

Text from the Tradition: The Mystic Heart by Wayne Teasdale (text drawn from pp. 144-45)

Transformation as the Reality of Inner Change

The spiritual journey changes us to the core of our being. If it didn't, it wouldn't be real. This quality of inner change is what I understand by the term transformation: a radical reordering and alteration of our character, and all our old habits of thought, feeling, and action. Spirituality is always meant to make us better by unlocking our potential for divinity, to be like God in some participatory way... The transformation to which mystical life summons us has seven basic levels: 1) consciousness, 2) the will, 3) the emotions, 4) the character, 5) the imagination, 6) memory and 7) action or behavior.

Consciousness affects our understanding of life and reality. Through the practice of the spiritual life, our awareness grows and expands. The more it expands, the greater becomes its capacity to understand, to change, to actualize what we are potentially: images and likenesses of the divine reality. As our understanding increases, ignorance dissipates and we can then modify or alter our motives, outgrowing the selfish ones.

Our *will* then knows an inner change, a purification that effects a far-reaching transformation in our character and behavior. The will becomes stable in desiring the good, in transcending self-concern and preoccupations, so that we can respond to others with love and compassion.

The *emotions* achieve a greater stability and order. They no longer operate on their own but are brought into harmony with the integral person. The emotions now serve the spiritual journey; they are no longer a source of distraction.

The change in consciousness, will, and the emotions gradually habituates the *character* to be reshaped in and by the virtues, values, and spiritual treasures of the inner journey. The character then makes the shift from self-preoccupation to love, from hypocrisy to sincerity, from sin to holiness, from ignorance to wisdom, from human limitation to the liberating power of grace. It becomes a beautiful manifestation of holiness, radiant with virtue and a loving presence. A natural beauty emanates from such beings, attracting others to the inner life that they themselves incarnate in witness.

Imagination, like the emotions and feelings, is united to our understanding, will, character, memory, and actions to form an integral and effective center of willing, knowing, acting, and being. It is in harmony with the will and intention of the person, not dragging it away with images of another life or commitment.

The *memory* is healed by our inner transformation, by the mystical power of deifying grace. Memory is at the surface of the person's inner growth; it no longer sits in isolation, wallowing in its hurts, injuries, and traumas of earlier life, but becomes completely present to the eternal now.

A living, mature, integrated spiritual life transforms our action or behavior, conforming them to the requirements of love. It compels our behavior to be in harmony with compassion and practical wisdom, which knows the suffering of others and the appropriate responses to those sufferings. Our actions become consistent with our virtue. We can no longer act inconsistently or in isolation from what we have realized. We must act from our inner life and from wisdom itself.

Teaching on Text from the Tradition: by Christine Luna Munger

Wayne Teasdale offers a succinct and concrete framework for marking points along the spiritual journey. Anyone who has read older texts from mystic writers, such as Teresa of Avila or Julian of Norwich, might appreciate the simplicity of his presentation of seven layers of transformation. Many of the classical terms used in other texts, such as infused or passive contemplation, night of the senses, night of the will, vocal prayer, illumination, purgation, union, etc. can cause one to completely lose track of where one has been and where one is going! In service of inspiration, clear and accessible frameworks can assist in keeping seekers motivated to stay on the spiritual path.

Yet, sequential and clear pathways can also cause disservice. Most of us are easily tempted to take on the journey in order to “get somewhere” or we enjoy keeping track of where we, and others, might be at any given time. Inevitably, when I’ve taught courses on life stage development, my students are regularly eager to assess their own growth by at least a stage or two further than what a spiritual life mirror might actually reflect to them. It is a natural tendency. I did it in my early twenties when I first engaged life stage theory, dreamy-eyed about how far I had come and how much was left.

Twenty years later, as I encounter Teasdale’s wise and succinct teaching on the stages of transformation, I recognize that a more realistic representation of the actual journey would honor the sequencing and development patterns, while also honoring the cyclical and repetitive nature of transformation. That “thing” that I thought I over-came at quarter-life crisis shows up again at mid-life. That irritation that I felt yesterday, or even earlier today, shows up again in this hour and the next.

Because of the ongoing and dynamic nature of the work of transformation, it is helpful and comforting to have wise teachers help to mark significant steps along the way. A supportive community which holds us accountable is also the place in which we can celebrate insights and fidelity to practice. May each of us know the beauty of being held in such a loving container, no matter where we find ourselves along the journey, or how many times we’ve traveled this same path.

Questions for Reflection:

- What practices, people, or teaching have helped you along the spiritual journey in developing and fine-tuning the various faculties?
- What growing edges have you known so far and/or which ones are you poised and ready to meet now?