

**Optional Study and Practice for *Consciousness Is What I Am*,
Chapter 5, “Evolving States of Consciousness”**

In this chapter, Joel talks about the evolving states of consciousness for mankind and the individual. This topic presents an opportunity for us to consider our own evolving state of consciousness. One approach to that consideration is to explore five questions.

1. What is meant by “evolving states” of consciousness?

We speak of an evolving “state” of consciousness because Consciousness Itself is already infinite; It does not evolve. But while that infinite, pure, unconditioned Consciousness is already our individual consciousness, to some degree we entertain a limited “state” of awareness of it, or “state” of realization of it. In other words, we are not showing forth that infinite Consciousness at this stage of our experience, even though we may be demonstrating as much of it as we can. Joel put it this way:

“God is consciousness, consciousness is God, and consciousness is infinite. . . . In the beginning, this was your consciousness and mine, and we had no other consciousness than that. We were as infinite as God; we were as eternal as God, as immortal as God; for the God-consciousness was individual consciousness, and these were one.”¹

He goes on to say that because of the universal acceptance of two powers, we were born into a *sense* of separation from God-consciousness. But nothing really can separate us from our original estate. The belief in two powers—that is, the belief in God *and* something other than God—does not *change* the infinite perfection of the consciousness that I am, but it can *hide* it. The purpose of the spiritual path is to evolve out of that sense of separation and return to our original state. And because we already are infinite, pure consciousness, there is a Something within us that is working to dispel whatever obscures God-consciousness.

Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”² Joel interprets that to mean that in God-consciousness, there are many states and stages of consciousness, and we progress through them on the spiritual path, moving from a sense of separation to a realization of our oneness with God. We acquire a greater understanding of truth, have deeper and deeper realizations, and attain higher states of awareness.

Sometimes students think they are making little progress in their spiritual evolution, even though they may have been on the path for a long time. So it can be helpful to step back and take a look. When we do this, often we are surprised to see how far we have come and see that there has been fruitage.

¹ Recording 556A: “Between Two Worlds – I Have Chosen You.”

² John 14:2.

REFLECTIONS:

- Think back over your life. Can you see evolving states of consciousness?
- During which period of your life has there been the most evolution? The least?
- Do you see anything that accounts for the difference (i.e., What was happening in your life when your evolution progressed more quickly? When it was slowed?)

2. Are the evolving states and stages of consciousness well-defined?

No. For most people, spiritual evolution is more like a sunrise. We move through the stages gradually and continuously. Or as Joel puts it:

“It’s like a transition, more like a rainbow, where one color fades or goes into another color, without stopping cold at any one place. So with us. You can’t say, ‘I’m in the first stage’ or ‘I’m in the second stage’ or ‘I’m in the third stage.’ . . . That is why the Master even at the very end, was in a state of consciousness where he could say, ‘Let this cup pass from me,’ or to the disciples, ‘Why did you not stay awake with me?’ or ‘Why do you not pray with me?’ That’s not quite the consciousness of ‘Thou seest me, thou seest the Father that sent me.’ We volley back and forth from one stage of consciousness to another.”³

REFLECTIONS:

- Has this been true for your spiritual journey?
- What would you add about your experience in moving through states and stages of consciousness?

3. Can our spiritual evolution be restrained?

In a word, yes. Many factors can slow progress. Here are just a few.

Holding on to What We Have

“Advancing evolving consciousness would ensure an improved state of affairs, but that improvement probably will not come as it should come—as a natural evolution of progress—because human beings are too determined to hold on to what they have, and they will not give up their limitation for something unknown. Human nature tries to hold on to the past, to hold on to present limitations. It is unwilling to break through for something else.”⁴

Holding on to Erroneous Beliefs

Chapter 5 points out that in orthodox Christianity, some sects build their teaching around a central character, who is set up as if he alone could attain enlightenment. The implication is that no one else is “worthy” of it. Not only has this teaching hidden spiritual development from the Western world and kept it in spiritual darkness, but it has been deeply ingrained in the psyche of church members, and it can remain a subtle restraining influence when they move to a more mystical spiritual path. Joel says:

³ Recording 469B: “Third Stage of Our Unfoldment.”

⁴ *A Parenthesis in Eternity*, Chapter 13, “The Unilluminated and the Illuminated.”

“I think that I have glimpsed some of the reasons that our progress is so slow, and I would say the major reason is that we have not emptied ourselves of our former concepts of truth. . . . We believe that we can retain the errors of religious teaching and *add* to those errors some truth which will work miracles for us, and I am convinced that this is our major stumbling block.”⁵

For example, you may still believe you can pray to God to get God to do something for you. You may still believe that God rewards and punishes, gives and withholds, or that you can win favor with God by living a good human life.

