



Sidebar G: States and Stages

Part I. The Relation of States of Consciousness and Stages of Consciousness: No Model Is Complete without Both

Hazelton walked from the front of the stage back to the podium. “Let me switch gears here a bit. We need some more background information, so let’s focus on this topic: what is the actual relation of *states* of consciousness and *stages* of consciousness? That is, how do *temporary states* eventually become *permanent traits*?”

“We have a theory at IC, first tentatively proposed in *Integral Psychology*, that draws on both ancient psychology and modern psychology, but both set and reframed in an AQAL context; it suggests the following relation between states and stages:

“To begin with, the three great *states* of consciousness (waking, dreaming, sleeping) are said to correspond with the three great *realms* of being (gross, subtle, causal)—this is an idea found in Vedanta and Vajrayana, for example. This simply means that, each time you are in a different state of consciousness, you can ‘see’ a different world or realm (because consciousness and being, or epistemology and ontology, are inseparable). For example, when you are in a dream state, you see a dream world, a subtle world of images and visions and archetypes; in the waking state, you see the sensorimotor world of rocks and rivers and houses. Each of the three great states shows us a different “world” or “realm.”

“These three great *states* are also said to contain, or to be able to contain, various *sheaths* or *levels* or *stages* of consciousness (called the nine *vijnanas* in Buddhism, the ten *sefirot* in Kabbalah, the seven chakras in yoga, the five *koshas* in Vedanta, and so on). Of

course, these ‘levels’ are not rigid rungs in a ladder but overlapping waves or spheres of consciousness. Today we will use the 5 koshas or sheaths as a simple example of these levels of consciousness; they are said to be: *anna, prana, mano, vijnana, and ananda*—which we can translate roughly as the material level, the emotional-sexual level, the mental level, the higher mental, and the bliss-formless. These *levels* of consciousness are really just a variation on the Great Nest of Being, which, in its general outline—matter to body to mind to soul to spirit—is found in most of the sophisticated wisdom traditions. Of course, at IC we dramatically reframe those levels in a post-metaphysical fashion: they are not pre-existing structures but enacted worldviews. Still, we can use the sheaths as a simple example of a more generic point, which is the relation of level/stages and states.

According to both Vedanta and Vajrayana, those 5 *levels/stages* of consciousness are related to the 3 *states* and the 3 *realms* as follows:

For the typical person, the *material level* or sheath constitutes the *gross realm* or world, the sensorimotor world which is experienced in the *waking state*. So we have a *state* of consciousness that reveals a *realm* or world, which contains various *levels*. In the *waking state* you see a gross or sensorimotor *realm*, which contains the material/physical *level*.

Moving to the subtle realm, let’s first note that in these traditional 3-realm, 3-state models (gross/subtle/causal realms corresponding with waking/dreaming/sleeping states), “the subtle realm” includes ALL of the levels or sheaths between the end limits of the material-gross sheath and formless-causal sheath: in this case, the subtle realm includes the three levels/sheaths of emotions, mind, and higher mind (as we will later explain in more detail). Those three *levels* are all contained in the *subtle realm* which can be accessed or experienced in the *dream state* (and in other states such as meditation, shamanic voyaging, etc.—but right now we are focusing on the three great natural states of waking, dreaming, sleeping). Thus, in the *dream state* you see a subtle *realm*, a realm that can contain all the in-between *levels* of emotion, mind, and higher mind.

“Finally, in the deep-sleep *state*, you see a causal *realm*, a realm that contains nothing but the *level* or sheath of bliss-formlessness.

“Okay, friends, why do Vajrayana, Vedanta, the Neoplatonists, and so many of the other great wisdom traditions make those correlations? It’s actually very simple. When you are awake, you are, at the very least, aware of the physical world, or the material level of reality (the *anna* sheath). Of course, you might be aware of other levels, too; but the thing that everybody *shares* is an awareness of the gross realm with its physical level of reality. When you are awake, you can see mountains, trees, airplanes, houses, lakes, your physical body, and empirical objects of all sorts—the whole sensorimotor world that is the gross realm.

