

Knowing the Stages of Human Growth and the Key to Understanding the Human Truth

The Interconnectedness of the Stages of Human Growth: From the Inanimate Dimension to the Supra-Rational Dimension

Human beings are the most comprehensive entities that encapsulate and reflect all levels of being within themselves. We have the characteristics of inanimate things, plants, animals, and angels. Moreover, we possess an infinite potential that belongs to the supra-rational dimension. This existential inclusiveness opens before us a limitless path toward growth. Many of us, during our lifetime, face the following questions: Why do we often lack inner peace despite great efforts, and what is the true purpose of this journey? The answers lie in understanding the developmental path of existence, the stages of human growth.

The stages of human growth represent our gradual movement along the path of awakening and flourishing of all the dimensions of our being. This movement is what we refer to as the stages of human growth. The journey begins from the inanimate dimension and extends up to the supra-rational dimension, the stage at which the human aspect within us reaches conscious relation with the truth. At each step of this path, a particular part of our being awakens, and a new faculty within us becomes active.

The activation of human faculties is not a disconnected process but a continuous chain. It starts with the actualization of sensory faculties and progressively awakens the faculties of imagination, estimation, intellect, and finally the supra-rational faculty. No faculty can flourish without the nourishment and groundwork provided

by its preceding one. Just as the body strengthens through physical nourishment, the faculties of the soul grow through a proportional feeding from sensory forms, imaginal forms, estimative forms, and intellective forms. This nourishment determines the trajectory and pace of the stages of human growth. Understanding this path is vital because the ultimate goal is the dominance of our human dimension over all other faculties within us.

As discussed in previous lessons, the human being is a multi-dimensional entity composed of five principal dimensions: the inanimate, the vegetative, the animal, the intellective, and finally the supra-rational (or human)- the highest degree of existence and the source of the desire for infinity and connection with God. To attain the qualities related to these dimensions, we have five perceptive faculties that are gradually and sequentially activated: faculties of sense perception, imagination, estimation, intellect, and the supra-rational. Each faculty serves as a tool for perception and relation with the environment, beginning from the most physical level (sense) and extending to the most immaterial level (supra-rational), each having its own nourishment and beloved. Faculty of sense perception reaches perfection through sensory forms, imaginal faculty through imaginal forms, estimative faculty through estimative forms, and the intellect through intellective forms; the supra-rational faculty achieves perfection and tranquility only through communion with Absolute Perfection and Existence.

In this article, we will carefully examine the four sequential steps of this developmental process in the stages of human growth—namely, the actualization of human faculties. It will clarify the role of awakening each of the five existential faculties throughout the journey. Our goal is to understand how, by knowing this path, one may transcend the confines of inanimate and animal needs, paving the

way for the dominance of the human aspect and ultimately connecting with the Absolute Perfection.

The Inanimate Dimension: The First Step in the Stages of Human Growth

The stages of human growth begin with our existence in its most limited form: the inanimate dimension. The embryo that grows in the mother's womb initially possesses only the characteristics of the inanimate dimension, such as weight, volume, color, and elemental properties. Although this inanimate aspect is the lowest level of our being, and its qualities are confined to maintaining and preserving our physical structure, it nevertheless remains with us throughout life. Our inclination toward tangible possessions, tools we interact with, and even luxury and ornamentation stems from this dimension of our existence.

At this stage, the faculty of sense perception is not yet fully active, though its foundations develop during fetal growth. This internal power enables the body to perceive external phenomena and establishes our awareness of the physical world. After birth, the five senses, that is, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, gradually complete their development. As gateways to the soul, they transmit the raw data of the natural world to higher faculties such as imagination, estimation, and the intellect. The role of sense perception extends far beyond merely identifying physical phenomena like seeing the path while walking or hearing an approaching vehicle. Most importantly, it provides the initial data necessary for the formation and development of the higher faculties.

As noted in self-knowledge studies, a newborn is, in essence, pure sensation. Until the five senses are strengthened, the next level of existence, imaginal faculty, cannot form images or develop powerfully. Our well-being, therefore, depends on

the proper connection between each sense and its corresponding partner. For example, the eye perfects itself through interaction with light, and the ear through sound waves.

Despite the key role of the faculty of sense perception and the importance of strengthening sensory forms, excessive indulgence in sensory forms is one of the serious harms of this stage of human growth. Excess in eating, drinking, or physical pleasures confines a person to the realm of sensations and disturbs balance, thereby hindering the advancement of other faculties. For instance, someone who watches movies excessively without boundaries loses the ability to focus and reason clearly. This occurs because the inputs received by the soul serve as the raw materials for higher levels, and the entry of impure and incompatible materials blocks the path of the flourishing of imaginal and intellectual faculties.

