life...Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.”

Steve Jobs did not pursue wealth; he pursued an abiding dream and a compelling vision—to make a dent in the universe. It is common knowledge that Steve Jobs’ salary at Apple was \$1. He had not been awarded any new equity since 2003, despite being its largest individual shareholder. His annual salary had been \$1 since 1998. Top Apple executives, including Jobs, were/are employed at will, without severance or employment agreements, tax reimbursements or supplemental retirement benefits. Thus from all accounts and intents, it is clear that Steve Jobs did not pursue wealth as an end, as the fake quote falsely mis-appropriates. Steve Jobs pursued a vision for Apple that was much grander and larger than any wealth of the world.

Hence, this falsely attributed set of quotes presented as Steve Jobs’ last words were NOT his last words.

The Art of Storytelling

In his seminal Stanford commencement address, Jobs told three remarkable stories. His first story was about connecting the dots looking backward.²² He recounted his struggles in early life, including the touching story about his adoption. The second story was about his rise, fall, and rise again with Apple. The crux of the speech, and its most compelling part, came in the third story which describes his bout with cancer.

“My third story is about death.” Steve Jobs continues, “When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: ‘If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.’ It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been ‘No’ for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.”²³

Perhaps certain things become clearer with the impending inevitability of death. The day before Steve Jobs passed away, he told his sister, Mona Simpson, that he was going to a

²² Perhaps the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, expressed the sentiment more accurately: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”

²³ *Ibid.*

better place.²⁴ Jobs's sister reminisced in the eulogy she delivered at his memorial service: "Death didn't *happen* to Steve, he *achieved* it."²⁵

Jobs seems to have made his peace with the universe, finally.

About the Author

Professor Satinder Dhiman, Ph.D., Ed.D. is Associate Dean, Chair & Director of the MBA Program, and Professor of Management at Woodbury University, Burbank, California. Professor Dhiman has also served as the Chair for a special MBA Program for Mercedes-Benz executives, China. He holds a PhD in Social Sciences from Tilburg University, Netherlands, an EdD in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, and a Master's degree in Commerce from Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, having earned the Gold Medal. *He has also completed advanced Executive Leadership Programs at Harvard, Stanford, and Wharton.* He is recipient of the prestigious 2004 ACBSP International Teacher of the Year Award and the Steve Allen Excellence in Education Award, 2006.



Dr. Dhiman's work has been published in multiple national and international journals, and he has authored, co-authored, and co-edited ten books on management and leadership during last 7 years. His current research on fulfillment, which is also the theme of his book, [Seven Habits of Highly Fulfilled People](#) (Personhood Press, CA, 2012/2014), is focused on transformative habits of mind for attaining lasting joy and fulfillment in both personal and professional life. In his most recent book, [Gandhi and Leadership](#) (Palgrave Macmillan, USA, 2015), Dr. Dhiman offers perceptive insights into the spiritual and moral mainstay of Gandhi's exemplary leadership and its abiding influence on the world today. In his recently co-edited volume, [Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches](#) (Springer, USA: 2016), the editors and contributors present the view that there is no sustainability without spirituality. Several forthcoming titles include *Holistic Leadership: A New Paradigm for 21st Century Leaders* (Palgrave-MacMillan, USA: Fall 2016); and *Leadership Today - Practices for Personal and Professional Performance* (Springer, USA: Summer 2016).

On April 18, 2013, Dr. Dhiman also served as the **opening speaker at TED-x Conference @ College of the Canyons, CA.** He serves as a Chair of ACBSP Peer Review Team (PRT) and accreditation mentor to several universities in the USA, Canada, Europe, and India. He has been recently elected as the President of International Chamber for Service Industry (ICSI), 2014-2016. Dr. Dhiman is the founder and Director of [Forever Fulfilled](#), a Los Angeles-based Wellbeing Consultancy that focuses on workplace wellness and self-leadership.

²⁴Simpson, Mona (2012). A Sister's Eulogy for Steve Jobs. *The New York Times*. October 30, 2012. Retrieved August 21, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/opinion/mona-simpsons-eulogy-for-steve-jobs.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.