“But when you go to sleep at night, and you begin to dream, you do not see the material world. In the dream state, there is no matter, no nature, no Gaia, no physical body, no sensorimotor rocks and rivers. Rather, you see images, you feel emotions, you can even have thoughts and perhaps luminous visions. In other words, you *do* have access to the levels of emotion, mind, and higher mind (or the *prana*, *mano*, and *vijnana* levels). So you have access to the overall subtle realm, but you do not have a direct awareness of the gross realm. That’s clear, yes?

“Finally, when you pass into the deep, dreamless state—the causal or formless realm—then not only does the gross realm fall away, the subtle realm also falls away: there are no emotions, no thoughts, no images, no dreams, no visions, no nuttin’—except vast emptiness or formlessness, a blissful release from all forms, high or low or in between. And thus in the causal realm there is only the *ananda* ‘level’ of blissful formlessness.

“That model adds one more very important item: *you can learn to enter all these higher realms while awake or fully conscious*. And when you can enter all of them while awake, then you are Awakened or Enlightened, because you have access to the full spectrum of consciousness and its realms, and thus you are Free from the binding power of being limited to only a few of them, a limitation that cuts into your soul with its fragmented partiality.

“Now that part of our integral model—which can be found in rudimentary form in Vedanta, Vajrayana, etc.—is really a very profound phenomenology of states and stages, isn’t it? We will unpack it a little more carefully in a moment, but you can probably already start to see that this simple, elegant model shows how *states* of consciousness fit with worlds or *realms* of being, and how those fit with *levels/stages* of consciousness (namely, different worlds are disclosed by different states of consciousness, and states can contain several stages). This model has the further advantage of being based on direct experiences, many of which (waking, dreaming, sleeping) you yourselves have had. For these reasons, it is probably one of the simplest yet profound psychospiritual systems available, and certainly one of the oldest. Of course, that simple model doesn’t answer all the questions or cover all the bases (it needs to be set in an ‘all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states’ context), but for the breakthrough insights that this ancient model offers, we have much to learn.”

Hazelton smiled radiantly, walked to the front of the stage. “And there is one last piece of information that is crucial, and this really is the key to the entire relation of states and stages:

“To begin with, notice that most people directly experience the subtle and causal realms only when they fall asleep, only when they are unconscious. That is, they experience the dream and deep-sleep states mostly when they are NOT AWAKE. And so, for the average person, the waking state of the gross realm seems to be the MOST REAL state. The subtle and causal seem ‘less real.’

“But a funny thing happens when consciousness continues its growth and development (especially when helped by spiritual practice). As consciousness grows stronger and stronger, first the dream realm, and then the causal realm, can be entered *while awake*. An ever-wakeful Presence, a brilliant clarity of Now-ness, begins to permeate the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep state, until all states are suffused with a radiant Wakefulness, and you are... *Awakened*, never to be fooled by the dreams of life or the illusions that drive ordinary souls who take them for real.

“Accordingly, as this Awakening process begins and starts to mature, this Wakefulness increasingly pervades all aspects of the waking state and begins to spill over into the dream state, rescuing them both from a half-asleep fog. As one then enters the dream state, one begins to *lucid dream*—to remain conscious where the average person passes out or goes blank. What happens is that the dream state is being converted from unconscious to conscious, and thus it begins to yield all of its visionary, archetypal, subtle revelations. Moreover—and just as important—because you have made the dream state conscious to some degree, you have started to transcend it—it has ceased to enslave you; it is now object, not subject; you now embrace your dreams, they don’t embrace you.

“Likewise, if consciousness continues to gain strength, then a very tacit awareness will persist even into the deep dreamless state, and you will awaken as vast, formless, empty, infinite Consciousness without an object—a direct experience, it is said, of Nirvana, of the Abyss, the Ursprung, Ayn, the infinite Void, the groundless Ground of all that is.