The Vegetative Dimension: The Second Stage in Human Growth

As we know, human life is not confined to the vegetative level. After the fourth month of fetal development, when the soul is breathed into the embryo, the soul moves from the vegetative level to the animal level, gaining new capacities in addition to inanimate qualities. This transition marks a crucial phase in the broader stages of human growth.

When the vegetative dimension becomes active, human growth enters the second stage. Vegetative qualities are more advanced than inanimate ones and include qualities such as delicacy, beauty, growth, nourishment, and reproduction. The developing embryo, much like a plant, gains delicacy and beauty, grows taller, nourishes himself, and forms the necessary organs within the mother's womb. Thus, vegetative growth represents the second stage that begins within the womb.

Every effort we make to beautify ourselves, maintain a balanced physique, or achieve excellence in sports belongs to the domain of vegetative qualities, which remain confined to appearance and have not yet reached the truly human realm.

Following the formation and maturation of the faculty of sense perception, another vital faculty awakens: imaginal faculty. This faculty becomes active immediately after sensory power attains maturity, and its function is to visualize and store the data received from the senses. Everything that the faculty of sense perception perceives in a raw form is archived as imagery within imaginal faculty.

Imaginal faculty is the central seat of our creative and representational abilities, governing both our visions of desires and goals and the mental images generated by fears. Its significance lies in the fact that it acts as a bridge connecting the sensory world (material realm) to the intelligible (realm of abstract meanings).

Proper guidance of this faculty smooths the path of growth. But if this faculty is misled or fed with unsuitable input, it can distance us from human perfection and cause disturbances in the subsequent stages of human growth.

The Animal Dimension: The Third Stage in Human Growth

After the imaginal faculty within us becomes actualized and we acquire the power to picture and recreate sensory experiences, the human soul becomes ready for a higher step in its growth. With the emergence of the estimative faculty, sense perception continues to evolve and expands its scope. Two fundamental drives, desire and anger, awaken within us, forces that make possible our willful survival, protection, and growth. At this point, the human being enters a stage of growth where life goes beyond mere physical growth and nourishment. It marks the

beginning of a new level of existence, forming the foundation of many emotional and social behaviors.

Many qualities of the animal dimension depend on the activation and strengthening of the estimative faculty, since this faculty evaluates benefit and harm and connects different matters. Yet, the growth of these qualities does not necessarily occur at the same pace as that of estimation itself; some traits appear earlier, others later. Thus, the estimative faculty is the main motivator of many animal abilities, but it does not always correspond with them or keep pace.

As mentioned, the animal dimension is the primary source of lust and anger in us. Animals, in addition to growing and feeding, mate, strive for survival, take responsibility, and defend their families. In fact, many traits we often think of as uniquely human, loyalty, modesty, decency, kindness, and social living, all belong to the qualities of the animal dimension in the stages of human growth.

This faculty may be regarded as the perceiver of particular meanings, or the factory where emotions and feelings are produced. The estimative faculty gives rise to feelings of love and hatred toward people and things in our sphere of relations. The affection we feel for someone or the hatred that stirs within us toward something are manifestations of its activity. It does not render general judgments but organizes our emotional responses to situations and individuals. It is also the central source of feelings such as fear, sorrow, joy, and anger.

In children, the estimative faculty becomes active when they begin to lie, hide things, plot tricks, or deceive others. The energy of cunning and playfulness that allows a child to mislead their parents stems from the powerful activity of this faculty.

If the nourishment and direction of these faculties focus only on the pursuit of pleasure and animal appetites, such as endless striving for status and power, marriage purely for instinctive satisfaction, or serving others merely for fame, then the person has, in reality, turned into a strong animal, deprived of progress toward true human qualities.

The Intellective Dimension: The Fourth Stage in Human Growth

After progressing through the inanimate, vegetative, and animal stages of human growth, the “intellective dimension” awakens in the early adolescent years. Around the age of six to seven, the mind gains a new capability. It can differentiate between imagination and reality and contemplate things that are not directly observable, but are the product of reasoning and inference. At this stage, humans no longer live only by direct feeling and experience; they become capable of grasping abstract concepts.

The mind gains the ability to look beyond the surface of phenomena and understand the relationship between cause and effect. Reasoning, judgment, and internal analysis begin to form, and individuals learn to distinguish between right and wrong. Thus, human consciousness goes beyond the limits of feeling and emotion, entering a realm of comprehension and thought. At this level, the potential for the “intellective faculty” moves closer to actualization within us, and the human soul enters a new phase of human growth and responsibility.

Occasionally, individuals may not progress further in their intellective growth; meaning, their intellect does not get the chance to govern their estimation. Consequently, the estimative faculty dominates their decisions and perspectives,

often leading them to navigate life primarily through speculations, fears, and misconceptions.

