

Heart Journey **by Mary Juno**

Stage Seven: Spiritual Stress Test and Surrender

Every spiritual student is tested while on the path, and every spiritual path ends in surrender. It is the natural course of spiritual development. Heart Journey is no exception in this regard. The test at this stage is one of open-hearted surrender. Nothing unusual or extraordinary has been added to Heart Journey; nothing important to your spiritual maturity has been left out. Testing is highly individualized and specific to the spiritual needs of the student. It is pre-programmed from the very beginning by one's personality, level of desire, ability to surrender, and spiritual development. Essentially, the test is a reflection of yourself and your coping mechanisms. It is a product of the choices you have made, the actions you have taken, and the ones you have avoided. Think of it as a spiritual stress test. There is no malice intended. No one wants to see you fail, least of all God, and in reality, no one ever fails outright in their journey to God; some travelers are temporarily delayed. Sooner or later, in this life or in another space, everyone surrenders.

Testing can occur on the physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual level, and any combination thereof. By their very nature, some tests span more than one level. Testing is not meant to be difficult though it can be if you forget what you have learned and stray from the path. The adjustment being made is in the balance of desire and surrender. Previously, you have clearly stated what you wished to manifest through attraction and receptivity. Regardless whether manifestation in cooperation with your co-creative Partner did or did not occur exactly as hoped, complete surrender is now the task at hand. Desire is no longer tempered by surrender; personal desire of any kind is superseded by surrender to God and with good reason. By surrendering and accepting what God has in mind for you, you can be abundant again, though in a different way, in a way you could never have imagined. Complete surrender can ultimately lead to a Divine upgrade and a new way of being in the world.

These are the four tasks you will be tested on: lovingness, spiritual principles, trust in God, and surrender. During the time of testing, you will be asked to remain open-hearted and remember the love you experienced since beginning your Heart Journey. You are to exemplify that love and pass it onto others by being kind, caring, and compassionate. You are also expected to adhere to the spiritual principles you have learned so far. Do not stray because conditions change or your ability to manifest wanes. Trust your co-creative Partner, God, come what may, even if communication stops. Continue according to plan, meditating and reflecting, putting one foot in front of the other. Finally, surrender to the process. It is meant to prepare you for a mindset of acceptance. You will not be tested on your ability to manifest through attraction and receptivity which you may have already experienced in previous stages of heart openness. You may continue to manifest, but you are more likely to fail at manifestation at this stage of spiritual development, or at least hit a dry spell for various reasons. This can be a real problem for those who have grown to depend on this ability.

Inability to manifest

One format the spiritual stress test can take occurs when the ability to manifest abundance becomes an overwhelming ego trip. Early successful manifestations can be followed quickly by acquisition and financial over-extension. The assumption is that if you can do this now, you can do this always and eventually manifest bigger and better benefits. If you fall into this trap, at some point, the pressure is on to maintain an abundant lifestyle at all costs. This is a precarious position to be in. Gone completely is the, "Not my will, but Thy Will," commitment to surrender. God is reduced from a co-creative Partner giving guidance to a mere provider or worse. God will not bend to your will nor will God support an ego trip.

Sooner or later everyone hits a manifestation dry spell. If you are financially over extended at that time and a manifestation junkie, anxiety will set in, followed quickly by the urge to take control. Spiritually, you can regress and begin to ignore ease versus difficulty signals; you just want to get your abundance fix. Spiritual principles and practices will be dropped along with a commitment to surrender. In the developing panic, you won't recall the love you experienced with God or the trust and guidance established in the co-creative partnership. Instead, you will feel alone, abandoned, and angry over the inability to manifest.

If you take God and the process of manifestation through attraction and receptivity for granted, thinking you have mastered some formula, you will fall from grace. You cannot take God out of the equation and continue to attract and manifest. If you have seriously overstepped your financial limitations, the dry spell will have serious economic consequences. Fortunately, few people will be tested to this extent, and as expected, the testing is of their own making. It is the ego-driven individual who creates unsustainable circumstances that magnify the testing of surrender. Do not be seduced by your initial ability to manifest. It is not likely to last. It was never the goal of Heart Journey and will never be the goal of any spiritual path. Communion with God is the true and final goal.

