

# “Stages of Spiritual Growth”



*“Ruysbroeck’s universe, like that of Kabir and certain other great mystics, has three orders: Becoming, Being, God. Parallel with this, he distinguishes three great stages in the soul’s achievement of complete reality: the Active, the Interior, and the Superessential Life, sometimes symbolized by the conditions of servant, friend, and Son of God. These, however, must be regarded rather as divisions made for convenience of description, ... The spiritual life has the true character of duration; it is one indivisible tendency and movement towards our source and home, in which the past is never left behind, but incorporated in the larger present.”*

*~Evelyn Underhill*

Ms. Underhill is correct in saying that Ruysbroeck’s method of dividing spiritual growth into three stages is only an approximation. Spiritual growth happens in many small steps much like any other type of growth. But just as it is convenient in our public schools to divide students into various grades depending on how much they have learned or at

least how much they have been taught, it is also convenient to divide the path of spiritual growth into stages.

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## “Solar Crowns”



*“The golden ornaments used by the priestcraft of the various world religions are again a subtle reference to the solar energy, as are also the crowns of kings. In ancient times, crowns had a number of points extruding outward like the rays of the sun, but modern conventionalism has, in many cases,*

*either removed the points or else bent them inward. ... Many of the ancient prophets, philosophers, and dignitaries carried a scepter, the upper end of which bore a representation of the solar globe surrounded by emanating rays. ...*

*"Many deities have been associated with the sun. The Greeks believed that Apollo, Bacchus, Dionysos, Sabazius, Hercules ... partook of either the visible or invisible attributes of the sun. The Norwegians regarded Balder the Beautiful as a solar deity, and Odin is often connected with the celestial orb. ... Among the Egyptians, Osiris, Ra, Anubis, Hermes, and even the mysterious Ammon himself had points of resemblance with the solar disk." ~Manly P. Hall*

I have to admit that with all my years of studying the spiritual sun (over twenty), I had never considered the symbolic meaning of the crowns of kings. It does seem obvious, though, when you stop to think about it, that those gold crowns with points or rays around the edge, and often studded with jewels, represented the sun. But why would kings, prophets, high priests, and others wear crowns that represented the sun?

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# Seeing Things Differently



*“The would-be initiate must come into contact with certain things and facts belonging to the higher worlds, but he can only see and hear them if his feeling is ripe for the perception of the spiritual forms, colors and tones. ...The first trial consists in obtaining a truer vision than the average man has of the corporeal attributes of lifeless things, and later of plants, animals, and human beings. This does not mean what at present is called scientific knowledge, for it is a question not of science but of vision. ...*

*“For many people, ordinary life is itself a more or less unconscious process of initiation through the Fire-Trial. ... Thus they are often initiates without knowing it, and it then*

*needs but little to unseal their spiritual hearing and sight.” ~Rudolf Steiner*

While Steiner and others of his time may have called this ordinary spiritual growth process “Fire-Trial”, today a fire trial, or trial by fire, is something different. Otherwise, what he says in the quoted text still applies and always has.

The spiritual initiate does begin to see things differently than his materialistic friends. He may think that he is the one who is seeing something false, a kind of hallucination, but he isn't. It is those who see only the small part of reality called matter who are seeing falsehood and illusion. But don't think that this happens overnight. The quick awakening of St. Francis is an exception, not the rule, so don't rely on being another one-in-ten-million exception. Most of us only see subtle hints of the spiritual worlds hidden by the denser material one, but even those hints are enough to let us know that we are much more than just animated balls of dirt.

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# It's Self-Fulfillment, Not Self-Denial



*"The sacrifice which men of genius—mystics, artists, inventors—make of their whole lives to this one object, this one vision of truth, is not self-denial, but rather self-fulfillment. They gather themselves up from the unreal, in order to concentrate on the real. The whole personality then absorbs or enters into communion with certain rhythms or harmonies existent in the universe, which the receiving apparatus of other selves cannot take up. ... 'The numbers came!' says the poet. He knows not how, certainly not by deliberate intellection.*