“As both lucid dreaming and lucid sleeping start to occur (usually as one progresses and develops in meditation), one can begin to experience these higher states and realms and bring them into consciousness *during the waking state*. For example, in a type of meditation known as savikalpa samadhi (or mediation with an object of awareness), one can directly (while fully awake) experience the higher reaches of the subtle realm; in states of nirvikalpa and jnana samadhi, one directly experiences the causal realm; in states of sahaja samadhi, one directly realizes the nondual (which we will discuss in a moment).

“In all of those cases, one is developing one’s capacity to experience higher states by converting them into *permanent acquisitions*. States that are normally unconscious have been made conscious; states that are normally temporary have been made permanent. One progresses from a Wakefulness of the waking state, through a Wakefulness of dream state, to a Wakefulness of the deep sleep state: one’s consciousness fluidly unfolds from gross to subtle to causal embrace, with each expansion of consciousness including and enveloping more and more realities. (For the stage- or wave-like nature of these developments, see below, Part II.)

One thus increasingly gains a liberation from the binding torment of being identified with lesser, smaller, shallower states; one gains an increasing liberation from their binding spell, until one can transcend and include all states in pure empty Consciousness as such—an ultimate realization or enlightenment that is known by many names, but the Great Liberation will do.

“So what does this tell us? Namely, that all three of the great states of consciousness are converted to permanent waking realities by developing through the levels of consciousness.” Hazelton looked around. “Let me say that again, because that one sentence ties together everything we have discussed: temporary *states* become *permanent traits* by developing through the *stages* of consciousness. And there, in a nutshell, is the ultimate relation of states and stages.”

“Kim, are you following all this?”

“It’s great, isn’t it?”

“I’m not sure. I think I’m lost. We at Artificial Intelligence get none of this stuff in our classes. It’s sort of scary how limited our understanding of consciousness is. We’re supposed to be the guys who understand human intelligence so well that we will be able to get supercomputers to reproduce it and then totally surpass it. We are totally deluding ourselves, is what it is.”

“Yes, Wilber, you have that totally deluded look all over your face.”

“Thanks, Kim. Did you have *any* friends when you were growing up?”

“So let’s take a short overview here, still using just the simple Vedanta model of 5 levels and 3 states, and show exactly what is involved with states versus stages/levels. This is important because most psychospiritual models focus on either states or stages, but few adequately integrate both, which is clearly required.

“It’s really very simple, I promise. You can have an *altered state* or temporary *peak experience* of any of the three great realms of being—gross, subtle, and causal—and you can do so at virtually *any stage* or level of development. Why? Because even an infant wakes,

dreams, and sleeps. And because the infant has access to these three great states (waking, dreaming, sleeping), the infant has access to the three great realms of being (gross, subtle, causal)—and that can happen at any stage of development (because at every stage, infants and children and adults all wake, dream, and sleep). But as for the levels or stages themselves, they unfold and develop over time; that is the very meaning of a *stage* of development. Thus, although the infant has access to the three great states, the infant does not have access to all the levels or stages that can occur in those states, because those have to *develop* and unfold in its own case. Is that clear? Yes?

“For example, using this simple 3-state, 5-stage model, a human being can be at ‘level/stage/sheath 2’—that is, their general center of gravity is at the emotional-sexual wave of development (in early childhood)—and they can still have a temporary peak experience of the subtle and the causal realms—because they have perfect access to dream and deep-sleep states, and thus they can ‘peek’ experience them. But they—the child at level 2, in this case—will not be able to experience all the stages of the mind level, such as formal operational thinking, because those have not yet emerged and developed.

