

The Progression of Awakening

Our awakening will generally follow through four distinct stages and realisations of what we know to be true (and are living as). An explanation of these stages can be beneficial and help us know how to deepen our seeing and realisations. It is important to realise here that nothing is actually changing as we move through these stages because we have always been that pure Self. The only thing that is happening is our identity is shifting and what we know ourselves to be is changing. When this is seen deeply awakening can happen very quickly.

I have written about the stages from the first person to help you to see we all go through this same progression and that I had the same journey as you are on. Use this description as a road map or guide to where your identity is placed currently and then you can take another step when you are ready.

Stages three and four may seem very complicated or difficult to understand but it is in fact the opposite when we realise them. Each stage produces a simplification of our experience, our life and ever greater peace, love, joy and abundance in all its expressions. The third and fourth stages are rare in human experience but ONLY because we believe they are harder to reach. Please do challenge this idea and know it is only what you are already.

Stage One-The egoic sense of self

At first I will feel as though I am a separate being moving through time and space. I will be convinced I was born and will die at some point. I will have had many experiences that match what I believe to be true. I may have heard of the Self and even at times had experiences of this great Presence.

Over time as I experience this Presence over and over it will seem to stay longer, become more pronounced and feel better each time. At the same time my life as a separate being may be becoming more and more difficult and I seem to only want to dive deeper into that Presence where I feel safe and secure but I cannot seem to hold onto it. In fact the more I try to hold on to it the more elusive it will seem.

I will feel like I am the one on a spiritual journey and that I am the one meditating. It will seem like "I am waking up" and that I am trying to reach enlightenment or awakening. I may feel like I cannot do self-inquiry properly or that I have to try harder.

I will have ever more frequent experiences of very high states of consciousness, where I experience bliss, peace and even ecstasy sometimes. I will also very low states of consciousness where I may feel ever more desperate to get back to those high states and be ever more sure that this hellish nightmare rollercoaster ride will never stop. I will be convinced that I am not worthy of feeling this peace deep down and I may be sure that I am missing some vital piece of information that all those

awakened beings have found. Sometimes this great Presence will reveal itself to me and I would give anything to keep it and then suddenly it will seem to close up and be gone and I will feel lost without it and wondering why I can't seem to get back to it.

I will feel very different to other people and how I see myself and the world will seem very alien to others. I may feel isolated more and more as I have less and less people to talk to about this that understand.

In my deepest meditation I may experience moments where I seem to disappear and I lose awareness of my surroundings and of time and space. Suddenly it seems like I am just gone or that I went somewhere. When I come back I will feel refreshed and maybe changed on some level. The more I try to make this experience repeat itself the more elusive it will seem. Eventually I realise that only by relaxing and not seeking this experience will it happen again and again. My love for this Presence deepens until it is all I can think about. My life becomes ever more empty and all I want is to feel that Presence again.

Most importantly I will still be CONVINCED that I am the one that has to seek, find and keep that Presence. It may take me a long time to be even willing to question this conviction at all.

This stage is where all of humanity begins the journey.

Stage Two – The Presence.

In this stage I have done a lot of self-inquiry and have come to see that I AM the Presence. I will have come to see that I am the Self and that I am formless and intangible. I will feel much more at peace and for a while I may even not suffer at all.

I will have recognised there is no separate egoic self that I used to be sure was "me". My identity will have shifted from being sure I was the one seeking into being sure I am the one the seeking is happening inside. I will have seen the Presence is always here and it is what I am. I will have seen that I cannot lose it if it is what I am. If I am here then the Presence must be here.

I will know that all things arise out of this formless Presence and I will gradually (or suddenly) notice a lessening of desire and suffering. More and more throughout my day I will feel that peace is always here and that silence and stillness is the background of all experience. I will notice my mind and my body doing whatever they are doing and I will simply watch.

My identity will have shifted to being the great Presence that is just witnessing all of this manifestation unfolding and moving. I will see that I was not born and I cannot ever die and I will be progressively less able to feel fear or any negative emotion. The extremely high and low states of consciousness may still happen but I will be cushioned from the swinging back and forth and it will seem like they happen inside

me and I am not so affected by them. I will still be disturbed sometimes by them and crave ever more stability and peace.

In my deepest meditations I will sometimes experience my egoic sense of self disappearing and I will feel just totally aware without any ability to focus on anything. I will experience timelessness and no thoughts at all even. I will feel conscious of nothing at all being wrong ever. These moments will seem to come and go and eventually thoughts begin again and something seems to pull me out of this state. I will crave it more and more and I will really dislike having to get up and get on with my life afterwards. I may even secretly be just waiting until I can feel empty of ideas and thoughts again in my sitting.

