

Achieving Spiritual Maturity

Any of us upon true introspection, can find ourselves immersed in arrested spiritual development. Despite the length of time since one's conversion to accept Yahshua as our Master, we seem no further ahead than when first coming to know Christ. We continue being unable to control our emotions. For example throwing temper tantrums unfortunately validates our sustained failure to keep a lid on anger. We still demonstrate faithlessness, jealousy, lust and other works of the flesh, Gal 5:19, while displaying precious little of the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:22. In rare moments of honesty we may question, "What have I done with the time and the gifts given me? I seem as carnal today as when I started."

At such times, we may even question the validity of our own conversion. In a way, the very willingness to ask such questions is an indicator of some spiritual growth potential. It takes a degree of maturity and humility to recognize and acknowledge one's spiritual shortcomings. If you find yourself thinking this way, questioning one's lack of actions from time to time, you're probably on the right path. No one should ever be satisfied with the state of one's personal spirituality. Those who have hardened their hearts forsaking any introspection concerning their spirituality, who are living passively, just waiting for His coming, may be in some jeopardy. Not one of us is mature in one's faith, especially when measured by the standard set by Christ's life on earth. For many of us, spiritual maturity remains an elusive goal. It is something we know we should aim for, yet have no idea how to achieve it. Perchance we already think we are mature? One of the key indicators of spiritual maturity lies in one's ability to love in a godly way. To be spiritually mature is to emulate Yah. We have been called to imitate Yahshua as He is, displaying His charity through our actions.

Eph 5:1~17 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And **walk in love**, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: **but rather giving of thanks**. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, (*covetousness is idolatry*) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with **vain words** (*words without action*): for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (*For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth*). Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. (*According to His words*) And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (*unfruitful, not bearing fruit, the action of their faith*), but rather reprove them (*reprove them, meaning correct them, say something, do something if you really have the Love of Yah for them*). For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: (*error is reprov'd by truth, words reveal the error, but action makes the change*) for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, (*use your time given wisely, do something with it*) because the days are evil.

1Jn 4: 7~11 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, **that we might live through him**. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Knowing and being like God is having a developed capacity for godly love, an outward concern for others. The Spirit of God motivates us to love. Thus it stands to reason that the more we submit to His Holy Spirit, the greater becomes our capacity and inclination to love in a godly manner. And that manner is in accord with the will of Yah. In contrast, touchy feely love may look like love, but love's truth and the actions that emanate from that truth is Godly love.

Ro 5:1~5 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we **glory in tribulations** also: knowing that **tribulation worketh patience**; And **patience, experience**; and **experience, hope**. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit which is given unto us.

Jn 13:34~35 A new commandment I give unto you, **That ye love one another; as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Now ask yourself this question. How did Christ show love to those around Him? And how did Christ's disciples openly express their love for each other, "displaying to all men" that by their actions they were His followers? The issue questioned is; how was godly affection and love appropriately expressed? Was it touchy feely love or the sword of truth... tough love?

The Apostle Paul was concerned over the spiritual maturity of the churches under his care. Reflecting on his own spiritual development, Paul wrote as he saw the depth of his walk at that time.

1 Cor 13: 8~12 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, (*speaking of Yah's word*) they shall fail; whether there be tongues, (*the gift to speak in different languages to edify*) they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, (*the gift of knowledge of the word will pass with time and lack of use*) it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (*history, past tense*) When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then (*the future in the kingdom*) face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Consider the nature of a child. The smaller the child, the more self-centered it tends to be. A small baby thinks only of its own needs, its comfort and wants. It is a black hole of self, sucking everything into it. It sees the universe as revolving around itself. As the child grows, its awareness of things, people and needs outside of itself is heightened. Instead of seeing everything as its own, it eventually learns that some things belong to others. Gradually, year-by-year, the child's world opens up, moving progressively outside of itself into the larger world with others. Over time, the child becomes "socialized," living in a society that is ruled hopefully for the benefit of all. Yet our example child may grow up, just to become physically larger, yet remain emotionally a child focused exclusively on self at the expense of others.

People who freeze in emotional and intellectual progress, fixed at certain levels, are defined as victims of arrested development. We have all been emotional at times. We all revert to the past in an attempt to solve a given problem in our lives. But reverting to the past only brings about the same results. We all know the classic definition of insanity: repeating the same event over and over while continuing to hope for a different result. As was the results the first time, so the outcome is the same when repeated.

People we interact with in life test our spiritual development as they are learning how to grow in maturity themselves. They challenge us, stretch us, and force us to dig deep into our bag of emotional past experiences, to kindle our spiritual resources, words of truth, as these persons test the fabric of our enlightenment. Their self-centered, negative life should be driving us to our knees to pray for them, that is "if" we are mature. The problem in successfully dealing with immature development is our lack of spiritual development. We wear the clothes but don't act the part. We are fully grown but not fully developed within, having exterior brawn but no brains.