“Precisely because the basic levels or stages have not yet emerged and stabilized, the altered states of a subtle or causal nature are not permanent. They are merely peak experiences; they come and they go quickly; they cannot be permanently contained—there is, so to speak, nothing to hold them in place, no structures or stable patterns in the psyche that can maintain access to these higher states, which are therefore always temporary and passing. So anybody at virtually any stage can have a profound, authentic, genuine state-experience of a subtle or causal realm, but they will *not* be able to experience those subtle or causal realms in a *permanent* fashion—the peak experience or altered state will come and go.

“Likewise, they will rarely be able to remain conscious when they enter those states during sleep at night; they will not remain conscious in the dream and deep sleep states. Of course, there are always a few exceptions, especially in highly developed souls, but generally speaking, it is only with further development through the stages or levels of consciousness—

moving from emotional-sexual to mind to higher mind to bliss-formlessness—that individuals will be able to successively convert those *passing* states into *permanent* traits that will remain in consciousness and not merely come and go like a drive-by shooting.

“In short, you can convert temporary states to permanent traits if you *evolve* through the great spectrum of consciousness, the great spiral of development. As we have often said here at IC, the levels of the spectrum of consciousness are not predetermined, pre-given, rigid molds to which you must conform in every way; they are rather great morphogenetic potentials and fluid waves of increasing consciousness and care. Exactly how you navigate those waves and streams of potential unfolding is up to you, but they are given as open possibilities to all beings.

“By the time you develop to the higher mental wave (vijnana stage, or sheath 4)—that is, using our simple 5-level model, by the time your general center of gravity stably reaches stage 4 or the higher mental wave of consciousness—you will begin to lucid dream (because you have now developed to the uppermost reaches of the subtle, and therefore the subtle itself becomes object). If you develop further to the ananda-mayakosha (sheath 5)—so that your center of gravity is actually at the ananda/causal level—then you will remain tacitly awake even in the deep sleep state. (Incidentally, we have compelling EEG studies of long-term meditators who remain conscious during all sleep states, including deep dreamless sleep. See *One Taste*.)

“That is why we summarize all this as: By evolving through the waves in the spectrum of consciousness, passing states become permanent traits.

“The net result of this evolution of consciousness is very simple: all of the levels or waves or stages of consciousness are now *available to the waking state*; or, conversely, the waking state has expanded to include all levels, include the entire spectrum of consciousness, so that the Immediate Presence, Now-Awareness, and Brilliant Clarity first available only in the waking state has permeated every possibility of your being, drenching it in the Spirit that it always already is.

“So at any stage of your own evolution, of course you can have all sorts of amazing altered states, nonordinary states, advanced meditative states, satoris, and profound spiritual experiences. Nobody is denying that. But those states will come and go, passing through your psyche in a way that cannot be reliably maintained because the psyche has not yet grown enough depth to stably contain the vastness of these higher realms. That is why we say that the potentials contained in states become actual stages with increasing evolution.

“In this regard, one of the things we want to remember is that there is an important difference between *state experiences* and *stage experiences*. According to the simple Vedanta/Vajrayana model (and remember, other models will also work, we are simply using this one to get us started): When you experience one of the three great states (waking, dreaming, sleeping), the thing that defines that state is its essential characteristic. For example, if you are having a waking-state experience, *all* waking-state experiences have one thing in common: you can see the gross, sensorimotor realm. It doesn't matter what else you see, if you can see the sensorimotor world, you're in the waking state. Thus, the essential characteristic of the waking state is: you can see the gross sensorimotor world.

“Likewise, the essential characteristic of the dream state is: there is no sensorimotor world. More precisely, you are floating in a realm that is not material, but it is not yet formless either. So no matter what else you are aware of—and there are all sorts of levels of mind that can float by in the dream state (as we saw, Vedanta maintains that there are at least 3 levels available in the dream/subtle state)—but no matter, if you are *not* formless and *not* in the sensorimotor, then you are in the subtle realm. (This is why it is said that the subtle is also the realm that occurs in the bardo or after-life states.)