The intellective faculty is the fourth of the soul's faculties. It is the level at which the soul transcends the plane of feeling and emotion (the estimative faculty) to understand general and abstract concepts. The intellect deals with “intellective forms,” those which fall within the domain of thought, science, and reasoning. The Intellect also understands and organizes what an individual experiences as personal likes and dislikes, in the form of general concepts and mental laws. These general concepts are called “intellective forms” and are, in fact, the beloved of the intellect. The intellect achieves perfection by understanding and comprehending them.

The intellective faculty inherently possesses the ability to discern between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and right and wrong. A rational person is one who prefers the unlimited over the limited and employs their reason to organize their life. This aspect is the practical intellect, the force that distinguishes good from evil and anchors the soul in goodness. Therefore, the measure of our intellective growth is not by the amount of information or intelligence, but by our rationality and our ability to discern and choose correctly. For it is only through practical intellect that a human can align their inner faculties in service of the human dimension and a higher level of existence, namely, the supra-rational faculty.

The dependence of the intellect on lower faculties:

For intellect to make sound judgments, it must receive correct and pure input. This is where the importance of the stages of human growth and the interconnectedness of faculties becomes clear. The input for reason consists of data that first enters through the faculty of sense perception into the imaginal faculty and is then processed by the estimative faculty. If the faculties of sense

perception, imagination, and estimation are subjugated by animalistic lust and anger, and consequently deliver impure inputs (such as corrupted mental images or false emotions) to the intellect, it will err. In such cases, instead of judging correctly, the intellect becomes a tool to justify wrong and illusory decisions. For example, someone driven by their animalistic dimension to commit a mistake will use their intelligence and intellect to rationalize and make excuses, thus making their error seem logical.

Love for the Absolute Perfection: The Emergence of the Human Dimension in the Stages of Human Growth

After the maturation of the intellect, during the stages of human growth, we gradually realize that knowledge and reasoning, while essential, are not sufficient for achieving peace and a complete understanding of life. At this point, we no longer settle for mere assessment and reasoning; instead, we seek an understanding beyond concepts and mental analysis. We notice that many fundamental life questions cannot be answered by rational contemplation alone and must be sought on a level deeper than intellectual comprehension. This supra-rational dimension is the final destination on the path of human growth. It is where the intellect transcends its limited framework, and the heart attains a living, continuous understanding of our connection to the entire existence. This capacity forms the basis for the development of the “supra-rational faculty,” which we will explain further.

The “supra-rational faculty,” also known in Islamic philosophy as the heart or the human dimension, is the only unlimited and non-material aspect of our being. It exists potentially in all humans and distinguishes us from all other beings. In fact, it

is this dimension of our being that angels have been commanded to prostrate before.

The supra-rational faculty is the source of our desire for infinity. We humans are inherently perfectionist and infinite-seeking beings; therefore, we are not satisfied with any limited manifestation. Whatever we seek, we desire its infinite form: infinite knowledge, infinite beauty, infinite power. This is because we are inherently unlimited beings, and only with the unlimited do we find peace. The origin of this strong and insatiable desire for the unlimited is the supra-rational part of our being, which has been separated from the Infinite Source (God) and has brought the memory of infinitude into the material world. This faculty is the only part of us that has the ability and capacity to receive infinity and is connected to matters beyond the material. Our connection to the unseen world, the attainment of spiritual pleasures, and the movement toward perfection are all functions of this faculty.

The growth of our supra-rational faculty occurs by being nourished by its beloved and, on the other hand, by the proper and pure nourishment of the lower faculties. This part is the only innocent and uncorrupted part of our being. If it encounters problems and does not enjoy spiritual sustenance, it is due to unhealthy inputs from the faculties of sense perception, imagination, estimation, and intellect. Only by actualizing this faculty do we gain the ability to cultivate the unlimited, excel over all beings, and reach the ultimate purpose of creation, a matter that represents the peak of the stages of human growth.

Humans are a composite of five existential dimensions and five perceptive faculties. Each of these faculties becomes active under specific times and conditions. The activation of these faculties is not a discontinuous process but a continuous chain moving from limitation toward infinity. This journey begins with the activation of

the first faculty, the faculty of sense perception, and continues until the blossoming of the highest faculty, the supra-rational. Understanding this continuity and sequence of perceptive faculties in the stages of human growth is vital for self-knowledge. This is because the perfection of each faculty depends on the soundness of the faculties below it. If the lower faculties of our being receive unhealthy nourishment and become corrupted, the higher faculties will also fail in their judgment and correct perception, and this becomes the main obstacle in the stages of human growth.

Ultimately, the goal of undertaking this existential journey and accurately understanding the various dimensions of the soul is for the supra-rational part to overcome all other faculties. Therefore, if all our potentials are to reach perfection and achieve the great purpose for which we are created, we have no choice but to intimately know this growth map and direct all our inner faculties toward the “True Beloved.”