

## THE FOUR STAGES OF PERSONAL GROWTH

Personal growth is really an amazing and enjoyable experience, once we learn that the 'process' (the journey) is just as important as reaching the 'destination'. If we are always looking ahead towards the destination, then the journey feels like a sentence we want to be free of. The truth is that the journey has so much to offer us, but more often than not we deny ourselves those benefits because we are so impatient about reaching the end. The end becomes so important that the journey feels laborious and tiresome rather than enlightening, pleasurable and enriching.

There are some difficult moments on the road towards wholeness and well-being, but these need to be seen in perspective because there is often great learning that comes out of difficulty. And so, our distaste and negative outlook towards that which is difficult prevents us from seeing its many benefits. We need to understand that the process of growth can be enjoyed once we alter our approach to the journey and our perception of difficulty. The way to alter our perception is to focus on the benefits of the now and not be so consumed by our desire to reach our goals. Then we can learn to enjoy the journey as we experience the sweetness and the bliss of building our desired reality. Adopting this frame of mind helps us to respond constructively to difficulty because it helps us to see difficulties as challenges that can be overcome.

The following summary of the four stages will help you to appreciate some aspects of the personal growth process and through that appreciation help you to see where you are on the chart of progress and well-being. Understanding the essence of the four stages will help you immensely in meeting the challenges of trying to be the best you can be, as well as help you make the most of the many benefits that each stage has to offer. It is also important to understand that the only way to move from one stage to the next is to keep the wheel of practice and routine turning, only then will all the benefits of growth be achieved.

**Resistance and Doubt** - This is the first stage within the growth process and is the point at which most individuals will begin their journey towards integration and well-being. It is also at this point that many due to lack of support and real understanding about the growth process, give in. This is because of the flawed belief that they are achieving very little as there is often limited movement experienced at this point. The feeling of little movement is the result of the resistance that is generated by the sub-conscious mind. The sub-conscious mind always refers to what is contained in its files and if what is being presented by the conscious mind does not correspond to the data in those files, then conflict is set up between past experiences and beliefs and new experiences and trains of thought. This opposition is in fact a healthy response because the sub-conscious mind has to ensure that new data being added to the files is properly vetted before there is acceptance of that data into the belief system. So, if we understand this process of resistance and respond to it by continuing with our positive endeavours, we need not be derailed by the doubt and scepticism that it so often creates.

**Duality and Conflict** - Is the next stage in the growth process. Resistance and doubt are still notable features of what is taking place in the mind. However, there is now also a momentum of belief building up in the mind. The sea of consciousness is now not simply flowing along the lines of doubt and disbelief. The tide begins to flow in the opposing direction, so those ideas, affirmations and positive concepts that were largely being resisted in the first stage are now enjoying significant periods of acceptance and belief.

Duality is like a tug of war between doubt and belief which can bring shifts in consciousness and moods quite quickly. The periods of stability can be sustained over hours, days even weeks and then instability can without warning pull the mind in the opposite direction. Duality is a very unpredictable and sometimes turbulent season within personal development, but it is a sign of further growth and therefore should be welcomed, rather than shunned. The way to move beyond the conflict of this stage is consistency. Regular application of those activities that are empowering and liberating eventually turns the mind around and the doubt based on the past fades and the solid foundation of practice in the present produces a more highly evolved self.

Acceptance and Integration - This is where there is almost no resistance, any residue of resistance is faint and weak, and represents the last desperate attempts of habit trying to reclaim supremacy. The individual now absorbs to the core of their being all the positive enlightening and liberating endeavours they have been and still are practising. For example, positive affirmations are no longer recited and battled with, the individual knows them to be true and lives and breathes their meaning. Creative visualisation moves from an activity of dreams and hopes and becomes a powerful force that delivers one's desired reality, producing positive outcomes. Still-time is no longer an activity of chaos and irritation with the mind either crippled by hyperactivity or boredom. Still-time at this juncture introduces you to the unlimited beauty of the self and generates the feelings of wonderment and unlimited possibilities. In fact, every self-help activity takes on new meaning, as there is uncontaminated absorption of those activities and their benefits. Out of that absorption and integration comes acceptance of one's real nature and clarity about one's role, direction and purpose in life.

Self-Realisation - The final stage is an ever-evolving experience where one fully tastes the sweetness of the self. Self-realisation knows no bounds and continually stretches the mind and one's being. The acceptance and the integration which took place in the previous stage continues to accrue and is converted into action. This is the phase where the process of becoming oneself leads to fulfilling one's potential. The individual no longer wishes they had self-love, because not only have they developed self-love (which develops during the acceptance stage) they now use their self-love which is the real evidence of self-realisation. The force of positivity now spills over into the rest of their lives as the self is now like an overflowing vessel that continues to be filled, the consequence is that the liquid goes everywhere. This is the final stage, being so filled with that which has been practised and experienced that the benefits received are far more than one needs. So, the self, having found purpose and direction, touches positively the lives of all those it meets. The unlimited nature of this stage means continued growth and expansion and the discovery of deeper and more subtle truths and realities. Living a 'realised' life means living life guided by insight, clarity, self-belief, and courage; it is where we live life guided by understanding not intimidated by ignorance and fear. It is this liberated state that introduces us to that which we are not presently able to grasp and understand.

So, remember the only way to evolve through each stage and acquire the jewel of self-realisation, is regular practice of self-empowering activities. Consistency is what gathers momentum, and it is momentum that produces the power for further growth. Strive from today to develop a momentum that carries you to your dreams and aspirations and enjoy the journey by altering your understanding and perception of the growth process. Appreciating the incredible 'scenery' of each stage adds immensely to the joy and meaning of your arrival.