



## The Seven Stages of the Path: Stage One - Repentance

by the Grand Master, Mir Hadian

*In the Name of the Beloved, the Compassionate and the Merciful.*

Repentance is to turn away  
from anything but the Beloved.

- Mir Hadian

The seven stages became apparent to Seraj (from Tous), a 10th Century Sufi Master and teacher. Through his own experience and through helping his students, he came up with the notion of the seven stages of the path (his book is called the Book of Flashes).

It is important to understand that the seven stages are not sequential. Seraj referred to the seven stages (also known as steps or stations) as a spiritual condition, not as a means to assess progress; for example, if you're on the second stage, it doesn't mean that you necessarily have five stages to go. Likewise, if somebody else is on the third stage while you're on the first stage, it doesn't mean they're further ahead than you. It doesn't work like that.

Let's make it clear, because it is important – the Sufi path is a circular path; it is not a straight path up or down. You start with your self and you go to your self – your self being part of the Beloved.

In fact, you may experience several stages together – or you may be deluding yourself to think that you are experiencing any stage at all! Our intelligence is there to pigeonhole (through comparison) and to support our naffs (ego). Using the intelligence, you might consider that you've covered the third stage and now you're on the fourth. Some spiritual paths work in this way, but on the Sufi path, it is not a measure. The seven stages are there simply to help you understand and develop yourself.

The first stage is repentance.

Seraj says that repentance (al Tobeh) refers to our having neglected the Beloved (in our forgetfulness) while He has been with us, loving us, continuously. This is the meaning of repentance – it does not refer to moral or religious meanings, as you might have expected.

How does repentance begin? Saying that you repent is one thing, but action must accompany that – you have to mean it. Indeed, a lot of people they mean it, but how do you identify that?

The first step is to look at your faults – this is essential. It is not for the purpose of telling yourself you've done something wrong, or even to judge yourself. Simply looking at and understanding your faults will develop your consciousness – and that consciousness will show you what is a fault. Again, this is not to be read in religious terms but we have to start somewhere. And the first stage is that you start looking at the faults, you start being realistic and sincere with yourself, saying, yes, this is me, I like this, I don't like that and I know this is not right – but don't judge yourself, just be aware of yourself and work at it.

“My Beloved and Lord,  
indeed I have wronged myself,  
so forgive me,” and He forgave.  
Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

- Surah 28:16

Now, being aware of the fault is one thing but to be completely absorbed by that fault is another. You have to be detached in your observation, be detached from the faults; otherwise your consciousness is not going to develop strength to deal with those faults. Don't become bogged into them, feeling guilty or you could end up like a religious person wanting God to forgive his sin, though if this is what you want that's your choice. That is a stage you could stay at but hopefully that is not the stage that spiritually you are aiming for.

Seek to identify those faults, learn about those faults and work with your shadows. Some of the impressions you might have of your shadow-side could be completely wrong. You might think a shadow is negative, but you'd be surprised, there may be a lot of positive things in there. Perhaps you've just been conditioned to perceive it as negative, so it stays that way.

Perhaps your parents have told you that this isn't right, you should play this, that is rubbish, etc. And perhaps you've felt that this is a fault you have, then despite your having a tendency toward doing something, you can't do it because of your conditioning. That isn't to suggest that you go and do whatever it might be, but look at it, examine it; why are you feeling guilty about doing it, why is this a fault?

You may be surprised to find that some of those so-called faults are actually positive, likewise, some of what you consider positive could be an illusion. Though you might feel something is positive, in spiritual terms, on the path, it isn't positive at all. Perhaps your ego says that you should join a spiritual group, do prayer with them and do all those things until you feel good. Be aware of it.

Frequently, we speak about reflection – including every New Years' – a Sufi's job is to continuously reflect, to critically discriminate himself as best he can in a positive, detached and non-judgemental way. Of course, that's a bit confusing because to discriminate you have to judge, but once you start and begin recognising your faults you learn to be detached and not judge. Know that nothing is perfect except Beloved; therefore, we all have faults.

Working with your shadows and starting to discern your faults is the start of repentance.

You need to develop consciousness so that you can find your way; these faults really block your progress. But once you realise your faults, you become more aware and detached, then you start noticing your conscious developing. You will not be like ordinary people whose unconscious rules them, repeating the same pattern throughout their life. You will start making decisions – real choices. You might say that you no longer wish to live as you have been, you no longer want to listen to this program or read that magazine that you used to, simply because those things are not enabling you to look into your inner self – they are not helping you.

And once you become aware of those faults, the repentance comes in. Becoming aware of a fault is, itself, repentance. Repentance doesn't mean you have to feel guilty – you don't need to feel guilty to repent. When that happens and you start developing that consciousness, you reach a stage on the path where, from time-to-time, you really start to feel the loving of the Beloved in your heart; your meditation feels different, your prayer feels different. That's a stage when your heart is opening to experiences.

One thing you've got to remember – you must not look at the fault as sin. Without fault, you cannot develop consciousness.

As an example, when doing Sufi Reiki you experience something wonderful and you remember it just for a second. If you have a bad experience, it lasts you a lifetime. Nevertheless, the positive point about faults is not to say, 'I've got this fault so I feel ashamed of it', no, on the contrary, you say, 'I've got this fault, I'm so glad Beloved that you made me aware of this fault therefore I can understand myself and develop my consciousness'.