“Finally, how do you know you are in the causal realm, such as the deep dreamless state or nirvikalpa samadhi or the cloud of unknowing? Very simple: if there are no gross phenomena and no subtle phenomena: welcome to the causal, a vast formlessness without gross or subtle objects.

“So that is why you can be at virtually any stage or level of development (for example, using the Spiral Dynamics levels, you can be at the purple level, the blue level, the orange level...) and still have a subtle realm experience (which can happen whenever gross objects are not the content of the experience, due to dreaming, shamanic voyaging, trance states, hypnosis, psychedelic-visionary experiences and illuminations, etc.). You are NOT skipping *stages* here, because you are plugging into *states*, natural states that are *already* given and already available because all human beings, starting in the earliest months after conception, wake, dream, and sleep. Actual *stages* CANNOT be skipped, because each stage is a *component* of its successor (this would be like going from atoms to cells and skipping molecules); but the three major *states* are available at virtually any stage under the right circumstances. (Thus, you cannot go from red to green and skip blue and orange; but at *any* of those stages you can have a gross, subtle, or causal peak experience).

“We add one more item: you can have a subtle-state experience at virtually any time, but you will experience that subtle realm *using whatever levels you have developed*: in other words, *states are always interpreted by stages* (we will return to this important idea in a moment). Nonetheless, no matter what level/stage has an experience of the subtle realm, it is said to be the *same* basic subtle realm with the same subtle energy pervading it, even if it is interpreted according to the mental structures that you have present (much as an alcoholic stupor is an alcoholic stupor, whether you’re blue or orange or green.... Same state, different interpretations while in it).

“We saw that the gross, subtle, and causal realms are defined by their essential characteristic. To elaborate on that a bit, according to both Vedanta and Vajrayana, the *common elements* of the subtle state/realms—no matter what stage/level experiences it—are simply the *absence* of gross and causal phenomena, and the *presence* of a subtle energy or subtle body said to support all subtle consciousness (just as the gross body/energy—or sensorimotor matter/energy—is present in all waking states, and the causal body/energy is present in all causal states). Thus, a child, when he or she dreams, is said to be in the same

general subtle realm—with the same general subtle energy—that an adult is, even though the child might interpret that experience mostly using purple and the adult mostly using green (or whatever general stage they are at).

“Technically, in these traditions, a general (broad) state of consciousness is defined as: ‘the perception or consciousness of a particular realm,’ and the realm is defined in part by the body/energy composing it (i.e., its essential characteristic). Thus, the waking state is defined as a perception of the gross realm; the dream state, bardo state, and savikalpa states are a perception of the subtle realm; and deep sleep, nirvana, nirvikalpa, and formless states are a perception of the causal realm. And each of those realms is laced with a different energy or body (which is why ‘realm’ and ‘body’ are often used almost interchangeably: a realm is the particular world populated by particular bodies/energies. Generally, ‘realm’ and ‘body’ are meant to be more ontological—the actual ‘stuff’ of the different worlds—while ‘state’ and ‘level’ are more epistemological—the knowing side of the equation. Incidentally, this traditional metaphysics is of course a pre-Kantian conception; nonetheless, its essential features can be reconstructed in a dynamic, evolutionary, AQAL fashion, resulting in a post-metaphysical expression. See ‘On the Nature of a Post-Metaphysical Spirituality,’ posted on this site. In the following discussion, even if we refer to the traditional metaphysics, we have in mind the strictly post-metaphysical formulation, which itself is found in none of the great traditions).

