

Life's highest purpose

A Study Guide to Realizing Soul by Paul Brunton

Family and friends, work and leisure-time activities, fill our days. To do something that benefits others gives great satisfaction. All this gives meaning to our lives for a long time.

Many of us, however, come to a point in life when a question arises: *"Is this really all—is there not anything more?"*

This question is not going to be put off easily. It can haunt us for years and provoke us to do something about it.

Paul Brunton

In response to this inquiry, the writings of British philosopher and author Dr. Paul Brunton (1898—1981) offer guidance for our exploration. Paul Brunton is widely known as one of the greatest proponents of spiritual philosophy of our time.

In the book, *Realizing Soul*, Paul Brunton shares his rich experiences. The quester inside each of us receives insightful guidance in the art of approaching life's highest point and purpose — spiritual awakening, the conscious unification with the Soul, the permanent shift of identity and perception of reality. But the journey has to be made by ourselves. No one else can make it for us.

Paul Brunton realized his Soul, and in *Realizing Soul*, he describes this memorable event;

". . . this is what I found: The ego vanished: the everyday "I" which the world knew and which knew the world, was no longer there. But a new and diviner individuality appeared in its place, a consciousness which could say "I AM" and which I recognized to have been my real self all along. It was not lost, merged or dissolved: it was fully and vividly conscious that it was a point in universal Mind and so not apart from that Mind itself. Only the lower self, the false self, was gone, but that was a loss for which to be immeasurably grateful." (316)

(After each note you will find its location number in *Realizing Soul*).

But Paul Brunton was not content with being himself enlightened. Through his inspired writings, he made it possible for us to have an easier and faster journey towards this common goal. With unmatched clarity and precision, he explains what the spiritual journey is all about.

The individual and/or group studies that are proposed here are aimed at providing a reliable and durable base for a continued spiritual quest.

Life's highest purpose

A conscious permanent unification with the higher self is the best that life on earth can offer us. The spiritual quest therefore is our most important life project, and it does not end until the goal is reached.

"There is nothing more important in life than the Quest, and the time will come when the student discovers that there is nothing more enjoyable as well . . ." (365)

". . . Even a few years' study of philosophy will bring definite benefit into the life of a student. It will help him in all sorts of ways, unconsciously, here on earth and it will help him very definitely after death during his life in the next world of being." (181)

"There is a deep joy in this growing perception of life's larger meaning . . ." (184)

FOUR THEMES

The ground structure — the four themes — is the same for all students. In study groups, the contents of the discussions may vary somewhat depending upon which texts in *Realizing Soul* you decide to read and discuss.

Begin by numbering the notes in the book. (This pertains only to the English and Swedish editions).

Theme 1. Our true reality

The first theme is about our true reality, our real identity.

Theme 1 — chapters 1,3,4 and 5 — is related to Paul Brunton's experience: "The ego vanished. A new and diviner individuality appeared in its place..."

He explains that there is a higher consciousness, that it is in us, and that it is our real identity — not only in a distant future — but *here and now!*

"Hidden away in every man there exists a being immeasurably superior to the ordinary person that he is." (32)

These chapters, each in its own way, contribute to answering the question "What am I?" They convincingly confirm that the Soul, the Overself, is our true self, our real identity.

Theme 2. The Ego

The second theme — chapter 2 — is about the ego, the everyday self.

". . . the "I" which trembles or enjoys in the time-series is not the real "I." (88)

What is it then?

"The thoughts and feelings which flow like a river through our consciousness make up the surface self." (74)

Theme 3. The Short Path

Theme 3 — chapters 6 and 7 — is about the Short Path and the wonder of grace.

When we understand and accept that the Soul is our true identity and that the highest purpose of our life on earth — the same for all people — is to be enlightened, to awaken to freedom from the ego's limitations, fears, and heavy burdens, the question arises how this can be practically realized?

Theme 4. Serving others

Theme 4 — chapter 8 — broadens the horizon to include our fellow human beings. Selflessly serving others is a necessary part of the spiritual journey.