“We can all make more rapid progress in our spiritual development than we are making, and the biggest barrier there is to that progress is what we are carrying over into our present consciousness from either orthodox beliefs or metaphysical beliefs, and the quickest way to progress is to start eradicating these. You can’t eradicate them without first becoming aware that they’re there, and this calls for self-examination.”⁶

Resting in the Attainment of Harmony and Abundance

“The fact that we do attain some measure of health, harmony of human relationships, or abundance of supply as the first fruits of our search for God is probably what keeps us on the path, but to many of us it is a stumbling block because it permits us to linger in the satisfaction of what we have attained. . . . If the discords and the limitations of life, if the sins and inequalities of life are disappearing in some measure from your experience, do not rejoice overly much at this evidence of greater physical, mental, moral, and financial harmony. These are only beginners’ footsteps leading to the overcoming of material sense in which even material harmonies disappear, and ‘My kingdom,’ the spiritual kingdom, is revealed.”⁷

Unreceptive Environment

Sometimes those who want to give their all to a spiritual path are reluctant to do so because those around them are dismissive, disapproving, or downright disparaging.

Clinging to Material or Mental Powers

As Joel pointed out in this chapter, Consciousness has been revealing and disclosing the ideals of spiritual sonship for centuries, but we try to demonstrate them by human means. We still try to find our freedom and health through physical or mental power. Yet Consciousness reveals that wisdom, freedom, harmony, and health are not to be attained by physical might or mental power but “by My spirit.”

REFLECTIONS:

- Have any of these factors influenced your spiritual evolution?
- What other factors can you think of that slow spiritual progress?

⁵ Recording 295B: “What Slows Our Spiritual Progress?”

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Heart of Mysticism, Volume 5: The 1958 Infinite Way Letters*, Chapter 4, “The Message of Easter: ‘I Have Overcome the World.’”

- What truth do you know that can help you dispel such factors?

4. How can we know if we are making progress?

Joel teaches that there are many indicators that our state of consciousness is evolving.

Living in the Now

“We can know how far we are from attaining even good humanhood by how much we live in the past. . . . Only a low state of thought concerns itself overly much with the past, except as the past may have lessons for the present or for the future. Otherwise, dwelling in the past, immersing oneself in either its glories or miseries, merely indicates a great, great distance in consciousness from that spiritual estate which lives by grace.

“The degree of humanhood also can be measured by the extent to which one lives in the future. **Spiritual being has no future. Spiritual being means living this moment, relaxing in it, rejoicing in it, sharing whatever there is of this moment.** Can you imagine trying to live a minute from now? A minute from now is a complete vacuum. It has nothing in it and nobody in it. What pleasure can there be in an hour from now? On the other hand, how can we be concerned for an hour from now, when we do not know what God’s plan is for us an hour from now?”⁸

New Forms of Peace, Harmony, and Freedom

“As this higher consciousness evolves through deeper study, practice, and meditation, the student becomes aware of an inner Grace, which now brings new forms of harmony and peace into existence. It not only dissolves qualities characteristic of human nature, disclosing the true spiritual nature, showing forth a harmony of mind and body which no longer manifests any of the former sins or diseases, but it may also bring to light hidden talents of art, music, literature, or some form of inventive genius. Gradually, the old self with its limitations, fears, and problems begins to fade away as the higher Self evolves, bringing into being the hidden manna of life, the meat the world knows not of.”⁹

Influence on the Lives of Others

“It usually follows that the spiritual development of an individual is touching the lives of his immediate household. This may appear as more harmonious human relationships, less illness, or greater success in the experience of the members of the family.

“Thus, in many ways, as an entire family or household is eventually governed and sustained in some measure by the higher consciousness attained by one person in the home. The hold of material sense on every member is lessened, and frequently one or two members of a household, by their spiritual unfoldment, carry the family through many years of health, abundance, and happiness. Furthermore, it is often true that the head of a business, by study, practice, and meditation, becomes a law of peace and success to his entire staff and to all the affairs of the enterprise.

⁸ *The Art of Spiritual Healing*, Chapter 16, “IS.”

⁹ *The Contemplative Life*, Chapter 11, “Supply and Secrecy.”

“The higher consciousness of one person not only governs his immediate environment, but also has the effect of transforming in some degree the consciousness of all those individuals touched by the newly born person. The evolving spiritual student more often than not becomes the center of a group of seekers or students, and in the degree of his own unfolding spiritual light, does he help to raise those who seek him out to higher levels of consciousness, and this naturally is followed by a greater expression of harmony, wholeness, and completeness by those of this group. The attained consciousness of the one draws to itself others and then in turn lifts them.”¹⁰

Seeing Through the Appearances

“In time, you come to the place where only occasionally is it necessary to remember some truth consciously. For the most part, truth is imparting itself to you from the infinity of your being, sometimes in the form of quotations that you already know, and very often in a form that you never heard of before.

