

## THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS

Progress is often clothed in disappointment, conflict and misfortune, it is able to take on so many forms that leave us not realising that what actually stands before us is indeed progress. However, if we take the time to unwrap our experiences rather than accept them at face value, we will always find a jewel waiting to be discovered, it is this jewel that offers us greater insight, understanding and the opportunity to grow. More often than not we tend to see the mud the jewel is encased in and so we cast it to one side because it appears worthless and seems to offer us only distress or pain. When we can learn to see value in every experience we can and do find the jewel of enlightenment and wisdom that helps to propel us forward.

Progress has many paradoxes and the more we become aware of them the less we are deceived on this journey of self discovery. For example, progress rarely happens in a straight ascending line, with no deviations along the way; it rarely goes from point A to point B without taking detours along the way. This unpredictable feature of progress can frequently be found if we look at our own 'progress charts', and it is at these times when we have been hampered or hindered in some way that we tend to give up, maybe lose hope, and tire of our endeavour or even become stuck. This is why it is critical for us to understand that the falls or relapses we may undergo always offer us the opportunity to move forward and form an important part of the journey towards fulfilling our potential. The detours, deviations and visits to seemingly irrelevant outposts as we make our way forward are all part of ensuring our learning and experience is complete. How do we really know if we have learnt a particular lesson or transcended a certain point in our life, if we are not challenged and confronted by life? Life is always asking us questions and we need not be afraid of its advances towards us.

What may be described as a fall or the loss of something in our lives is really a 'moment of truth', it is the moment when life asks us, "do we really believe in what we say we believe in?" And, "are we putting into practice what knowledge and experience we have gathered along our way?" When the answer to these questions is yes, we benefit from our fall or loss and progress to the next stage of our journey. The fall or relapse we experience generally represents the reality that something is still missing from our understanding, there is still something we have not learnt. Therefore, if we could see what we often describe as failure, as really an opportunity for growth and improvement, we would be able to extract the gems that lay dormant within the confusion and loss of our experiences then progress would follow more swiftly on the heels of such events.

When we understand the winding and twisting nature of progress and its many disguises, we do not get so caught up in the negative stream of thoughts such as: "I will never make it" and "why me, nothing ever seems to go right", because we realise that progress has many peaks and troughs and both are equally important. In fact, most of our learning and commitment to move forward come out of the times we spend in the troughs of life.

If we are to experience the magic of every moment and feel the joy of being alive, we really need to move away from a consciousness that categorises our experiences by their external appearance. We need to unwrap our fear, anger, tragedy and pain and see what they really offer us; very rarely does the outward appearance of our life experience match what lies inside. Progress is like the rest of life, it is largely governed by our perceptions, therefore we can choose how we see things and respond to them, so why not choose from now on to find the jewel?