"The duty to which we are called is not to propagate ideas but to offer them, not to convert reluctant minds but to satisfy hungry ones . . ." (635)

SIX MEETINGS

The following is a suggested format for using this guide in a study group (it can also serve as an individual study program):

Start and end each meeting with a few minutes of quiet meditation.

For every meeting, there are topics suggested for discussion (see below). Adjoining every topic there are so called "pleiads" which give an introduction to the topic. (A pleiad is a set of seven related selections from *Realizing Soul*). There are 43 pleiads in this study guide.

Each person in turn reads a note out loud and then all discuss it. The person who has read a note should be the first to comment on it. Let everyone in the group read in turn, and continue going around.

Homework: Prepare for the next meeting by reading the notes in the suggested pleiads.

Then, make your own pleiad connected to the topic and theme! To construct pleiads is an interesting and instructive work. Start by choosing a topic. Look through *Realizing Soul* and chose notes that are related to the topic. The richness of notes in the book provide many possibilities.

Share your own pleiads with the group.

The first meeting – Theme 1 – Our true reality

Materialistic science denies that we have a reality other than the human body, and claims that the brain produces our consciousness.

"The materialistic notion that individual centres of intelligent life could have been produced by non-intelligent "matter" is an utter absurdity." (2)

We live, at the same time, on two levels of consciousness — paradoxically without knowing it. The lower, the ego-level, is known by everyone while the higher, the soul-level, is unknown for most of us. Please observe that we are not talking about two consciousnesses, but about different levels of a single consciousness.

"He has a double existence, with the frontal part of his consciousness in time and the real part out of time. All the miseries and misfortunes which may enter into the one part will make no difference to the blessed tranquillity which permanently reigns in the other." (4)

All people have intuitions. But how many understand that it is the Soul that knocks when our intuitions come? And how many realize what a central role intuition plays in our lives?

". . . among all the varied powers of the mind, a properly unfolded intuition is indeed one of the most priceless anyone could have. It always warns against wrong courses and often counsels the right ones . . ." (191)

An intuition can be deepened and extended to a glimpse of the Soul. The glimpse may last only a short moment, but we can never forget it and we will always long for another.

"The experience explains a man to himself for the first time, lights up the fact that he lives in two planes at one and the same time. It reveals his ego as the illusion which envelops his consciousness and his Overself as the reality behind his consciousness." (286)

The glimpse is our first direct experience of the Soul. It not only shows that the Soul exists, that it is fully real, but that it is our inner being, that we are it.

This living demonstration of the Soul's reality, is nothing less that a temporary enlightenment. It gives a foretaste of the permanent spiritual awakening.

". . . he knows now by unshakeable conviction and by this vivid demonstration that the durable realization of the Soul is what he is here on earth for . . ." (294)

There is no need for an outer authority to confirm the experience's authenticity.

"The sage is a man who lives in constant truth-remembrance. He has realized the existence of the Overself, he knows that he partakes of Its life, immortal and infinite . . ." (333)

Paul Brunton marvelously explains the mysteries of intuition, glimpses of the Soul and the permanent spiritual awakening.

Discuss:

Start the first session by reading through the study guide aloud. That gives everyone in the study group an overview of the coming work.

Next you are ready to read and discuss the notes in the pleiads on the first theme.

Consciousness

1. *Our true identity:* 1 5 6 13 15 16 17
2. *Two levels of consciousness:* 3 8 14 18 35 51 63
3. *Source and nature:* 9 10 11 25 27 29 65
4. *"The kingdom of heaven is within":* 33 34 37 38 39 44 53
5. *Ever present:* 45 54 55 56 58 60 306

Intuition

6. *The gentle voice of the Overself:* 186 190 192 197 209 211 223
7. *The nature of intuition:* 187 195 196 199 216 221 226
8. *Where does it come from:* 188 189 193 194 204 205 238
9. *Cooperate with your intuition:* 202 214 217 220 227 251 255

Temporary awakening

10. *The glimpse, an unforgettable experience:* 257 258 260 261 262 264 267
11. *Confirmation and evidence :* 268 271 278 279 281 283 297
12. *A new dimension of life:* 282 295 300 302 303 305 331
13. *A feeling of security:* 263 265 275 280 301 317 318

Permanent enlightenment

14. *Love welling up from an inner centre:* 319 320 321 322 323 324 325
15. *The Sage:* 336 338 339 342 344 347 357
16. *Established in the divine:* 334 348 353 354 355 360 361

The second meeting — Theme 1 — Our true reality, continued

Continue the readings and discussion on theme one!

