KNOW HOW... TO GROW!

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There is an art in knowing how to grow! There is a method in every madness, even divine madness.

Of course, this should not be so surprising! Gardens don’t suddenly appear! There is a method, an art in cultivating a garden: one must know many things. What type of soil, how much sun is needed, how much water, the quality of the seeds, at what depth they should be placed, how far apart! Quite a bit of information must be in hand if the garden is to grow successfully. How long it takes for the seed to sprout, for the plant to mature, when the first flower, fruit or vegetable can be expected.....For all things there is a season, and a time for all things under the sun. A wise man does not interfere in the growing process, but rather bides his time and flows with it!

When we are aware of all this in our mundane existence, why on earth do we expect spiritual growth to occur “just like that”! We must know when and where and how the unfolding occurs.

Well! Of course, as we all know, humans are mostly foolish creatures! That is one explanation as to why we want to eat fruits out of season, why we want to obtain things without working for them or earning them! When we wake up and realize that there is an art to spiritual growth, we will be able to develop the skill to make that growth more certain and conscious.

Growth implies that one becomes better at some time in the future than they are in the present moment.


Those interested in the spirit will want to grow in spirit, evolving and expanding consciousness and cultivating virtue.

But often we feel we are just hitting our heads against a stone wall! What has happened? Why are we unable to progress? Why do we suffer so many failures, so many setbacks?
Perhaps it is time to contemplate the whole concept of growth and progress. First we must first divest ourselves of a deeply entrenched notion! That growth and progress is linear. This is a gigantic error in human thinking! The idea that we move between point A and point B on a straight line is a totally wrong idea! Only rockets go straight up, not people!

Spiritual evolution does not occur exponentially along that straight line. Evolution or spiritual unfolding can be understood more as a spiral, which goes round and round, but nevertheless, lifts slightly when each circle is complete. This is why many who undertake spiritual pursuits feel “they are not making progress,” that they are going in circles! Well! In fact they are! But, and here is the point! Those circles are gradually lifting and getting smaller as they lift, until at the height of it all, the circle becomes a Bindu, a powerful point of convergent forces.

This implies that one does the same thing, over and over (Repetition, Rhythm, Regularity) but each time the cycle is complete, it is done with a slightly higher level of awareness, consciousness and vision.

There are many other concepts implied in understanding the subtle, invisible structures of growth. Usually, in the beginning there will be a great spurt of enthusiasm and growth will be rapid. This explains enthusiastic testimonials by novitiates in any art or skill!

There is great exhilaration in this, an adrenalin fix that produces an endomorphic high –The thrill of achievement! This explains why newcomers to difficult disciplines like Bharat Natyam, Yoga, Carnatic music, various types of western classical music or difficult dance forms like ballet or various kinds of intense sports, often experience great “changes” in the first few months of practice. They think that this progress is linear and they will continue to go straight up. The aspirant enjoys a true “high”! Soon, the dust of every day sets in, and more often than not, the feeling emerges that one is running on a treadmill and getting nowhere. This creates a peculiar enervating despair. One feels at this stage as though one is hitting one’s head against the proverbial “Zen wall.” As one gets better and better at the skills required in the art, it becomes more and more difficult to “improve,” One feels “stuck in the mud,” locked in the daily grind, going nowhere!

This is a crucial stage in growth. Many stop here, never to proceed further. They give up! They cannot tolerate making a big effort and yet not receiving any tangible reward. A teacher of any art that requires life – long practice such as Bharat Natyam, Carnatic music or Yoga is well aware of this point. The majority of those who begin the journey, drop out here, unable to endure the monotony of the non-ruminative,
often boring pattern of Regularity, Repetition and Rhythm. Sometimes, in 
disappointment, they change teachers, feeling their stagnation is due to poor 
instruction, or faulty techniques.

If one sticks with the discipline and persists beyond this point and puts in the 10,000 
hours of effort (The amount of practice time estimated by researchers to achieve 
mastery in any endeavor), their skill becomes second nature, a natural function of 
their being. It is only then that creativity can enter the field and express itself using 
the “10,000 hours of disciplined, hard effort” as a basis from which to make a 
gigantic leap.

One must be stubborn to persist, when one is not experiencing any sense of 
accomplishment or feeling of progress. Certain qualities of character like persistence, 
endurance, fidelity to purpose, stoicism and cheerfulness are absolutely necessary 
for spiritual advancement.

Progress in spiritual unfolding, growth, can also be understood as climbing a 
stairway. One steps up, then there is a period of stagnation. Then, another upward 
step, then stagnation. A climb, then a plateau, a climb, a plateau. Or making effort, 
relaxing effort. Making effort, relaxing effort. This is called Spanda (effort) in Yoga, or 
push and then, Nishpanda, letting go. Push , let go. This is like waves rhythmically 
lapping the shore. One practices, acquires skill and insight. The wave of effort breaks 
on the shore, then goes back, leaving a residue. The wave recedes, then, crests again, 
more knowledge is gathered in the forward momentum to add to that residue. Little 
by little, the sand bank of realization and insight builds up.

Another paradigm can be constructed to understand the pattern of growth. 
Sometimes it is like a valley-shaped curve. One has to go down before one can go up. 
One has to start at the bottom, before one can make the climb. Progress towards 
virtue, towards the Yamas and Niyamas, the cultivation of morality is like that. One 
must go down to see one’s flaws, one’s faults and failings down to the dirty cellar of 
Samskara stored for lifetimes in sub consciousness, before one can go up. One must 
experience the humiliation of knowing just how low one can go, just how 
undeveloped one is, before excellence in virtue can be achieved. Rock bottom is the 
solid place to start the upward climb.

Another useful pattern to contemplate is this : in the beginning one must be rigid, 
disciplined, unbending in one’s practice, in one’s efforts, until a certain level is 
attained. After that, the discipline can be more flexible. Playfulness and creativity can 
then be enjoyed on that solid scaffolding.
All real excellence in spirituality, virtue, or for that matter, almost any authentic human endeavour (not fame or glory which is created by media manipulation and mass hypnosis and hysteria, but real genuine mastery, artistry and excellence), is a deeply moral activity in which the aspirant must defeat his/ her own natural desires and egotistical motivations. One has to fight the urge not only to self-celebrate but also the need to self-deprecate. Here is where the ancient Yogic values of Vairagya (detachment) and Viveka (discernment) must be joined to Abhyasa (disciplined effort towards a goal). One must literally see oneself from a distance as though looking at the earth from the moon.

The pinnacle of spiritual growth is at the top of the spiral. There stands Ahamkara, the sense of individual self, the ego. This is the last point, the last frontier which must be crossed to transcend from humanity to Divinity. It is the peak of the material mountain, the summit of all experience, where the sense of “I am” is experienced. It is there that the Sadhak, the seeker after truth, must make that leap of faith into the abyss, into the unknown, into the far reaches of outer (inner) space.

Then a miracle occurs ... The flight of the Alone to the Alone. On the wings of Vairagya and Viveka, having faithfully practiced long periods of time with Abhyasa, disciplined focused effort, one may make that final glorious journey to Freedom, Mastery, Moksha!