It is said that one should not fixate on experiences in the spiritual path. The seeking for spiritual succor, which is in essence a quest for ending of suffering, is not an easy path for those of us who are caught up in our worldly matters, or, in other words – samsāra. How we travel the spiritual path is dependent on many things, including our constitution (gunas that dominate and define our personalities). We could travel the path of devotion (Bhakti), of selfless service (Karma), of psychosomatic control (Raja) or intellectual finesse (Jnana). Often, we will find ourselves moving between one or the other. Depending on the path, and our personality/history, we will find that we idealize a “final” goal of our practices. It could be getting a vision of our beloved deity, or awakening to our Self-nature, or Kundalini Awakening, etc. All of these are actually milestones on the same path.

The true objective of all our quest is ultimately to find an end to suffering. There can be no “liberation” without that. Because what is the liberation that a spiritual path provides, if not cessation of suffering?

Now what that suffering is, is open for many interpretations and discussions. For the sake of the topic at hand, we will define suffering as the resistance to change; change being the experience of pleasure and pain, and their inevitable cessation.

So this article is about milestones and signposts. What would these be, in the spiritual path? They could be dreams, visions and encounters with deities and divine beings, they could be with manifestation of powers (siddhis), and with deepening maturity, clarity and insights into the nature of the world as it exists, and it’s machinations.
The diagram above shows us how the mind is so besotted with objects that we lose ourself in them. Even when one turns the attention back from the world towards the Self, inner objects are encountered.

Of the five sheaths, the first, the sheath of food (annamaya kosha) is our interface between the inner and outer worlds and is an outer experience. The four progressively subtler sheaths, namely, the Energy (Prāṇamaya), Mind (Manomaya), Intellect (Vijnānamaya) and Blissful (ānandamaya) are inner experiences.

During meditation, many experiences will come and go. One might experience one’s personal deity (Ishta Devatā) in their inner vision. One might experience various astral or divine beings, different lokas (realms/dimensions). All these are still experiences, so in terms of Self-realization, they are still phenomena that are being experienced. The experiencer is who we are. And it IS easy to lose focus of the experiencer — just like we get absorbed in the external world, we can also get absorbed in these inner experiences. In fact, meditators with certain level of attainment can create entire universes and worlds in their inner experiences and get engrossed in them, forgetting the Self entirely.

Be that as it may, it also behooves us to not close ourselves up to “experiences” either. These experiences can be very powerful tools to shake the hold that our mental apparatus has, via our mundane experiences.

Depending on our “history” (past life karma) and our constitution (which guna dominates our personality), we can start recieving teachings in either the waking state, the dream state or in-between the waking and dream states.

For example, from my teenage through early adulthood, I was a died-in-wool atheist. A follower of scientism without knowing that such a word existed. I held (as do many educated youth) that if something cannot be studied using the tools and logic of hard science, it was not real. So, I summarily rejected all concepts of God, divinity, chance, etc. My world was a random world of accidents and chaos. That lasted until my father’s untimely demise. With his passing, my world of cards literally came crashing down on me. The vacuum left in his wake, was chaotic to say the least, and us hapless survivors were left to navigate the harsh realities of the world without much filter. It is then, when everything seemed to be falling apart, is when, humbled and searching for an answer, I found divinity again.

I started having dreams that left me reassured, despite the harshness of our circumstances, and almost hand-to-mouth survival. I ended up having to give up worrying about the future entirely, and focused instead on what I had control over – my studies and making myself market-worthy once I graduated from college.
After I moved to the US, I was affected by the problems that started around 2000 and found myself without a job in 2002. I spent the “time off” practicing Taijiquan, Meditation, Pranayama and Japa. I would have recurring dreams of an old Chinese Daoist master visiting me and teaching me Tai chi.

I also would get recurring dreams of some Himalayan Sadhus urging me to move to the Himalayas. That was a time of great turmoil in my life, both career-wise as well as personally. I was torn over the strong call of the Himalayas and my responsibility towards my family and my wife.

As the weeks rolled into months, I was struggling to keep the hope of getting proper employment and suffering from intense nightmares (visitations by ill-intentioned beings). In desperation I prayed to God “Please...show me some respite O Lord!”. That night, I was visited by an unknown Yogi in my dream, who gave me a mantra. He told me to chant this mantra every day, as many times as I could. Within two weeks of my starting the chanting, I mysteriously got a job which I had not applied for. Subsequently, in my nightmares, I developed enough awareness, and mysteriously knew how to apply the mantra, to vanquish my tormentors. That Mantra has been a mainstay of my practice since then.

Over the years since then, I’ve had many dream teachings, and many mysterious experiences, which I cannot explain rationally.

After my first teacher moved to another state, I met my Master in 2015, and requested him to accept me as his student. Before ever meeting him in person, he had visited me in a dream. He initiated me with a forefinger touch to my forehead, over the 3rd eye. Told me to inhale into my lower dan tien (near the navel region) from my 3rd eye after he disconnected from me. I started feeling the room buzz and swim and sat down for a few minutes. After that, I drove home. That night I was unable to sleep, and so sat down to meditate. My 3rd eye felt like it would burst. Over the next fifteen days, I spontaneously entered meditative states, sometimes even doing simple things like buying groceries at a store or driving. Strange thing is, this was not always a sense of cessation, but rather, a connectedness to all beings and things. My heart filled with such love that I cannot verbally explain. I was in constant union with creation itself.

My master would connect with me at early hours of the morning (between 3 and 4 AM) and I would enter a state in between the waking and dream states. And I would see the most amazing things like vortices open up over me and pull me into it, purifying me, cleaning me up.

Subsequently, while attending a three day intensive workshop with my Master and several other students, I woke up one morning around 3:30 AM, with a loud voice chanting a mantra in my ear. It was so loud that I thought someone was playing a practical joke on me. But I
was in a hotel room, sharing a room with an elderly tai chi brother. The Mantra that was transmitted to me was a shakti mantra, and somehow I knew how to apply it during meditation it resulted in a huge boost in my meditation and performing what I call “internal yajnas”.

Since then, I witnessed many things which will sound too far-fetched for most to even believe. Each of these experiences have however reinforced to me how our “reality” is neither particularly real, nor for that matter the only “reality” that exists. As much as our waking world is real, there exist other dimensions and planes of existence, just as the Sages have articulated in our ancient texts.

But, just so we put things into context, they all however are projections of none other than the Self. I have friends who argue about what the value of such experiences is, in that light. For me, the purpose of these experiences culminated in a flash of knowing one day – The world as we know it is indeed nothing but Awareness, but just like our reality, there are many overlapping apparent realities that simultaneously co-exist, at different frequencies. Just like our access is limited by our mind-body adjuncts, there are other similar entities, who have higher access because they are not encumbered by the same limiting adjuncts as we do. A Sage who has siddhis, has them because he has transcended his limiting adjuncts.

These experiences and events play the role of milestones and signposts in our journey of essentially transcending our limiting adjuncts. When the journey seems long and arduous, these milestones and signposts give us hope, and let us know that we are on the right track.