The third meeting — Theme 2 — The Ego

"The ego self is the creature born out of man's own doing and thinking, slowly changing and growing . . ." (84)

We must study the ego illusion thoroughly in order to free ourselves from it. Seeing through the ego's unreality and transience is the first liberation in the awakening process.

The ego does not easily give up its hold. But as its dominance lessens, the light of the Soul may shine through our thoughts and feelings, our words and actions.

Discuss the ego illusion:

17. *A transient shadow:* 69 70 71 78 80 112 266

18. *An idea which changes from year to year:* 72 73 75 76 89 97 100

19. *Prisoner of the past:* 93 96 98 99 101 165 420

20. *The ego is not the real I:* 66 67 68 77 94 128 161

21. *The body:* 120 122 123 125 129 137 138

22. *Character and karma:* 142 143 144 146 147 149 153

23. *Living in the ego:* 164 167 285 375 385 386 388

"Keep on thinking about the differences between the personal ego and the impersonal Overself until you become thoroughly familiar with them." (92)

The fourth meeting — Theme 3 — The Short Path

"The very idea of a quest involves a passage, a definite movement from one place to another. Here, of course, the passage is really from one state to another . . ." (364)

The inner journey consists of two different phases, an introductory one called the Long Path and a concluding one called the Short Path. The Long Path can continue for an unlimited time. It is on the Short Path that enlightenment can happen.

The Long Path is about developing the ego, its character and abilities, at the same time as its dominance gradually diminishes. However hard we work to develop our separate self, imparting refinements to it, it will never reach beyond itself by its own efforts. We walk in a circle in its limited world.

Egotism is the biggest hindrance for our enlightenment. Therefore egotism must go.

"Whatever path a man starts with, he must at the end of it come to the entrance of this path—the destruction of the illusion of the ego and giving up identification with it." (428)

The Short Path disregards the ego. Here our task is to free ourselves from everything that hinders the spiritual awakening. This is done by focusing attention on the Soul.

" . . . no effort is needed to get hold of the Overself, but every effort is needed to get rid of the many impediments to its recognition... (328)

Compare this process with a sculptor who takes away everything that hinders the statue from showing forth beauty.

"If men only knew how glorious, how rich, how satisfying this inner life really is, they would not hesitate for a moment to forsake all those things which bar their way to it." (579)

On the Short Path, there are four different but related exercises — see below. They complement and reinforce each other. To begin with they are controlled by the will, but after some time they change into a self-propelled inner attitude. At first, they are done diligently and with patience, but later they continue by themselves. The exercises are integrated so imperceptibly in our ordinary daily life that people around cannot notice it.

"The constant movement of thoughts and the ego's fascination with itself hide from us the divine Overself . . ." (203)

Mental quiet consists of two parts. Meditation (with thoughts, the intellect is active) and Contemplation (without thoughts, the intellect is passive). During Contemplation, our whole being becomes absorbed in a peaceful state. It is during such a thought-free state that we can experience a union with the Soul.

Regularly, at a certain time or at certain times every day, we enter into Meditation followed by Contemplation. Because habits to a large extent control our life, regularity is important.

The remembrance exercise is about reminding myself all the time of my true identity— to direct my attention inwards, from the ego to the higher self, to the Soul's ever-present presence. To remember the Soul is to ignore the ego!

The problem is that we forget and that other thoughts take over. Some kind of reminder to remember is needed. One way is to use hands, which are always present, my own or someone else's. When I see a pair of hands I remember. When it is dark the touch of my hands works as a reminder.

