

THE WISDOM OF THE WINDING PATH

A Reflection on Control, Acceptance and Surrender



“Peace does not come from controlling every turn of life. It comes from learning when to guide, when to adapt, and when to trust.”

Arun Sehgal, Author

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The human mind finds comfort in certainty. We make plans, establish expectations and imagine how life should unfold. We want our efforts to produce predictable results, our relationships to remain secure, our children to follow the paths we believe are best for them, and our future to resemble the picture we have carefully created in our minds.

There is nothing wrong with planning. Responsibility requires foresight, discipline and action. Yet somewhere along the way, responsibility can quietly transform into control.

We begin to believe that if we work hard enough, worry deeply enough or hold everything tightly enough, life will obey our design. When it does not, we feel disappointed, anxious or even betrayed.

But life is not always a straight road.

People change. Relationships evolve. Opportunities disappear and unexpected ones emerge. Health interrupts ambition. Loss alters priorities. Children choose their own destinations. Even sincere prayers may receive answers different from those we hoped to hear.

The desire for control often arises not from arrogance, but from fear—the fear of uncertainty, failure, separation or loss. We hold on because we care. We interfere because we want to protect. We insist because we believe we can prevent pain.

Yet excessive control rarely creates peace. It exhausts the person trying to control and suffocates the people or circumstances being controlled.

There comes a time when wisdom asks us to understand the difference between guiding and forcing, between perseverance and rigidity, and between surrender and defeat.

Surrender does not mean abandoning responsibility. It does not mean becoming passive or leaving everything to destiny. It means doing what is genuinely within our power and then releasing the belief that everything must happen only according to our preferred design.

Faith begins where the illusion of complete control ends.

The following story is a reflection on this difficult but liberating truth.

The Channel That Would Not Stay Straight

A farmer inherited a beautiful orchard from his father. It stood upon gently sloping land beneath a range of distant hills. Apple, peach and apricot trees grew across the property, but the orchard had one persistent problem.

The spring that supplied its water emerged near the upper boundary of the land, while many of the trees below remained dry during the summer.

The farmer decided to construct an irrigation channel from the spring to the farthest end of the orchard.

He carefully measured the distance, marked a perfectly straight line and hired workers to dig the channel. When it was completed, he stood proudly beside it.

"This," he said, "is how water should travel—the shortest and most efficient route from its source to its destination."

For some time, the channel appeared to work. Then the rains arrived.

The water rushed through the straight passage, gathered speed upon the slope and broke through one of its walls. Mud flowed into the orchard, and several young plants were damaged.

The farmer was disappointed, but he did not lose confidence in his design.

"The walls were simply not strong enough," he concluded.

He rebuilt the channel with heavier stones and packed the soil more firmly around it. Once again, he made certain that the channel remained perfectly straight.

The following season, the water broke through at another point.

This time, the farmer became angry. He ordered the channel to be made deeper and lined parts of it with bricks. He spent more money, employed more workers and supervised every detail himself.

"Water must be controlled," he told them. "If we make the channel strong enough, it will eventually follow the path we have created."

But during the next heavy rain, the channel overflowed again. The force of the water dislodged the bricks and carved a winding path through the softer ground.

The farmer stood before the damage in despair.

"I have planned carefully, worked tirelessly and spared no expense," he said. "Why does the water refuse to obey me?"

An elderly irrigation specialist who was visiting a neighbouring village heard about the farmer's difficulties. He came to inspect the orchard.

The old man did not immediately examine the broken walls. Instead, he walked slowly across the land. He observed its slopes, pressed the soil between his fingers and studied the stones scattered beneath the trees.

Finally, he followed the irregular path the water had created.

"This channel is badly made," the farmer said. "Tell me how I can make it stronger."

The old man looked at him and replied, "Your channel is strong. But it is fighting the land."

The farmer frowned. "The shortest distance between two places is a straight line."

"That may be true on paper," the old man replied, "but water does not travel across paper. It travels across the earth."

He pointed towards the orchard.

"Beneath this soil are layers of rock that your eyes cannot see. The land also slopes differently in different places. Your straight channel forces the water downward too quickly. With every rain, its speed increases until the walls can no longer contain it."

"What should I do?" asked the farmer.

"Do not stop guiding the water," the old man said. "But first understand the land through which you are asking it to travel."

Together, they walked along the winding course that the overflowing water had repeatedly carved.

The old man proposed a new channel that followed the natural contours of the orchard. It curved around the harder ground, widened where the slope became steep and divided gently near the lower fields.

The farmer looked at the markings and shook his head.

"This path is much longer. It is not neat. It will not look as impressive as the straight channel."

"Perhaps," the old man replied. "But do you want a channel that looks perfect or one that carries water?"

Reluctantly, the farmer agreed.

The workers dismantled parts of the old channel and constructed the new one along the contours of the land. To the farmer, it initially appeared irregular and unnecessarily winding.

Then the water was released.

It moved calmly through the curves. Where it had previously rushed, it now slowed. Where it had once broken through the walls, it turned gently with the slope.

Most surprisingly, the winding channel carried water to a neglected corner of the orchard that the farmer's straight design had completely bypassed.

Within months, the dry soil there softened. Young plants began to grow. In the following season, flowers appeared upon trees that had not blossomed for years.

The farmer stood beside the old man, watching the water move quietly through the orchard.

"I thought the water was resisting me," he said. "But perhaps it was revealing something I had failed to understand."

The old man smiled.

"The water was not your enemy. Neither was the land. Your struggle began when you believed there could be only one correct path—the one you had imagined."

The farmer looked at the channel as it disappeared between the flowering trees.

"My mistake was not that I tried to guide the water. My mistake was believing that it could reach its destination only by following the path I had chosen."

The Deeper Meaning

Life often resembles that orchard.

We create straight channels in our minds—plans for our careers, businesses, relationships, children, health and future. We imagine that happiness lies at the end of a particular path and that any deviation from it represents failure.

When life breaks through our carefully constructed walls, our first response is often to make those walls stronger. We try harder, hold tighter and become increasingly determined to restore the original plan.

Perseverance is a virtue, but rigidity can become a prison.

Not every obstacle asks us to give up. Some ask us to change direction. Not every delay means that we have been denied. Some delays may be slowing us down before a dangerous descent. Not every unexpected turn takes us away from our destination. Some may lead us towards neglected parts of our lives that also need nourishment.

We must continue to act, plan and guide. But we must also learn to observe the landscape, respect realities we cannot change and remain open to paths we did not originally choose.

This is equally true in relationships. Love cannot mean designing another person's journey and insisting that they follow it. We may advise, support and protect, but every human being must eventually discover the contours of his or her own life.

The Almighty may not always reveal the entire map. Sometimes we are shown only the next turn. Faith is the willingness to take that turn without believing that the unseen path is necessarily the wrong one.

Perhaps surrender is not the abandonment of purpose. Perhaps it is the abandonment of our insistence that purpose can be fulfilled in only one particular way.

There will always be circumstances that require courage to change. There will also be circumstances that require grace to accept. Wisdom lies in learning the difference.

The winding path may take longer. It may look imperfect. It may carry us through places we never planned to visit.

Yet it may also nourish forgotten corners of our lives and awaken possibilities that our straight and carefully controlled plans would never have reached.

Sometimes life is not destroying our direction. It is teaching us how to flow.

Peace does not come from controlling every turn of life. It comes from knowing when to shape the path, when to follow its natural contours, and when to trust the Almighty with what lies beyond our sight.

— Arun Sehgal