

# Complications and Sticking Points

by Art Ticknor

Event #1 on the critical path to nirvana\* is intuiting or hearing and believing that the antidote to dissatisfaction lies within. The first complication or sticking point, then, is never hearing that message. Hearing but not believing is basically the same as not hearing.

Other variations on getting stuck before reaching step #1 are hearing the message but being afraid to act -- maybe coming to the conclusion that such a pursuit would lead to insanity or at least require you to make some impossible sacrifice -- or hearing but not being willing to act now. Fear and procrastination are likely to visit the seeker at any time along the path, so they are among the many factors that we need to apply our critical observation and evaluation to.

For the person who embraces step #1, the ensuing sticking points and complications are legion. Our best chance lies in coming under the influence of someone who has made the trip and can guide us. Ideally, that guidance would come via personal interaction with a living teacher. If not, then we're in even greater need of finding or designing some system of self-checking. Of the three great western teachers of our era -- Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Douglas Harding, and Richard Rose -- only Harding, now in his 96th year, is still alive and functioning. If we come under his influence, and if his approach works for us, we will accomplish step #2 (i.e., looking at what we're looking out from; seeing what we really are) in short order. His recommendation for then finishing the work is to practice the exercises of "seeing" until a breakthrough of ego-death occurs. Unfortunately there's no system of self-checking, and the student needs to have faith that this approach will yield results.

Of the three men, Rose is the only one who left a system that can be applied by the student regardless of what techniques he's experimenting with and that can be used for ongoing self-checking at any stage of the project. The outline of this metasystem is in a paper titled "The Threefold Path." After his self-realization, Rose said he could see that directives left by Jesus in his statement: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" and by Buddha, when he said to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, were pointing to the same thing.

My feeling is that the more retreating from untruth we've done in getting to step #2, the less there will be left to do in going from step #2 to #3 (i.e., accepting the radical implications of what we see) -- and the sticking points are likely to be the same in either case. The greatest complication comes, I believe, in that we're not unified creatures before we arrive at the finish line, and different "parts" of us have conflicting agendas. For example, the intellect may hear and believe and act toward going within to find the ultimate answer while the emotions or instincts continually undercut our efforts by their conviction that the solution lies in another direction -- love, security, career, etc.

If the instinctive function is primary, the call will be answered with asceticism, trying to discipline the mind by punishing the body. Buddha reportedly went through several years of this, bringing himself to the edge of bodily death before graduating to the next level of seeking.

If the emotional center has the upper hand, we will fall in love with or otherwise worship a savior or guru and thus follow a devotional path. We may then find a succession of teachers all of whom eventually reveal their "feet of clay" as in Buddha's story. In a way this is preferable to falling in love with a long-dead savior who's not around to either reveal his own foibles or to help us see ours. The graduation from this level of seeking comes with the realization that there's another way of seeking besides trying blindly to feel our way.

If the intellect is dominant, then we will try to understand our way to Truth, refining our concepts and building complex rationalizations that we hope will become impregnable fortresses. Unfortunately, these fortresses become our prisons. Eventually we have to see that the intellect is not the vehicle that's going to take us beyond the barrier of the mind.

While each of these levels of seeking is its own sticking-point, the graduation from one to the next is liable to land us on a plateau of satisfaction with our newfound perspective. Being alert to this possibility, our customized critical-path analysis lets us enjoy a temporary rest but then warns us that it's time to get back to work.

Another common sticking point may either prevent us from starting on the path or may retard our progress at any point along the way. The different variations of it all result from war between our "higher" and "lower" aspects. We feel that our intuition is leading us astray and that pursuing such a nebulous thing as self-definition is an egotistical pursuit which, furthermore, is impractical and unrealistic. We tell ourselves that keeping the questions and doubts constantly on our minds leads us in circles, prevents us from living our lives, causes confusion and even depression. And we conclude that we'd better pay attention to conventional wisdom and get back to living "normal" lives.

*\* See Art's article titled "Critical Path to Nirvana."*