SIGNS OF PROGRESS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

by Elizabeth Lesser

1. Obuntubotho When Bishop Desmond Tutu introduced Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as the new president of South Africa, he described him as being a man who had *Obuntubotho*. Obuntubotho, he said, "is the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humanness, gentleness, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in ours, for we can only be human together." Obuntubotho is a sign of progress on the spiritual path.

2. The Truth Works A disciple once asked the Buddha how he would know the Truth if he found it. "You know the Truth, because the Truth works," the Buddha answered. When your life works better—when drama and chaos get tiresome, and goodness and peace are your preferred companions, then you are receiving messages from the Truth. When you are naturally happier, stronger, and more deeply engaged with people and place, you can assume you are touching on the Truth.

3. In Touch With Reality A sign of progress is when you no longer fight the nature of life. Instead, you work with it. You stop pretending that life is supposed to be a certain way and accept it on its own terms. You size up the human story and get on with living.

4. Honesty is an Aphrodisiac It does pay to be honest. It pays in rewarding relationships. It pays in unblocked energy. It pays in passion. To stand tall in who you are, unafraid to reveal what you want and need, kind enough to tell the truth, and brave enough to bear the consequences, is a telling sign of spiritual development.

5. Suffering is our Fear of Pain There will always be pain in life. This is something we learn as we progress spiritually. We also learn that if we resist pain, if we fear it, then we create additional pain called suffering. Our resistance to pain stands between us and full-bodied living; it keeps us at war with our problems and from making peace with life's dual nature. When pain arises in your life and you stand to greet it with calm curiosity, you will know that you making progress on the path.

6. How Can I Help? If you are spiritually happy you naturally want others to be happy. You can't help but help. Spirituality is the gift of love. Service to others is the discipline of love. If you reach out often to those in need, not because you should but because your heart leads you more and more deeply into the hearts of others, then keep on going.

7. Declaration of Interdependence. Are you becoming more and more aware of the interconnection of all beings, creatures, and elements Do you hold as your own Jesus' words : "And whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me"? Are you getting tired of the way our society celebrates the false ego's selfish and insatiable drive to acquire and use more and more? And does that make you want to be an agent of healing? A declaration of life's interdependence is a sign of spiritual progress.

8. Combine love and loneliness. When we progress on the path, we become more and more comfortable with the great paradox of belonging and being alone. We reach out to others for love and companionship, yet we know that the abiding love for which we long rests in our solitary relationship with God. We are generous in our compassion and help to those in need, but we also know that each person is responsible for his or her own healing. We are loved; we are alone. Both are blessings. Love and loneliness are both states of grace.

9. The ordinary is extraordinary. "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy," said Rabbi Abraham Heschel. When we really feel this, without forcing, without trying too hard, then we know we're on the right track. When we see the marvelous structure of the universe in the mundane and when we love the whole world by loving our mates and children and co-workers, then we are making progress. When we don't need to be anyone special, but are pleased to be simply one of God's many creatures, then we will know the joy of the extra-ordinary.

10. God is optimistic. Finally, look for these signs of progress on the spiritual path: a friendliness towards change and an optimistic vision of eternity. Faith in the perfection of God's plan – even when the road is rough – can make the difference between a life of happiness and a life of bitterness. Trust in God's goodness fuels our commitment to justice and beauty; with such faith we can move mountains, just like the spiritual heroes of all times.