Improving Myself or Judging Myself?

When Growth Becomes a Demand

We often speak of self-improvement as something unquestionably good.

- Become better.
- Do better.
- Think better.
- Live better.

Books are written about it.

Courses are built around it.

And much of modern life quietly encourages us to keep improving.

There is nothing inherently wrong with learning, developing new skills or changing how we live.

Yet I have begun wondering about something that often goes unnoticed.

When I say I want to improve myself, what am I really asking?

Am I responding to something I have understood?

Or am I judging the person I am today?

The Hidden Judgement

Sometimes the wish to improve begins with an unspoken assumption.

I am not good enough.

Something about me needs correcting.

I must become different before I can feel acceptable.

These thoughts may not be expressed openly.

They may appear as ambition, discipline, responsibility or even a desire for spiritual growth.

But beneath them, there may be a quiet comparison.

Who I am.

And who I believe I should be.

When this comparison becomes our starting point, the Self gradually becomes a project.

- Something to repair.
- Something to upgrade.
- Something to monitor.

And perhaps, without noticing, we begin treating ourselves as a problem that needs solving.

When Growth Becomes Performance

Sometimes our efforts to improve are guided less by understanding than by expectations.

- How should I behave?
- How should I feel?
- How should I appear?
- What would a more successful, mature or spiritually developed person do?

We may become more disciplined.

- More productive.
- More agreeable.
- More accomplished.

And yet, inwardly, something may become increasingly tense.

We begin watching ourselves.

- Correcting ourselves.
- Comparing ourselves.

Trying to maintain the image of the person we believe we ought to be.

Our Public Self may become beautifully dressed while our Inner Life receives very little attention.

What appears outwardly as improvement may sometimes be an increasingly elaborate form of self-management.

And the question remains:

Am I growing, or am I becoming more skilled at performing the person I think I should be?

From Improvement to Alignment

Perhaps there is another way to approach change.

Not by beginning with judgement.

But by beginning with Presence.

- To notice how I actually feel.
- To recognise how I respond.
- To become curious about what happens within me when life changes.
- To see where my Outer Life and Inner Life may no longer be moving together.

There is no need to begin by declaring something wrong.

We can simply notice.

- Perhaps I have been agreeing when I wanted to say no.
- Perhaps I have been carrying responsibilities that no longer belong to me.
- Perhaps I have been pursuing something that once mattered but no longer feels meaningful.
- Or perhaps I have discovered an interest that I would like to explore.

From this understanding, a different question may arise.

Not:

"How do I become a better person?"

But:

"What no longer fits the life I am living?"

And sometimes:

"What is now asking for my attention?"

This is not improvement driven by inadequacy.

It is a movement towards alignment.

Weather, Not Worth

Our Inner Life has its own changing weather.

Some days we feel energetic.

Other days we feel tired.

Sometimes we are unsettled, anxious, frustrated or uncertain.

And sometimes we experience clarity.

If we judge every change in our inner weather, we may begin treating ordinary human experience as evidence that something is wrong with us.

A difficult day becomes a failure.

An uncomfortable emotion becomes a weakness.

A moment of uncertainty becomes something to overcome immediately.

But what if we approached our inner weather with curiosity?

On a tiring day, perhaps the body needs rest.

On an unsettled day, perhaps something needs attention.

When anger arises, perhaps there is a boundary to understand.

When clarity comes, perhaps there is a step we are ready to take.

Not every feeling needs to be obeyed.

Not every discomfort needs to be removed.

And not every difficult experience requires us to change who we are.

Our inner weather tells us something about our experience. It does not determine our worth.

When Effort Is No Longer a Struggle Against Ourselves

Alignment does not mean that life becomes effortless.

Sometimes change requires courage.

Sometimes it requires repetition, patience and sustained effort.

We may need to learn a new way of responding.

- We may need to apologise.
- We may need to establish a boundary.
- We may need to leave a familiar situation or begin something uncertain.

But there is a difference between effort guided by understanding and effort driven by self-rejection.

One says:

I am wrong, and I must become someone better.

The other says:

I can see what is happening, and I may choose another way.

The action may look similar.

Yet the relationship we have with ourselves is very different.

We are no longer fighting ourselves in order to grow.

We are participating more consciously in our own lives.

A Quieter Question

Perhaps the difficulty is not with improvement itself.

It is with the judgement we sometimes attach to it.

We can learn without believing we are inadequate.

We can change without rejecting who we have been.

We can recognise a mistake without turning ourselves into the mistake.

And we can grow without making growth another obligation.

Self-judgement asks:

"What is wrong with me?"

Awareness asks:

"What is happening within me?"

And alignment asks:

"What might be an appropriate next step?"

Perhaps flourishing does not require us to become an ideal version of ourselves.

Perhaps it begins when we stop measuring our worth against an imagined future self.

We remain free to learn.

- Free to change.
- Free to explore.
- Free to recognise when something no longer fits.

And free to remain as we are when nothing needs changing.

We do not need to judge ourselves into growth.

We can allow understanding to guide the way we grow.

Atmadeva Devatma

The Living Wisdom of Arriving