Situational test

Some tests seem purely situational. It is not uncommon for a person with strong spiritual assets to end up in a place that could use some uplifting, positive energy. This can occur in either your professional or personal life. You might have recently relocated for one reason or another, or your new awareness of spiritual input and cleansing of emotional negativity could have opened your eyes to the truth already around you. Suddenly, dysfunction seems to be the norm. You develop an aversion for gossip and drama and find it frustrating when time, energy, and resources are wasted on pettiness. You long for a more enlightened venue with like-minded spiritual individuals. Where is the love? Creativity? Kindness? It lies within you and you need to show it. It is hard to spread love and joy in a black hole, but that is probably what you are meant to do. It might be your task to carry light into that dark place and hold that space sacred. Your test is to express love and kindness when there is anger. Can you stand your spiritual ground and not fall into the trap others have already succumbed to?

A situational test frequently comes with a holding pattern. You get stuck in a set of circumstances, unable to move forward. You are where you are for a reason; the reason may or may not be of your own choosing. Perhaps you stay because your job provides much needed security, or you are due to retire soon with a pension. You might yearn for a different profession, but feel your family responsibilities would make a transition difficult or risky. If you are in a failing relationship, you might decide to stay for the children or until the finances are worked out and arrangements can be made. Sometimes, the reason you are stuck is unknown or totally beyond your control. You don't understand why you cannot sell your house and relocate, or transfer your job from one office to another. Trust that your co-creative Partner knows the why and wherefore. If it feels like you are stuck in a holding pattern, you are being called to surrender to the situation, especially if difficulty arises whenever you try to leave. This is your spiritual path for the time being. Be loving while you are here and adhere to the principles and practices you have learned. As soon as ease arises and doors fly open, move on.

Test of service to others

Testing can come in the form of service to others. You may get involved in a cause or respond to a desperate need arising locally, nationally, or internationally. You or your family might be faced with a crisis that demands your immediate attention. In these cases, the test of surrender takes the form of subjugating your plans and desires to the needs of others. It is your time to give back and perform acts of service willingly and with love.

The trap many fall into while serving others, especially when illness of a family member is involved, is one of distraction from spiritual practices like meditation and prayer. External demands can completely monopolize your time and energy causing you to disconnect from your co-creative Partner. In addition, it is extremely difficult to attract and manifest under these circumstances. There is no time or space for creative ideas or navigational corrections. You become so focused on doing and providing that you stop being. The result is you drift without an anchor.

Example of Service to Others

In 2005, both of my parents were diagnosed with debilitating illnesses. My youngest child was just graduating from college. Several of my siblings and I banded together to buy and renovate a home in Connecticut for our parents so they could move north from Florida and get the help they needed. At the same time, I relocated from my home in Maryland to Connecticut.

My parents' needs quickly became overwhelming. Caregiving shifts grew to twelve hours a day for a week at a time until twenty-hour care became necessary. Even though good caregivers were hired and both parents spent time in a nursing home, the demands for my time and attention were great. After my father passed, my mother still required twenty-four hour care when she left the nursing home and returned to the community.

Besides my parents' decline and the disabilities my father faced in the last ten months of his life, the most upsetting development during this time was that communication with God fell away. Did I meditate

daily? No. I felt bad about this, but after twelve hours of caregiving, I was exhausted and needed to shop for food, pay my bills, do laundry, and attend to business as best I could. I felt lucky to have been able to sleep. I had no time to create or even think creatively. My brain was numb and I definitely felt adrift. The best I could do was hold to the spiritual principles I had learned and be loving and kind to my parents even during the toughest times of caregiving. I did not lose sight of the purpose associated with this time and the reasons I had chosen this path, but I felt disconnected from God.