". . . this practice of constant remembrance of the Overself purifies the mind and gradually renders it naturally introverted, concentrates and eventually illumines it." (463)

"As if" exercise. As if ... what? As if I were enlightened!

I imagine myself how an enlightened person would be in different situations, how he or she would act in relation to other people, animals and nature. Then I try to live up to this ideal.

Study notes 476—484!

"This practice of picturing oneself as one ought to be, of visualizing the man free from negative qualities and radiant with positive ones that are part of the Quest's ideal, has near-magical results." (483)

The witness exercise is to stand beside oneself, to be a witness to one's thoughts, feelings, words and actions, to impartially regard these activities — at the same time as one partakes in worldly affairs.

But this is not all. The witness attitude will have the effect that we begin to identify with the whole, that we understand that unity is the fundamental reality.

". . . outwardly all differ but in the deepest root of consciousness all are the same." (19)

Towards the end of the Short Path the longing after the Soul becomes stronger than ever, it gives us no rest.

"We are like flowers torn from our natural soil and suffering the misery of separation. Our fervid mystical yearnings represent the recognition of our need to reunite with our Source." (551)

When Grace starts operating there is no way back. Slow but steadily we are drawn deeper and deeper into the love, wisdom and peace of the Soul. Ultimately the ego surrenders to the higher power. And with the help of Grace the spiritual quest suddenly comes to an end.

Enlightenment is now a fact. The dominance of the ego is gone for ever. The highest purpose of life on earth is fulfilled.

Discuss:

The inner journey

24. The spiritual quest is a human need: 367 369 371 387 389 395 455

25. The quest: 377 378 379 380 392 405 409

26. Some fruits of the quest: 390 393 394 396 398 401 402

27. Its goal: 259 312 313 315 366 376 581

The Short Path

28. The Long and the Short Path, a comparison: 408 411 412 413 418 424 430

29. The Short Path: 433 434 435 436 437 438 439

30. A pleasant existence: 443 444 445 446 447 448 452

Mental quiet

31. Meditation is necessary: 486 490 493 508 519 522 526

32. Meditation: 485 487 488 489 491 495 497

33. Contemplation: 492 498 501 502 509 510 511

34. The Void: 512 513 514 515 516 517 518

Exercises on the Short Path

35. The remembrance exercise: 457 458 459 460 464 472 473

36. The "as if" -exercise: 476 477 478 479 480 482 484

37. The witness exercise: 528 529 531 532 533 534 539

Back to the source

38. Fervent longing: 541 544 546 548 549 550 571

Loving surrender

39. Giving up the ego: 552 556 558 562 566 575

Life's greatest gift

40. The wonder of grace: 583 586 587 590 594 595 596

41. Grace opens the door: 609 612 613 614 615 617 619

The fifth meeting — Theme 3 — The Short Path, continued

Continue the reading and discussion of the Short Path.

The sixth meeting — Theme 4 — Serving others

Paul Brunton devoted his life to service of humanity. His writings have inspired millions of people around the world to a higher and better life. Now he asks all who are benefiting by these ideas to help make them available to others.

"The immediate task today is for philosophy to deliver its message. The secondary task is to assist those who accept this message to come to a proper and adequate understanding of it. The first is for the multitude and hence public. The second is for the individual and hence private." (634)

Discuss:

The world is rapidly moving into a new age

42. Meet the age which is coming: 620 621 623 626 628 629 632

A truth that must be proclaimed

43. Dedicated instruments for service: 622 639 640 641 642 649 652

Print and electronic media are important channels in disseminating the information. To tell our Facebook friends that this study guide is available — without cost — from www.paulbruntondailynote.se could be a first step.

Another opportunity for service is to start a study group on life's highest purpose together with some friends. That can give the members of the group a basic introduction to the philosophy and open their eyes to the great possibilities of the Short Path. Small groups — seven, eight persons — is ideal for these studies.

". . . let the buds of high thought burst into the flowers of heroic action. In the present chaotic and critical state of the world, it is better for those with spiritual ideals to throw their weight into positive service of humanity . . ." (638)

In the last note in *Realizing Soul*, Paul Brunton says:

". . . I am never really alone when writing but every now and then there rises before my mind's eye the vision of some man or woman whose whole life may take a new and nobler course because of a few paragraphs which flow lightly from this old pen of mine . . ." (653)

More meetings needed?