My identity will have shifted to knowing I am the formless Presence. I will know myself to be the unmanifest Self in which all manifestation arises and subsides. I will feel a distinction between form and formless and I will have realised that the great Presence is coming to recognise itself through manifesting as a form or an ego in order to see the contrasting experience of form vs formless.

This stage is very common in spirituality and awakening and comes with its own subtle trap! In this stage I will feel such peace that I may have very little urge to progress further. I will have to be very honest with myself to see if I still am suffering occasionally and feeling my experience change. I will also be subtly rejecting the world and all manifestation as “not what I am”. There will be still be a distinct idea inside my consciousness that I am the unmanifest and that all manifestation is actually real and has arisen out of me.

Don't stop here! There is ever greater peace available that cannot be disturbed.

Stage Three – Realising Form and Formless are the same

As I progress deeper into my seeing I will come to see that nothing arises out of the Self. I will come to see that all forms are not really real but only seem to be when I am looking through a human body. I will have realised that there is no creation or destruction and that the whole world is only a “seems to be” in my awareness. The universe is then seen to be only a mirage or an apparition in the great Presence that only seems to be real when I judge with my human senses. I will realise the more that I think about someone the more they seem to be real.

I will have come to see that nothing arises in the great Presence and nothing falls away. I will know that creation, sustaining and destruction of all forms is nothing but a story or imagination that I believed was possible. I will know that all is the unborn Presence and nothing was ever born or died. Life, death and suffering will have been seen to be untrue by me.

I will see it was only ever my imagination that troubled me and that when I imagine I am living in a world full of other beings and things I will feel alone and scared and unworthy and all I will want is to go home. In this stage I will have seen I am always home and that I could never leave it. I only dreamt I went on a journey and when I realise none of it happened at all then I will see that I have always been free. I will feel liberated and that I was never bound or limited.

I may stay at this realisation level because I can still think here. I may love thinking about what I have realised and become. I will love to watch my life and those around me being affected by my seeing and my radiating of this Presence to others. I will feel completely whole and that there is nothing left for me to see. I may be totally sure that no thing is real and only appears to be. I will feel that I have reached somewhere extremely profound and that I have reached the end of the journey. My thinkingness will be about the One and I will love to experience myself in ever more infinite ways

Most importantly I will identify as the One without a second. I will be sure that duality or “two-ness” was never real. I will be sure that only the viewpoint of the One is real and that all illusion is false.

Again the trap here is subtle because I will feel so completely whole that I will not see I am still identifying as the one that has finally seen it all. I will not realise I am still believing in time, progress and evolution of myself. I will feel I have reached and become the ultimate. I will be sure that this is where all the great Teachers, Sages and Avatars have lived and I will be convinced there can be nothing beyond this.

Even fewer beings realise this stage and live as it.

Stage Four – The Absolute Reality

Finally I will see that no thinking about reality will actually equal the direct experience of reality or of being the One. I will drop all concepts, all stages, all ideas and I will not be sure of anything at all. I will be totally empty and free and I will know this is how I always was.

I will not have any ideas about stages or realisations of the Self. I will see that an ideas of levels, stages and progression are only teaching aids in order to point consciousness into ever more subtle truth.

I will see no Avatars or Sages. I will know nothing. I will not feel enlightened or unenlightened and I will not know what any of this means. I will be totally empty of all ideas because I realise the highest love is to truly be myself. I will realise nothing ever was or will be and that I never changed at all. I will realise I never realised anything and silence will be my constant companion.

I will feel totally peaceful and will be unable to suffer ever. I am concept free and unbound. There are no thoughts that are true for me. I do not see thoughts. I only see myself everywhere. I see no levels or stages ever happened. There was only ever me appearing in all these wonderful ways. Nothing ever happened to me and nothing ever arose out of me.

I will not be able to identify as anything because identification is only in thought. I will be that thoughtless Presence and all else falls away.

I will feel totally free and I will not understand anything. Knowledge and ignorance mean nothing to me. Duality and non-duality are just words and have no meaning to me. Nothing has any meaning at all. I have no body and nothing is other than me. The ideas of “all” and “none” have gone. “One”, “two” or “many” has gone.

I will not know the Buddha. I will not be awake or asleep.

I just am. And I always was. That is all I will know and then I will forget even that.

Note that this fourth stage is not really a stage at all but a way of living in which all the previous stages are including and not valued as more or less true. No distinction at all is possible here.

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