

The Dynamics of Spiritual Advancement.

*Dictated by
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The Dynamics of Spiritual Advancement

By Meher Baba

Spiritual advancement begins when there is a radical change in the outlook of the worldly man. The worldly man lives mostly for the body; and, even in those pursuits which do not seem to have a direct reference to the body, the ultimate motive power of those pursuits is, in the last analysis, to be found in the desires connected with the body. For example, he lives to eat; he does not eat to live. He has not yet discovered any purpose which is clearly transcendent of the body; and he, therefore, naturally allows the body and its comforts to become the center of all his pursuits. But when he discovers a value in which the soul is predominant, the body is at once thrown into the background. The very maintenance of the body now becomes for him merely instrumental for the realization of a higher purpose. His body, which hitherto had been a hindrance to the true spiritual life, comes to be subjugated for the release of higher life; and it becomes, after this change in the point of view, less and less of a hindrance, until it becomes merely an instrument. At this stage, a man tends to his bodily needs, not with any special feeling of self-identification, but in the same spirit as that of the driver of the railway engine, who fills it with coal and water, so that it may be kept going.

The very beginning of spiritual advancement is conditioned by a searching quest for that goal for which man lives—the goal for which he unconsciously loves and hates, and for which he goes through life's variegated joys and sufferings. But, though he may be stirred by the pull of this incomprehensible and irresistible divine destiny, it may take a long time before he arrives at the mountain top of Truth-Realization; and the Path is constantly strewn with pitfalls and slippery precipices. Those who attempt to reach this mountain top have to climb higher and higher; and, even if a person has succeeded in scaling great heights, the slightest mistake on his part might cause his falling from those very great heights,

so that he may have to start again from the beginning. Therefore the aspirant is never safe, unless he has the advantage of the help and guidance of a Perfect Master, who knows the ins and outs of the Path, and who can not only safeguard the aspirant from a possible fall, but lead him to the goal of Realization itself, without unnecessary relapses.

The aspirant who has decided to reach the goal carries within himself all the *sanskaras* which he has accumulated in the past, and, in the intensity of his spiritual longing, they remain half-suspended and ineffective for the time being. But, time and again, when there is a slackening of the spiritual effort, the *sanskaras* which had hitherto been suspended from action, gather fresh strength, and arraying themselves in new formation, constitute formidable obstacles to the spiritual advancement of the aspirant.

This might be illustrated by the analogy of a river. The powerful current of the river carries along with it great quantities of worn-out earth from its source and the banks, and as long as these quantities of earth are suspended in water, they do not hinder the flow of the river, though they may slow it down. But when the current becomes slower in the plains, and particularly towards the river's mouth, these quantities have a tendency to be deposited on the riverbed or to form huge islands and deltas. These not only obstruct the current, but often divert it, or even split it into smaller currents, and on the whole, weaken the former force of the mighty river. Or again, when the river is in flood, it sweeps away all obstacles which it encounters; but when these accumulate to a certain degree, they can become a serious hindrance to the flow of the river. In the same way, the path of spiritual advancement is often blocked by the obstacles of its own creation, and these can be removed only through the help of the Master.

The help of the Master is most effective when the aspirant surrenders his ego-life in favor of the unlimited life which the Master represents.

Complete self-surrender is most difficult to achieve; and yet, the most essential condition of spiritual advancement is the reduction of egoism to its minimum. The objective of spiritual advancement is not so much "good works" but quality of life which is in no way curtailed by ego-consciousness. If the aspirant has many great and grand things to his credit, but all the time has claimed them to be his, his ego fastens itself upon his achievements and constitutes a formidable hindrance for the life unlimited. Hence comes the futility of rituals and ceremonies, acts of charity and good works, external renunciation and penances, when they are rooted in ego-consciousness.

It is, therefore, most necessary for the aspirant to keep free from the idea "I do this," and "I do that." This does not mean that the aspirant is to keep clear of all activity through fear of developing this form of the ego. He may have to take to the life of action in order to wear out the ego which he has already developed. So, he is caught up in the dilemma that if he keeps inactive, he does nothing towards breaking through the prison of his ego-life; and if he takes to a life of action, he is faced with the possibility of his ego becoming attached to these new acts themselves.

For spiritual progress, the aspirant has to avoid these two extremes and yet carry on a life of creative action. Treading the spiritual Path is not like riding a saddle horse, but like walking on the sharp edge of a sword. Once the rider is on horseback, he is sitting more or less at ease and can go ahead with very little effort or attention. But treading the spiritual Path requires one's utmost attention and carefulness, since the Path affords no halting places. There is no room for the expansion of the ego-life, on either side. He who enters the Path can neither remain where he is, nor can he afford to lose his balance, or the "sword" on which he walks may cut him fatally.

To avoid inaction on the one hand, and pride of action on the other, it is necessary for the aspirant to construct, in the following manner, a

provisional and "working" ego which will be entirely subservient to the Master. Before beginning any activity, the aspirant should think it is not *he* who is doing it, but that it is *the Master* who is getting it done *through him*; and after doing it, he does not tarry to claim the results of action or enjoy them, but becomes free of them by offering them to the Master. By training his mind in this attitude, he succeeds in creating a new ego, which, though provisional and "working," is amply able to become a source of that confidence, feeling, enthusiasm and "go" which true action must express. But this new ego is spiritually harmless, since it derives its life and being from the Master who represents Infinity, and since when the time comes, it can be thrown away, like an outworn garment.