God had been my touchstone and co-creative Partner for many years in my life. Without the unwavering support and guidance I had grown used to, I became confused. I honestly did not know if I was doing the right thing. Was it my path to spend years caring for my parents? Had I lost my way spiritually by being overwhelmed by their physical needs? Sitting in meditation or even prayer while my parents were not cared for did not seem spiritual. I begged God repeatedly to tell me what to do. There was no detectable response, no ease or flow, only a new caregiving task and a new health crisis that demanded my time and attention.

Meanwhile, I had arrived in Connecticut with a substantial saving account. Since I did not know what the future would bring or how my parents' needs might escalate, I had been financially conservative when purchasing a home and setting up a budget. Still, the manifestation dry spell hit hard. I was never in danger of losing my home or going bankrupt, but I was dismayed by the depletion of my savings. Business all but stopped and I had no time to focus on career endeavors or generate new business. Each attempt was met by an immediate caregiving task. Financial stress only added to my sense of the abandonment and loneliness which was both spiritual and emotional. Since moving north, I had not had the freedom to participate in groups or cultivate new friendships. I became isolated and at times even found it difficult to visit my out of state grown children.

The good news is that everything comes to pass. Eventually, my caregiving responsibilities lightened enough for me to go back to work. Ease reappeared and difficulty fell away. The flow of abundance slowly returned even though I did not push it or make requests. I was content to let it be whatever it intended to be without desiring. Finally, I am climbing out of debt. After I renewed my meditation practice I was back in communication with my co-creative Partner. God still did not answer my burning question, "Did I do the right thing in caring for my parents for so many years?" Perhaps it wasn't God's to address. This was all just my test of surrender, a test of my own making. I am in a different place because of caregiving, and it is a good place.

Health issue test

Sometimes the test of surrender comes in the form of your own health issue, especially if you have been burning the candle at both ends and not taking care of yourself. As mentioned before, tests are of your own making and can reflect an innate weakness or spiritual immaturity. If you have been ignoring your body and any warning signals that arose, you will be faced with a health challenge sooner or later and this might be your surrender test. Regardless of how you handle the health developments medically, it is especially important in this case to remain in contact with your co-creative Partner.

Relationship issue

As you progress spiritually, relationships need to be renewed regularly to remain current. In the best situation significant others will grow with you psychologically and spiritually as you cleanse and adopt principles and practices. Any relationship that is a major deterrent to the path you are on might fall away or become meaningless as a gulf develops over time. It may be difficult for your partner to understand your experiences, but if the love is there, the relationship will survive and even thrive. In this situation, it is crucial that you express unconditional love for others. It has been said that relationships are the hardest yoga you will ever practice and this is especially true when one has a spiritual growth spurt and the other partner does not. This does not preclude compatibility or others catching up later on. If love is truly there, trust that the relationship can be sustained and renewed.

The important thing to remember is that Heart Journey or any spiritual path is not the cause of misfortune. Sooner or later, challenges arise in every life. Heart Journey and the spiritual path are also not the cause of testing. The transition from desire tempered by surrender to complete surrender is innate to developing spiritual maturity. It is to be as expected as a baby learning to crawl or walk or an elder aging. The test is not the hardship. The test is what you do under less than ideal or stressful circumstances.

I have said it before, God uses good bait. Abundance is good bait, but the ability to manifest abundance through attraction and receptivity is not indicative of spiritual attainment, nor is it the true spiritual lesson. It simply means that you are able to open your heart, work co-creatively with God, and understand the process needed for formation. A sign of true spiritual growth is the ability to remain open-hearted and loving when the abundance stops, communication is interrupted, and you are never sure if you are on the right path, doing the right thing. You can only put one foot in front of the other and proceed in a loving manner, trusting that God is with you. After you have surrendered completely to your situation while adhering to the principles and practices you have adopted, you will have reached a level of spiritual maturity that allows you to slowly begin to move forward and onward to "Stage Eight: Acceptance and Generation."