*"So it is with the mystic. Madam Guyon states in her autobiography, that when she was composing her works she would experience a sudden and irresistible inclination to take up her pen. ... Similar statements are made of St. Teresa, who declared that in writing her books she was powerless to set down anything but that which her master put into her mind. ... The subliminal mind of the great mystic, however, is not disorderly." ~Evelyn Underhill*

When people read of mystics and adepts giving up certain things like popular foods and sporting events they think of this as self-denial and see it as a lifestyle they are not interested in. But as Ms. Underhill points out, that is not the correct way to interpret it. What the mystic is giving up is something of very little value in exchange for which he gains something of much greater value. It is really not much different than the athlete who skips going to a movie with his friends so that he can go practice is swimming or jumping or whatever activity is involved in his sport. Generally speaking, people don't see that athlete as being in self-denial, but they often think that way when they see the spiritual person or the mystic giving up some of the fun materialistic activities that so many find enjoyable.

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## Lamp, Mantle, and Staff for

# Spiritual Growth



*"The initiate is he who possesses the lamp of Trismegistus, the mantle of Apollonius, and the staff of the patriarchs. The lamp of Trismegistus is reason illuminated by science; the mantle of Apollonius is full and complete self-possession, which isolates the sage from blind tendencies; and the staff of the patriarchs is the help of the secret and everlasting forces of nature. The lamp of Trismegistus enlightens present, past and future, lays bare the conscience of men and manifests the inmost recesses of the female heart. The lamp burns with a triple flame, the mantle is thrice-folded and the staff is divided into three parts." ~Eliphas Levi*

I think it is safe to say that when Levi refers to the lamp of Trismegistus (Hermes) as representing "reason illuminated by

science,” the science he is referring to is not chemistry or biology, but the spiritual sciences that awaken the spirit and soul and reveal spiritual truth (Gnosis) to us. Materialists, of course, laugh at the idea that anything spiritual could be considered a science, but those same materialistic scientists also tend to refute quantum physics as pseudo-science while the high-tech corporations continue to use it to make the technological wonders we all love to play with.

Levi aids us with understanding what is meant by the “mantle of Apollonius” which is “full and complete self-possession,” when he adds that it isolates the sage from blind tendencies.

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## Sun Salutations

*Has any of us ever experienced a suspension, or cessation, of breath while performing solar eye techniques?*



The above diagram is the *basic* sequence of postures known as *Surya namaskara*, or Sun salutation.

Traditionally, this was practiced by vedic seers just before greeting the morning sun. It is also a component of *nadi shodhan pranayama*, which is a yoga centered around alternate nostril breathing and holding one's breath.



Practicing *nadi shodhan pranayama* can produce kundalinic effects and propagate prana, or chi, distribution, yet the crown jewel of this breathing yoga is *kevala kumbhaka*. *Kevala kumbhaka* is breath suspension that is separate from inhalation, exhalation, or intentional pauses; it is an unforced removal and cessation of breathing that occurs without discomfort. Once attained, it can crop up naturally and normally now and then. It seems interesting that the Sun salutation postures are integrated in a pranayama practice that can produce natural breath cessation.

As a side note: Clinical studies (see links below) suggest that alternate nostril pranayama promotes: greater cognitive ability, sustained attention, and a balancing effect on hemispheric brain functioning:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1938166>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23721252>

by Michael McIntyre

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## **“A Hermetic View of Death”**



*“Hermes bowed his head in thankfulness to the Great Dragon who had taught him so much, and begged to hear more concerning the ultimate of the human soul. So Poimandres resumed: ‘At death the material body of man is returned to the elements from which it came, and the invisible divine man ascends to the source from whence he came, namely the **Eighth Sphere**. The evil passes to the dwelling place of the demon, and the senses, feelings, desires, and body passions return to their source, namely the Seven Governors, whose natures in the lower man destroy but in the invisible spirit man give life. After the lower nature has returned to the brutishness, the higher struggles again to regain its spiritual estate.”*  
~Manly P. Hall

“It may seem like it, but this is not an excerpt from a fantasy novel. The dragon, spheres, and governors in this tale are allegory, not fantasy. It is unusual to see a dragon as a good guy, but in this case, he clearly is. In fact, it seems to me from the description of the dragon found in the quoted text and elsewhere, that the Great Dragon, or Great Teacher, is Christ. And if you reply that Christ hadn’t been born yet, you are confusing Jesus with Christ. Jesus was a man in whom the Christ spirit resided for a time, but the Christ spirit is immortal and always existed. But if you wish to think it is a different spiritual teacher, that is your choice.

