

INTERNAL JOURNEY

STEPPING STONES ON THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Spiritual maturity is the final stepping stone, though not the end of the journey. This is when we have complete honesty with the self. The power to face the things we can truly see that need to change, and the ability to wonder at the truth and beauty within.



CHARLIE HOGG

Few people embark on a spiritual journey, often referred to as the road less travelled. This journey is written about in mythology and legends, many even modern-day films have this 'journey' as a theme, and music, both ancient and modern, often have this underlying depth of meaning. It is in fact an internal journey to explore the depth of who I am and how I can attain and experience my highest self. It is a path that sometimes winds and takes detours. It is understood to be a steep path, and sometimes we want to give up. We come to forks in the road and are not sure which way to go, and sometimes there is a tiredness of spirit because the journey seems so long. The journey also has

incredibly beautiful experiences of the love for and of God and it is this that keeps us moving forward.

So, what are the stepping stones in front of us when we set off on our journey? There are six stepping stones or stages.

1. Whatever the catalyst for the journey, be it deep unhappiness, anxiety, fear of the future, a life-threatening illness, a near-death experience – something switches us into a different spiritual mode.

2. This is the stage of taking what is often referred to as a spiritual rebirth, or an awakening. It is most often accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of love through a connection with God. This love is the key to the beginning of the journey, and is what sustains us throughout.

3. Our first baby steps make us aware of being the spiritual being within, a soul, and as we practise, we notice a transformation. The habits of eating, sleeping, reading are suddenly easily changed and we actually see the results of our efforts and how far we are heading along the path. The danger



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of this stage is to become a bit 'holy' and judgemental of others who are not on the journey – we may become stiff, serious and self-righteous.

4. The next stepping stone is of growing up spiritually. It is the youthful stage of the journey. We have a

regular practice and begin to see how important it was to concentrate on the consciousness of being a soul. We spend time going deeper

and deeper into this awareness, unpack all the layers of this consciousness and become less and less bothered or influenced by things of

the physical dimension.

5. What happens next, for many, is a kind of spiritual midlife crisis. Even after many years of commitment to learning and growth and of improving the relationship with God, suddenly a lot of rubbish emerges from within. Things about the inner thought processes, that we had worked on before and thought eliminated, come back but with great force. This is when a lot of doubts come to the soul. Can I do this? Am I really a pure soul? This is because somewhere along the line we have been suppressing pain, hurt and negativity and it has to emerge, to be dealt with. The major ones being lack of self-respect, fear and insecurity. This is when we must not become confused – we are not going backwards – it is all a particular stepping stone and part of the journey.

6. Spiritual maturity is the final stepping stone, though not the end of the journey. This is when we have complete honesty with the self. The power to face the things we can truly see that need to change, and the ability to wonder at the truth and

beauty within. Spiritual maturity is the ability to see all of this, with clarity and the attain the deep understanding, that the reason for this journey is to emerge in total, the original state of the self – peaceful, loving, benevolent.

We have to constantly have the courage to keep learning. Sometimes there seems like so much to learn, it is difficult to know what to concentrate on. The best way of moving forward is to focus on one particular aspect. For example, it may be that I need to rebuild a stable sense of self-respect, or eradicate a victim consciousness, or some fear or insecurity. By gently noticing and practising, we begin to acquire the confidence that the change is possible. Meditate every day, study every day and during the day, practise changing whatever it is I am working on - this is real spiritual effort. This journey is only possible through the development of a beautiful, close relationship with God. It is this that makes us take the next step of the journey.

Charlie Hogg, based in Sydney, is the National Co-ordinator, Brahma Kumaris, Australia.

SUBTLE POWER

Beginning to take control of our life



B.K. GEETA

When the physical organs are fully in our control, the body functions properly and we can do many varied tasks. Who is it that controls the body? If the body is 'mine', who am I? I am the soul, the sentient entity that is the seat of consciousness, the living spark that lends life to the body. The soul is the non-physical being that houses the mind and the intellect, through which it thinks, feels, and makes decisions.

Just as the hands and the feet are physical organs, the mind, intellect and 'sanskars' or tendencies are our subtle

faculties. It is through these that the soul controls the body. Our actions begin with a thought, 'I have to read this...'. The thought is followed by a decision from the intellect, 'Read it now...'. Then we act upon the thought.

Control over our actions, therefore, begins with control over our subtle faculties. If the mind is disturbed, the actions can be erratic. We can check how much control we have over the subtle faculties by noticing if we can focus the mind on whatever we choose, whenever, wherever and for however long we want?

