

Signs of Personal Growth and Development

What Is True Growth?

The Concept of Personal Growth and Development from the Perspective of Divine Humanology

One of the frequently used terms in recent decades, which is quite noticeable on social media pages, websites, and books, is the term “personal growth and development” and the associated skills. In simple terms, personal growth and development mean the process that teaches individuals how to use their talents and abilities to achieve their goals, increase self-confidence, manage their social relationships, enhance their careers, and address similar issues.

The origin of this term lies in Western civilization. Therefore, its version of human progress and development is rooted in Western humanology. Since the Western definition of the human being is fundamentally flawed, the self which is referred to in these processes is not the true self of the human being. In other words, what is recognized as an “individual” in these processes is the inanimate, vegetative, animal, or, at best, intellectual aspect of the human being. The purpose of “development” is also to expand and elevate these dimensions. Another noteworthy point regarding the common understanding of personal growth and development is the matter of goals. Western humanology defines the human being from the period between birth and death and only recognizes his goals within this framework. Consequently, the plans offered by self-development experts mainly

focus on short-term and material successes, rarely addressing issues beneficial for eternal life.

Since these processes overlook the main dimension of human existence, the resulting growth is false, fleeting, and bubble-like. It can never create sustainable, long-term satisfaction in an individual. In fact, the principle of personal growth and development itself is not inherently bad; rather, it is necessary and obligatory. However, the question arises: In which aspect of existence is development truly beneficial for us? In which dimension should growth occur to guarantee both worldly and eternal bliss simultaneously? Another question is: How should this growth show itself in a person's life? Based on what criteria can we determine our own and others' growth? In this lesson, we will delve into these questions.

Who Is More Developed?

As all of us are infinity-seeking beings and perfectionists, we inherently seek growth and progress and dislike stagnation. All our efforts and endeavors in life revolve around this principle: We strive for greater achievements and progress. Someone who has a motor cycle strives to buy a car; someone who owns a car aims to upgrade its model; a tenant aspires to become a homeowner; a homeowner seeks to expand his house; a single person desires marriage; a married person wishes for children; someone with a high school diploma dreams of obtaining a bachelor's degree; someone with a bachelor's degree yearns for higher levels of education, and so on. In summary, our desire for growth and perfection knows no bounds, to the extent that if the entire earth were offered to us with all its resources, we would still think about conquering other planets! Of course, this desire is entirely normal

and innate. In fact, if someone lacks the desire for personal growth and development, he suffers from a disorder. However, the question remains: Does every form of growth qualify as true development? Can we assert that someone with a Ph.D. has necessarily a developed personality? Is a company manager necessarily more developed than his employees? Does a new car or a bigger house truly signify true growth?

To answer these questions, we must revisit the definition of the human being. We mentioned that the human is the most comprehensive entity, embodying a version and essence of all the components of the universe, from matter to God. However, what truly makes a person human is not his lower, earthly aspects. It is through possessing a divine spirit that humans attain superiority and dignity over other beings. Therefore, true growth occurs when this aspect of human existence expands and develops. If we examine the concept of personal growth and development from the right perspective, we can say that true self-growth only happens when the soul or spirit of a person—the essential and eternal part of his being—grows and expands. Other forms of growth in various areas are also sacred, respected, and valuable if they serve as a precursor to this growth; otherwise, they resemble a cancerous tumor that becomes more dangerous as it grows larger. But how does our soul or spirit expand, and what are the signs of this development?

Signs of True Growth

Our true status as humans lies in being deputies of Allah, and He has entrusted us with the potential to become His deputies by breathing His spirit into us. The word “Allah” is also a name that refers to all the attributes of God, and according to

religious scholars, it encompasses all His attributes. Therefore, the deputy of Allah manifests all Allah's attributes. As humans reach the status of the deputy of Allah, they become the complete embodiment of God's will, and their eyes, ears, hands, and tongues become the eyes, ears, hands, and tongues of God. This is the highest status imaginable in the realm of existence. This status is like the trust offered to the heavens, the earth, and mountains, but they could not bear it,¹ and even angels were not worthy of receiving it. Of course, the potential for being the deputy of Allah exists in all individuals, but not everyone has actualized it. In other words, the deputyship of Allah has degrees, and each person, to the extent that he manifests the names and attributes of Allah within him shares in this deputyship. Considering these points, a truly developed individual does not possess higher academic degrees, more attractive physical features, or more incredible wealth; instead, a developed individual is someone who has matured in the supra-rational dimension and increasingly resembles Allah.

Naturally, like any other kind of growth, personal growth and development has signs and indicators, with the most important being Beneficence (*Rahmaniyyat*). Beneficence is the most significant sign of spiritual growth and the first attribute that should manifest itself within us. Beneficence reigns supreme among all names, and when it manifests itself in an individual, other divine names naturally follow. Someone who is beneficent also becomes generous, forgiving, and forbearing, and he covers people's faults. Such a person holds the utmost love and humility toward the world around him, even extending respect to stones and inanimate objects, let alone humans.

¹. Quran, 33:72

The second sign of personal growth and development is experiencing **happiness** and **inner peace**. Just as evaluating the value of gold mines depends on the amount of gold extracted, assessing an individual's progress on the path of growth is tied to the amount of happiness and inner peace flowing from their soul. Achieving inner peace and happiness is the least on the journey toward God. If we tread this path correctly, it naturally leads to happiness and inner peace. To gauge your progress, consider how well you can maintain your inner peace and happiness without relying on external factors. The more skilled we are at controlling anger, grudges, irritability, jealousy, fear, and anxiety, the stronger our character becomes.

The third and final sign of self-growth, which serves as the foundation and mother of all other signs, is regulating the hierarchy of love or '*Ishq*.' Love for Allah is the driving force in our journey toward perfection. Without it, our ego does not move toward growth! Love breaks the chains and prevents us from stagnating in challenging situations. Beneficence, joy, and inner peace are gifts of love. Someone not genuinely devoted to the true Beloved will inevitably invest his heart in things that yield nothing but sorrow, fear, and humiliation.

In this lesson, we explored the concept of true personal growth and development, comparing the non-divine perspective with the divine and human one. We learned that true human growth occurs only through fulfilling the purpose of creation and similarity to God, and other forms of progress, if not aligned with this path, can be deceptive and dangerous. Additionally, we discussed beneficence, happiness, inner peace, and love for God as the four essential signs of character maturity, stating

that each of us can evaluate our progress or regression on the path to perfection by using these criteria.

Now, we invite you to a sweet challenge! Evaluate your character based on these four qualities and give yourself a score. In which aspects are you weaker, and in which are you stronger? Feel free to share your results with us!

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