There are thus two types of ego—one which can only add to the limitations of the soul, and the other, which helps towards its emancipation. The passage from the binding ego of the worldly man to the ego-lessness of the infinite life lies through the construction of the "artificial" ego, which can be generated through wholehearted allegiance to the Master. The construction of a new ego which is entirely subservient to the Master is indispensable in the dynamics of spiritual advancement.

The spiritual seeker has been accustomed to derive his zest in life from his limited ego; and an immediate transition from the life of egotistic action to that of ego-less action is, for him, at once impossible and uninspiring. If the aspirant were to be required to avoid all forms of ego-consciousness immediately, he would have to revert to a state of negative passivity, where there is no room for the joy of expression. Or he would have to seek expression through activity which is merely automatic, like that of a lifeless machine, so that he couldn't derive any sense of fulfillment from it. The real problem before the seeker is that he has to abandon his life of the limited ego and enter into the limitlessness of the ego-less life, without entering into a coma, where there would be an ebbing-down of all life. Such a coma may give temporary relief from the limitation of the ego-life, but it cannot, by itself, initiate the aspirant into the infinity

of ego-less activity. It suffocates the limited life, without bringing the fulfillment of the ego-less life.

This is the reason why, in most cases, the spiritual advancement of an aspirant has to be very gradual and often takes several lives. In those cases where a person seems to have taken long strides in his spiritual advancement, the aspirant either has recapitulated the advancement he has made in previous lives, or he has won the special intervention of the Master. But in normal cases, the progress of the aspirant has to be gradual. The distance between the limited life of the ego and the limitlessness of the ego-less life has to be covered by gradual stages of ego-transformation, so that egoism is replaced by humility, surging desires are replaced by steadily growing contentment, and selfishness is replaced by selfless love.

The ego which is entirely subservient to the Master, is not only indispensable and spiritually harmless, but contributes directly to the spiritual advancement of the aspirant, because it brings him closer and closer to the Master, through the life of selfless service and love. The constant inward contact with the Master which it fosters, makes him particularly amenable to the special help which the Master alone can give. The aspirant who renounces the life of an uncurbed and separative ego in favor of a life of self-surrender to the Master, is, through this new subservient ego, operating as an instrument in the hands of the Master. It is, in reality, the Master who is working through him. And, just as an instrument has a tendency to go wrong while in use, the seeker is also likely to get out of order when working in the world. From time to time, the instrument has to be cleansed, overhauled, repaired and set right. In the same way, the aspirant who, during his work, may have developed new perversities, entanglements and shelters for the personal ego, has to be put into working order, so that he can go ahead in his spiritual sojourn.

The aspirant who enlists in the service of the Master may be compared to the broom with which the Master cleanses the world of its impurities.

While doing this work the broom is bound to accumulate the dirt of the world; and unless he is cleansed again and again and given a new tone, he will be less efficient in the course of time. Each time the aspirant goes to the Master, he goes to him with a crop of fresh spiritual problems. He might have gotten caught up in new entanglements connected with a craving for honor, riches, or other worldly things that allure men. If he pursues these, he may get them; but he may be far from the goal of experiencing God on whom he had set his heart. It is only through the active intervention of the Master that such spiritual diseases can be cured.

This task of curing spiritual diseases is comparable to the performance of an operation by a surgeon who promptly removes the very cause which may have been sapping at the vital energies of man. If a person develops physical ailments and complaints, he must go to the doctor or surgeon; and, if he develops spiritual troubles, he must go to the Master. Recurring contact with the Master is most necessary throughout the process of spiritual advancement.

The Master helps the seeker in his own invincible ways, which have no parallel in the ways of the world. But if the aspirant is to be the recipient of this help, he must make a real effort to surrender himself to the divine will of the Master. The personal ego which the aspirant renounced in his first surrender to the Master might reappear in a new aspect, even within the artificial ego which was meant to be completely subservient to the Master, and create disorder in its smooth working. So, this new resurrection of the limited personal ego of the seeker must be counteracted through fresh surrenderance to the Master. The series of successive resurrections of the personal ego have to be accompanied by a series of fresh acts of surrender to Him.

Progression from the first surrender to a greater one is a progression from minor conquest to a major one; and the more complete forms of surrenderance represent the higher states of consciousness, since they secure

greater harmony between the aspirant and the Master, so that the infinite life of the Master can flow through the aspirant in more abundant measure.

Spiritual advancement is a story of a succession of one surrender after another, until the goal of the final surrender of the separate ego-life is completely achieved. The last surrender is the only complete surrender. It is the reverse side of the final union in which the aspirant becomes one with the Master; and therefore in a sense the most complete surrender to the Master is equivalent to the attainment of the Truth, which is the ultimate goal of all spiritual advancement.

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The Master helps the aspirant in many ways, but the most important is that he helps him to surrender. He does this by showing him the way to surrender, and by giving him the help he needs to surrender. He does this by showing him the way to surrender, and by giving him the help he needs to surrender. He does this by showing him the way to surrender, and by giving him the help he needs to surrender. He does this by showing him the way to surrender, and by giving him the help he needs to surrender.

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