Control over the mind, intellect and sanskars is called self-sovereignty. It is these subtle powers that make the body function regularly - if the mind is calm, for example, the heartbeat is regular.

Most people complain that they can control their mind most of the time, but not always. Something or the other happens and their thoughts



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and feelings go haywire, they say. This is a marker of the power of the soul. We may be strong, but not always.

If someone knows how to rule over their mind, they can conduct themselves appropriately and easily get along with others. In return they receive

cooperation from all. In other words, someone who is able to handle the subtle powers of the self can also handle others.

Why is it sometimes not so easy to get along with others? When we see a variety of behaviours and attitudes, our love and regard for others

fluctuates. If someone does not behave the way we like, our feelings for them change. However, if there is respect for the individuality and speciality of each soul, we accept everyone as they are, with empathy and understanding.

When we do not like some-

thing about a person, we can remind ourselves that they are a part of the human family, and see them as a brother soul. Regard for them will automatically emerge from within the soul. Having such feelings for others brings us their good wishes and cooperation. This is the spiritual way of interacting with others.

Sometimes some people think of stepping away from a place, a situation or a person they find troubling. They imagine they would be happier somewhere else. If we make it a habit to avoid challenges in this way, we will not be stable anywhere, because the mind and intellect do not develop the capacity to deal with difficulties. It is a sign of weakness. The key is to stay positive, hopeful, and big-hearted. The positive vibrations that we then radiate, help to create favourable situations.

B.K. Geeta is a Rajyoga teacher at the Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Abu Road, Rajasthan.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Perfect balance is found when two strengths come together. When a weakness attempts to balance itself with a strength, the result is known as compensation, not balance. The most stable balance is created when two strengths come together to complement and reinforce each other. Today let me express my strengths in balance.

THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

REALIGNING MY MIND TO THE TRUTH



ALKA PATEL

Spirituality creates for us the quiet path to gently realign the self with what we value the most in life, that is, what matters to us the most. Whatever matters most at any given moment in time, will be where my thoughts go and will be the topic of all my conversations. What is dwelling in my mind will be revealed through my behav-

iour and words. At the end of a day, we can look back and reflect on whether we spent the day in the way we really wanted to or how much we were affected or influenced by others. Was my behaviour aligned with the best in me: my virtues, talents, abilities and potential – or was there some mismatch that I would like to change?

We can liken life to a journey, with a destination in mind. Just as on a physical journey, we can use a GPS system to guide us there and if we go off-track, for whatever reason, we can realign the GPS system to get us back on the right route. In the same way, on a spiritual journey, which most certainly has a destination or goal to reach, we need to keep

realigning ourselves gently and patiently to our truth to keep ourselves on track.

If we find ourselves in situations that are taking us away from our spiritual goals, we should readjust and retune; no-one can force us to participate in gossipy conversations, for example, as there is always a way to circumvent such situations. Things never stay the same, and new things happen suddenly. We can check our responses, and that will show us if we are using our deep understanding of the self and our spiritual perspective, or if we are simply reacting. How quickly are we able to get back to the centre of our being, to the place of deep peace and pure love? Are we working from our



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head, or from our heart? If we use only our head, that is just information, then we will find that we are hav-

ing to work hard for our spiritual progress. If we are working from our heart, that is using experience and

understanding, then everything will simply flow and we will feel totally aligned, in thoughts, words and actions.

When we have a difficulty and need to work out what to do, it is like trying to work out what piece fits where in a jigsaw puzzle. When we find a few key pieces, then we find that everything starts to fall into place. Meditation gives us the space to find the key pieces; it gives us the chance to readjust and realign our thoughts and our understanding. We need to be able to choose the thoughts that are most beneficial to us, and then that is what we will put into action. This pausing throughout the day gives us the chance to retune and re-programme the GPS system, and sets us on the right road. We can only realign ourselves, not others. The choices are ours. We can gently, with patience, keep

realigning the self and realigning a connection with a Supreme Energy, as though we are plugging the GPS into a continual charging point.

It takes wisdom, courage, and patience to continue to realign the mind. Those who find that courage, receive great help. Someone who occupies themselves in this kind of adjustment of the mind, are people who have a big and generous heart. They care about what they do and how they speak and most of all, they care about what thoughts they are pouring out into the atmosphere. They are trailblazers, who illuminate a path for others to follow.

Alka Patel is based at the Brahma Kumaris International Coordinating Office, London.