That's how you've got to look at faults rather than saying, 'Oh, I've got a fault, therefore I'm terrible, I've got five faults, the other person probably has three faults ...' – that's not going to get you anywhere. All the faults are attributes of the Beloved too; the Beloved made you, you are part of Him, the fault you've got is His too. But the fault is there for you to develop yourself and your consciousness in this way.

The second stage of the repentance is known as “repentance of the repentance” (Tobeh-al-Tobeh). When you start feeling that love, the Majesty of Beloved in your heart, you start repenting for the fact that you've only just began to experience that love; you wish that you'd always been experiencing that rather than doing anything else. You find yourself repenting from neglecting the Beloved and His love and hence that becomes a repentance of the repentance. Though you've repented already, you continue repenting.

The Beloved loves those who are  
constantly repentant and loves  
those who purify themselves.

- Surah 2:222

But that forgetfulness is part of us as human beings. If you remembered Him all the time and you didn't have the forgetfulness, you couldn't appreciate what remembering Him means. A simple analogy is that if you were healthy all the time, you couldn't appreciate what health is; you've got to be sick occasionally to appreciate what health is. Forgetfulness gives you an opportunity to appreciate what loving the Beloved is; to feel that repentance, to feel nearness to Him and that feeling builds momentum.

Later, there comes a stage that you will have developed to the point of having to abandon your conscious. You will have worked so much to develop your consciousness, to become aware of yourself, to know your shadows, to know your good points, bad points and to detach without judgement – and now you have to abandon that.

We see manifestations of Beloved's love all around us, but unfortunately we're too preoccupied to notice. The beauty of the flower represents His lovingness, His beauty and tenderness. Trees and many other things are all manifestations. We expect a manifestation to be in accordance with our understanding and that's why we stay and don't go beyond that. By understanding our self, we expand that horizon. And then by abandoning our self, that's the time we start seeing reality as it really is, rather than the 'reality' that has been presented to us as 'reality'. These days, the majority of people believe what they read in newspapers – that is how the naffs (ego) and our intellect take us on a ride, not giving us any time to detach from all that.

In the short-term (it's not for the long-term, not forever), work to understand and be content with yourself – this is me, this is my shadow, this is my positive side. Once you have that, then you really start noticing the impact on your meditation, your prayer, your remembrance and that attraction starts pulling you toward the Beloved.

In our prayer, we say, "Beloved, please guide me to the right path, the path that You want." That is submission. The only way you will be pulled properly is if your submission is done properly. You will reach to a stage where you see all that you have been searching for and loving for, the Beloved has been doing that long before you started looking for Him. At the end of the day, it is the Beloved who pulls. You may work through your life to be pious and pure, but if the Beloved does not want to pull you – to attract you – you have no chance.

So, the repentance is important and the repentance makes a Sufi humble; makes the Sufi appreciate the time that he hasn't spent for the Beloved. And that is enough. Beloved loves those who repent – He is the Merciful and accepts all repentance. Why? Because He knows Himself, he put the forgetfulness inside of us. As long as we repent, we can return to Him if we decide to – that's our choice – but He is most happy and His loving never stops regardless, even when we neglect Him.

In talking about developing your consciousness and then abandoning it, it may sound it bit odd to talk about developing something and then abandoning it. You may find that confusing. Why would you abandon your consciousness after so much work? Simply, once you experience the Majesty of the Beloved, the sensitivity, loving and tenderness of the Beloved, you start forgetting yourself. The consciousness you

developed to pull yourself away from everything becomes worthless because you have succeeded. Numerous Sufi poets talk about the intensity of this love and of the nothingness.

The abandon is not really leaving it out, it is a transfusion to your Higher Self – your consciousness goes to your higher self, which is much more beautiful, visible and satisfying than just the consciousness. In the consciousness, you're trying to identify and examine your fault but when you reach to the higher consciousness, the Grace of the Beloved comes to you continuously; your acts become what He wants because you are totally submitted. Like many Sufi Saints, when they do things it has come to them from the Beloved, through their act, daily routine, anything they may decide or go for, there's a reason for it because they've accepted total submission.

That transfusion of your conscious to your higher conscious is really a matter of how much you have worked up to it and how much you have submitted. The work is one thing – you can achieve that – but the trust and submission are something that some of us may not achieve in our lifetime. Why? Because it is hard to suddenly trust something that you feel but cannot see. You may be seeing His representative, the teacher, but he's a human being too; you may ask how you can submit yourself to the teacher, as a human? That's ego using physical and intellectual boundaries.

Looking at your faults and discrimination between the right and the wrong within yourself does not mean doing the same for other people – you're not here for other people, this is your life. You could waste it just concentrating on other people and what they're doing but then you'll have just wasted your life and an incredibly valuable opportunity.

The main thing is that repentance comes back to our forgetfulness and neglecting the Beloved. As I said, eventually you reach the second stage (the Repentance of the Repentance) and you find yourself coming to the meditation and enjoying it so much you start telling yourself, 'How dare I not be thinking about or feeling that other side'. Of course, what you're doing is forgetting again! Rather than enjoying that moment, you're thinking about whether you should have done this or that – and that's what you need to stop. Rather than thinking what you could have been doing, just acknowledge that thought and be thankful to the Beloved that you have this opportunity to enjoy, to experience, His Grace. Otherwise, you end up missing that point.

I mentioned earlier and I've said it many times before, a Sufi is a child of the moment. What's happened in the past is gone; you can't do much about it. It is experience, yes, so live with it, understand it and learn from it. And as for the future, nobody has a guarantee. Don't miss today for the sake of the past or the future.

Ya Hu.

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