“Hermes wants to know what happens to us after we die, and the Dragon replies in ways that are mostly allegorical, but occasionally literal (one has to learn to tell the difference).”

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## **"The Awakened Self"**



*"The truth, then, so far as we know it at present, seems to be that those powers which are in contact with the Transcendental Order, and which constitute at the lowest estimate half the self, are dormant in ordinary men; whose time and interest are wholly occupied in responding to the*

*stimuli of the world of sense. With those latent powers sleeps the landscape which they alone can apprehend. In mystics none of the self is always dormant. They have roused the dweller in the Innermost from its slumbers, and round it have unified their life. Heart, Reason, Will are there in full action, drawing their incentive not from the shadow-show of sense, but from the depths of true Being; where a lamp is lit and a consciousness awakened, of which the sleepy crowd remains oblivious.” ~Evelyn Underhill*

“Sailors long ago learned that it is folly to ignore the largest part of the iceberg that is hidden underwater. Today, however, many people think it is just fine to ignore that greater part of what they truly are simply because it remains dormant. And like the foolish sailor who ignores the fact that the iceberg is bigger underwater than it is above, or that there may be other dangers hidden below the surface of calm waters, those people may be in for a rude awakening.

“I know that the attitude of many seems to be to deal only with the material world while trapped on this level of existence, and they will worry about the spiritual when and if they ever get their. That is like waiting to learn how to swim after your boat sinks: almost certainly too late. But it is also a foolish position to take because awakening additional senses, additional faculties cannot harm you at all in this world, but certainly can be of benefit. Materialists tend to find that hard to believe, but there is ample evidence. People who awaken their spiritual self, people like St. Francis, Jacob Boehme, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, just to name a few, have seen their simplistic material lives be greatly improved by this awakening. Yet many continue to resist.”

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# **“The Initiate Must be Fearless”**



*“The would-be initiate must bring with him a certain measure of courage and fearlessness. He must positively go out of his way to find opportunities for developing these virtues. His training should provide for their systematic cultivation. In this respect, life itself is a good school, possibly the best*

*school. The student must learn to look danger calmly in the face and try to overcome difficulties unswervingly. For instance, when in the presence of some peril, he must swiftly come to the conviction that fear is of no possible use; I must not feel afraid; I must only think of what is to be done. And he must improve to the extent of feeling, upon occasions which formerly inspired him with fear, that to be frightened, to be disheartened, are things that are out of the question as far as his own inmost self is concerned.”*  
~Rudolf Steiner

We live in a strange time when many people feed their fears as much as they possibly can, and often do so without being aware that they are doing it. To some degree, we can blame the media for this, especially advertising, but ultimately we are all responsible for our own behavior.

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## **“Real Success”**



*“A wealthy man of good family, who lacks inward discipline and all virtue in his way of life, is regarded by those with spiritual understanding as under an evil influence; likewise, a man who happens to be poor or a slave, but is graced with discipline of soul and with virtue in his life, is regarded as blessed. And just as strangers traveling in a foreign country lose their way, so those who do not cultivate the life of virtue are led astray by their desires and get completely lost. ...*

*“A man should strive to practice the life of virtue in a genuine way; when this is achieved it is easier to acquire knowledge about God. When a man reveres God with all his heart and with faith, he receives through God’s providence the power to control, anger and desire; for it is anger and desire which are the cause of all evils.” ~The Philokalia*

“It is curious and timely that I should read this section of the Philokalia at a time when we are seeing so much of the opposite point of view in the media. We see a person with

great wealth, who not only admits, but brags about the fact that he obtained much of that wealth by tricking people and using the sleaziest of tactics to get good deals when he bought their properties and he is being considered a great success! Simply having a big pile of money to sit on is not success, especially when that money was obtained by trickery and thievery, is not success in any logical or sensible interpretation of the word. By that definition, some despot who robs a country of all its wealth and makes it his own is a great success, which is ridiculous.”

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