“Eventually you learn what it means to pray without ceasing. When that time comes, whenever you hear a news broadcast, see a headline, or somebody brings you bad news, automatically you just turn it off with the reminder that in God’s kingdom, harmony alone reigns. Wherever you may be—on the street, in a bus, in your office, or in your home—when you witness sin, disease, lack, limitation, or death, you automatically realize, ‘No, that can exist only as a picture in the human mind, not as any part of God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom could never hold any such pictures as that.’ And so you are praying without ceasing, and yet you are doing it without consciously going around declaring truth. As the pictures of sense touch you, you automatically re-interpret them into their spiritual values.”¹¹

Seemingly Disturbing or Negative Experiences

This one can be surprising. Joel says:

“It [the spiritual life] is not a lazy life. It is a joyous one when we have really learned contemplation and meditation. And for quite a while, it may bring disturbing influences into our experience. It may even bring up latent illnesses in our body, so that we may have the opportunity of experiencing a spiritual healing and thereby leaving the body purified with no latent diseases, or latent signs of age to come forth from them.”¹²

“If you examine your thoughts honestly, you will discover that the reason for your approach, at least your first or earliest approach, to a metaphysical or spiritual work was the desire for the improvement of human conditions, and nothing more nor less than that. It was a way to achieve better health, better supply, or better companionship, and now to your surprise or dismay, you are faced with the fact that just the opposite may take place. You may lose some of your companions, some of your friendships.

“In the same way, in seeking health, sometimes when you are hoping to get rid of one undesirable condition, you may discover that you have three or four others along with that one. They have been latent in your body or mind, and now this stirs them up, and all of a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Leave Your Nets*, Chapter 8, “Living the Life of Grace.”

¹² Recording 537B: “Lesson One in Living the Inner Life.”

sudden you discover ailments you never knew you had. At first, you might think that your spiritual study brought this on. No, your spiritual study did not bring it on, but it did bring to the surface whatever was latent in mind or body, and the right attitude is to be grateful because otherwise, it would lie dormant there until it got ready to strike; whereas now at least it has come to the surface, and through your study and work you will have the opportunity to make a transition from a material sense of health to the spiritual consciousness of wholeness.”¹³

REFLECTIONS:

- Do you see any of these indicators of evolving consciousness in your own life?
- What other indicators of evolving consciousness would you identify?

5. What can we do to help our spiritual evolution?

Much as we might wish there were a magical way to make fast spiritual progress, for most of us, the answer is the one we have heard hundreds of times: practice the presence, meditate, study, practice the principles, and associate with others on the path.

Meditate

The core practice in Joel’s teaching is meditation and inner silence. He believed that quieting the mind and turning inward are essential for awakening and evolving consciousness.

“As you meditate for the purpose of God realization, your own consciousness evolves, becomes higher and deeper, and then into that higher consciousness come the experiences.”¹⁴

“If I continue in the practice of meditation, which is a turning within to the center of my being, the source, to let it flow, tomorrow I will show forth more of the infinity which I am, always have been, and next year a greater degree, and a greater degree. . . . Turn within to let that infinity express itself in greater and greater degrees . . .”¹⁵

Know the spiritual principles and practice them in daily living

The Infinite Way Message rests on four foundational principles: the nature of God, the nature of individual being, the nature of error, and the nature of prayer.

“Regardless of how far you go in spiritual development, never lose sight of these basic principles, because spiritual consciousness evolves through the understanding, the study, and the application of these principles. By embodying these principles in daily life, individuals can facilitate the evolution of their consciousness and contribute to the collective spiritual awakening of humanity.”¹⁶

¹³ *The Mystical I*, Chapter 5, “The Two Ways of I.”

¹⁴ Recording 519B: “From Metaphysical to Mystical.”

¹⁵ Recording 255B: “Consciousness—A New God.”

¹⁶ Recording 315A: “A Blueprint for Study.”

Practice love, forgiveness, non-judgment and non-attachment

Joel encourages us to live by the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁷ practicing love, forgiveness, non-resistance, non-judgment, and non-attachment. By embodying these in daily life, we facilitate the evolution of our consciousness, and we contribute to the collective spiritual awakening of humanity.

In addition, Joel encourages us to work toward the realization that “I am not the body.”

De-identify with the body

Joel teaches that consciousness evolves when one moves beyond identification with the body and material circumstances. To help with this, he has given us the body exercise.¹⁸

REFLECTIONS:

- What are you doing now to support your spiritual evolution?
- Is there anything else you could do that would be helpful?

¹⁷ In 2021, we had a [study program on the Sermon on the Mount](#). Study material is still available.

¹⁸ You can review the body exercise on any of these recordings: 462A, starting at minute 52:10; 513B, starting at minute 5:32; or 59A, starting at minute 15:03.