Paul Brunton's short, concentrated notes can inspire many long and exciting talks. Perhaps you will need more meetings than these six? Follow up meetings will be very valuable.

Paul Brunton's writings

From Paul Brunton's pen have come 35 philosophical books. They have reached out into the world in a combined total over 2.000.000 copies. They address a broad spectrum of key issues we meet in the process of becoming conscious of, developing and deepening our spirituality.

Let Paul Brunton's wisdom and loving guidance continue to inspire you! The study of his notes is an essential component of the spiritual path.

Brunton's early books in English:

A Search in Secret India
The Secret Path
A Search in Secret Egypt
A Message from Arunachala
A Hermit in the Himalayas
The Quest of the Overself
The Inner Reality (Discover Yourself)
Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture
The Hidden Teachings beyond Yoga
The Wisdom of the Overself
The Spiritual Crises of Man

Published posthumously:

Essays on the Quest
Paul Brunton: Essential Readings
The Notebooks of Paul Brunton (16 volumes)

Collections of Notes from The Notebooks of Paul Brunton: published posthumously:

Meditations for People in Charge
Meditations for People in Crisis
What Is Karma?
The Gift of Grace
The Short Path to Enlightenment
Realizing Soul

Please visit www.paulbrunton.org and www.larsonpublications.com for more and detailed insights into Paul Brunton and his works.

A foresighted decision

During the latter part of his life, Paul Brunton wrote in a new way, short, free standing notes, that could be used in different contexts. This was a foresighted decision, because the note format has proven very suitable to the new technology, the internet, that is available to most people around the world.

Paul Brunton Daily Note

The 653 carefully chosen notes in *Realizing Soul*, have all been taken from the internet service www.paulbruntondailynote.se where, everyday, year round since 2010, a new inspiring note is being published in 15 different languages. The site has attracted great interest — over 1,000,000 visits!

The more than 2,200 notes on the site, that you can read and/or listen to free of charge, are from the 16 volumes that have been published under the name *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*. The volumes that are the most interesting in these studies are numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, and 15.

Number the Notes — before the first meeting!

Realizing Soul has proved to be an esteemed text for studies in the highest purpose of life. In future editions each note will have a number printed above it. For the time being the numbering has to be done by hand in the English and Swedish editions.

To help you keep track of numbering the notes, we include this table of contents and note number for the first note in each section.

Realizing Soul: First the page number, followed by the note number:

First note	10	1
<i>1 The Mystery</i>	11	2
The Overself	12	5
The Kingdom of Heaven...	17	31
Always Here and Now	21	54
<i>2 The Ego Illusion</i>	24	66
A Transient Shadow	25	69
Prisons of Our Past	30	93
The Evolutionary Process	39	102
The Body	36	120
Death of the Body	38	129
Karma	41	142
Life in the Ego	45	159
<i>3 The Gentle Voice of the Overself</i>	52	186
Intuition shows the Way	53	189
Take time to listen	57	209
Ego Impulse or Real Intuition	61	229
Cultivate Your Intuitive...	62	236
<i>4 Foretaste of the Ego-free Life</i>	67	257
An Unforgettable Experience	68	260
Confirmation and Evidence	72	278
Waiting for Liberation	76	299
<i>5 Born Again</i>	80	316
The Awakening	81	319
The Sage	84	333
<i>6 The Inner Voyage</i>	92	364
The Spiritual Quest	93	367
The Short Path	101	408
Always Remember	112	457
As If	116	476
Mental Quiet	118	485
The Witness	128	528
Aspiration for a Higher Life	130	540
Loving Surrender	133	552
<i>7 The Wonder of Grace</i>	140	580
Grace Takes Us...	141	583
... into the Shining Presence	146	608
<i>8 Toward a Brighter Future</i>	150	620
A New World	151	623
A Truth that Must be Proclaimed	153	633
Last note	158	653