When we who have been baptized, born again into the light, behave as though we are "self-centered babies" we are displaying spiritual immaturity. If we find ourselves fighting the same old problems we fought against when we were first converted, or repeating a problem of sinning over and over, suffering from the lack of success, we are showing forth our spiritual immaturity.

Some Examples:

- *Do we continue to have just as big a problem with temper as when first converted?*
- *Do we feel spiritually powerless?*
- *Do we have long dry spells in which nothing seems to be going on between us and God?*
- *Are we unable to generate love, care and concern for others?*
- *Do we live a fundamentally self-centered, self-seeking life?*
- *Do we still seek to manipulate and control others through tantrums, emotional blackmail and deceptive stroke seeking?*
- *Is it "all about me"?*
- *Do anger, hatred and jealousy play an inordinately large role in the way we express our personality?*
- *Do we put others down to make our self look better?*
- *Does our life reflect more of the works of the flesh than fruit of the Spirit?*

Please remember that I am addressing feelings that plague me. If perchance you find yourself having similar thoughts, we can help each other as each first removes "the beam" from our own eye.

Lk 6:37~49 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: **condemn not**, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

An infant's utter preoccupation with self is totally devoid of any spiritual maturity because there is no outward growth concerning the well being of others. One must grow out of the past to understand the beauty of the gift of life given, to love in like manner. First one needs the truth and then the application of that truth to serve others in our lives. To know and not yet do, is not yet to know!

1 Cor 13:1~7 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and **have not charity**, it profiteth me nothing. Charity **suffereth long**, and **is kind** charity **envieth not**; charity **vaunteth not itself**, is **not puffed up**, Doth not **behave itself unseemly**, **seeketh not her own**, is not **easily provoked**, **thinketh no evil**; **Rejoiceth not in iniquity**, but **rejoiceth in the truth**; **Beareth all things**, **believeth all things**, **hopeth all things**, **endureth all things**.

Notice the characteristics of charity... love. Charity suffers long as love is never tired of waiting; love is kind; love has no envy, vaunts not itself; love has no high opinion of itself, is not puffed up; love has no pride. Love does not behave unseemly; love's ways are fair; true love seeks not its own, takes no thought for itself, is not easily provoked; it is not quickly made angry, takes no account of evil, takes no pleasure in iniquity, wrongdoing, but rejoices in what is true. Love has the power of undergoing all things, bearing them, having faith in all things, hoping the best in all things and endures as it waits its reward.

*So the growth from immaturity to maturity is the focus led by one's newly achieved outward concern for others, a spiritual correction from the former preoccupation of self-centeredness. Mature love is **self...less love**. Immature love is **self...love**. Godly love then lies at the heart of spiritual maturity. This goal is what we should be actively seeking in order to achieve love expressed by our actions in the likeness of Yahshua.*

Gal 5:13~26 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, **but by love serve one another**. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Spiritual maturity is characterized by patience, good manners (civility), lack of envy, by humility and a temper under control. The spiritually mature person is not preoccupied with himself or herself. The self, its preoccupation, has died. Those who have reached a high level of spiritual maturity are no longer interested in keeping track of other people's mistakes, sins and faults. As is said, "They keep no record of wrongs." They have no war chest of offenses to unload on others.

A mature Christian rejoices over every new discovery of truth. They actively seek out truth and follow it wherever it leads. They are not ashamed to rid themselves of old errors to the favor of a better understanding. Those who have reached a higher plain of maturity take no delight in evil. They do not use

another's evil as a platform of elevating themselves to look good by contrast or as a sunken floor to stand upon rationalizing their backsliding. Mature Christians have no appetite for scandal. They take no delight in hearing about the evil that men do. They actively seek to drive back spiritual darkness that envelops this world.

Mature Christ-like followers put things in Yah's hands, as Christ did spending much time in prayer. Those who are spiritually advanced are not paranoid. They "believe all things are possible through Christ" and offer others the benefit of the doubt, not swiftly condemning them. They are not fearful and suspicious of other opinions and never continually expect the most negative, depressing outcome. Believers have given their life's reward, their life's outcome, over to Yah optimistic about what He has in store for them after His ultimate character examination of each of us.

Now if we are to become as He is, we must persevere and not give up on our self or others. We should never "write each other off" simply because we disagree on a point of life's teaching that is working its way through the life of others that differs from our point of view from how it's working in us. Each of us sees events from different perspectives and at different times.

The Holy Spirit imparts the power of Yah (God) to His people. It enables us to change our human character and limitations. The more of Yah's Spirit we use, the quicker we're on the path to attain spiritual maturity. The gift is given; it's up to us to use it.

*Yah's spiritual gift as exemplified in the parable of the talents
Can be used to produce an increase or buried in status quo.*

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