

Spiritual Growth and M Scott Peck's Stages

The Road Less Traveled

M Scott Peck first alluded to the spiritual growth stages in his first book, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*. However, he did not enumerate stages at that point. He only explained how, in his practice of psychiatry, sometimes a particular person would require assistance working their way out of religious belief while the next person might require help moving toward faith. The explanation given for this phenomenon was that of spiritual growth.

Apparently, people still in what we are calling the "Faithful" stage on this site might need help learning to question the religion that was handed to them at birth. It seems Peck had figured out that blind acceptance without doing the work of personalizing faith was not a mature way to approach religion. In the long run, this led the person to shirk assuming responsibility for their beliefs. Going through the stage of questioning was important and healthier than just blindly accepting.

But other people who were already in the questioning stage (Rational stage in the terminology of this site) often seemed to need help moving toward some type of spiritual faith. In this case, the route of spiritual growth would be to accept faith but this post-questioning faith would be very different from the type of faith typical of the Faithful.

The Different Drum

I think Peck gave the most complete description of his spiritual growth stages in *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. (New York: Touchstone. 1987.)

Stage I: Chaotic, antisocial.

A stage of undeveloped spirituality, people in Stage I of spiritual growth are manipulative and self-serving. Though they may pretend or even think they are loving toward others, they really don't care about anyone but themselves. There are no principles (such as truth or love) important enough to these people to override their own desires.

Because they don't allow any principles to govern their existence, there is a lack of integrity to these people and a chaos to their existence. Personally, I find the term "anti-social" most misleading here. Some of these people are very engaging and personable and can really fool you. Some even rise to positions of considerable power, such as presidents.

This stage is equivalent to the Lawless stage as described on this site.

Stage II: Formal, institutional.

In order to save themselves from the chaos of the prior stage, when someone converts from Stage I to Stage II, he submits himself to an institution of some sort for "governance." This could be a church, or it could be the military or even a prison. Nonetheless, to this person the rules are very important. And the structure provided by an institution is very important in providing order in this person's world.

In religion, people in Stage II will mainly view their God as an external, transcendent Being. They generally need a legalistic God, who will punish misdeeds, to keep them from chaotic behavior.

A principle value for people in Stage II is stability. And they perceive external forms of society or their religion as providing this stability. Thus they can become very upset if minor changes occur in the rituals at church, for example. This is where Peck uses the word "formal" - this person sees their church as being about the outer forms, not about the interior meanings.

Peck's Stage II is roughly equivalent to what we are calling the "Faithful" stage on this site.

Stage III: Skeptic, individual.

According to Peck, people in the third stage of spiritual growth have the principles of goodness "engraved on their hearts." Thus they no longer need the forms of society or a church to keep their behavior in check. They are self-governing.

Because they no longer need the services offered by a church, they begin to feel free to question the value of religion in their lives. They may at this point choose to reject religious belief.

Even though they may describe themselves as atheist or agnostic, people in Stage III are actually more spiritually developed than most of those content to remain in Stage II. They are often deeply committed to social causes. They are active seekers of truth.

This stage is roughly equivalent to the "Rational" stage as described on this site.

Stage IV: Mystic, communal.

According to Peck, Stage IV of spiritual growth arises when the seeker in Stage III keeps seeking. They keep finding more pieces to the puzzle and the "larger and more magnificent the puzzle becomes."

Thus the person in Stage IV grows to value the beauty of the mystery of our existence over the definitive answers provided by the traditional church. They speak of unity and connectedness and are not into magnifying the differences that divide us.

Peck's StageIV of spiritual growth is roughly equivalent to the "Mystic" stage as described on this site.