“So let’s unfold those essential ideas a little more carefully, because the central ideas are incredibly important, I think. We have these major terms: levels/sheaths/stages, states, and realms/bodies. Each of the three great states (waking, dreaming, sleeping) introduces us to a different world or realm (gross, subtle, causal), and each of those realms is defined in part by the ‘stuff’ or ‘matter-energy’ or ‘bodies’ found in it. These ‘bodies’ or ‘energies’ are said to be the *necessary support* of the corresponding consciousness in each realm. Thus, there is the *gross body* (the physical organic body) which is the necessary support of all waking-state consciousness. There is the *subtle body* (such as the dream body you have in the dream state

and, it is said, in the bardo realm), a subtle body which is the necessary support of all the levels of consciousness in the subtle realm (i.e., the subtle body is said to be the subtle energy that supports the prana, mano, and vijnana levels of consciousness). And there is the *causal body*, which is the finest energy/body supporting the ananda level of consciousness.

“This is a profound approach to the mind-body problem, because in effect what this model says is: every state and level of consciousness *necessarily has a body*. Thus, there is the gross bodymind, the subtle bodymind, and the causal bodymind. (Notice that, for Vedanta, there are 5 levels and 3 states/realms/bodies, so that the subtle body can support more than one level: in fact, the claim of these traditions, as we saw, is that the subtle body actually supports all the levels of consciousness in between the end-limits of gross-matter and causal-formless.) *But the important point is that no level of mind or consciousness is without some sort of body.*

“As we at IC would put it, every holon has an Upper Left (mind) and an Upper Right (body) as *inseparable* dimensions of existence *at every level* across the entire spectrum—atoms to worms to apes to buddhas. The ‘mind’ is the consciousness side of the equation, and the ‘body’ includes forms and actual energies that range from gross energies to subtle energies to causal energies. We don’t often depict these subtle and causal energies on the four-quadrant diagram—it’s very difficult to do so on a flat sheet of paper—but they are, by definition, aspects of the UR or matter/energy dimensions of all holons.

“So there is a spectrum of mind or consciousness (Upper Left) and a spectrum of body or energy (Upper Right), and they both go together inseparably, top to bottom and bottom to top. (Of course, we maintain that all holons actually have at least four dimensions: mind and body and social and cultural, so that the experiences of mind and body are inseparably set in sociocultural contexts—which is what moves this conception from premodern metaphysics to postmodern postmetaphysics; but today we are focusing merely on the individual holon and ignoring its sociocultural dimensions.)

“For the great tantric traditions, this bodymind union is not a mere theory but a profound practice. The tantric traditions often use various bodily techniques—the most commonly known is kundalini yoga—to manipulate the gross body, subtle body, and causal body in order to evoke and sustain the *corresponding* states of consciousness that are *supported* by those body/energies: namely, gross body/energy supports a material waking consciousness; subtle body/energy supports dream, bardo, intermediate-level consciousness, and meditative states; and very subtle or causal body/energy supports formless states of consciousness, which open directly into nondual Enlightenment [see note 1 for chap. 14 in SES for an extensive discussion of these topics]). Various meditative practices manipulate these subtle energies in order to evoke the corresponding consciousness across the spectrum—a very profound bodymind practice.

“Okay, dear souls, that’s a quick overview of (a) sheaths/structures/levels/stages, (b) states, and (c) realms/bodies. So let’s now return to the simple point we were trying to make: you can only experience the levels/stages/memes that have emerged so far in your development (and you cannot skip stages or have a peak experience of a considerably higher stage); but you can experience any of the three great states/realms at any of those stages, because everybody wakes, dreams, and sleeps. Got it? Yes? All of that is now blindingly clear, yes?” Hazelton laughed good-naturedly.

“In a moment we will add the last integrating link: a person at any stage can have a peak experience of the three great states, but those state experiences will be *interpreted* differently according to four-quadrant factors, including not only the sociocultural background, but also the stages that are present in the person having the altered state or peak experience. Thus: *states are interpreted by stages*. As I said, we will come back to that important point in a moment.

“So those are a few of the items that help us differentiate between a *state* experience and a stage or *level* experience. A person at the red stage cannot have an experience of the green stage; to experience that level you have to actually evolve to that level. But a person

at any level can have a state experience of gross, subtle, or causal realms, because those natural states are freely available at every stage.

“(A small technical note: in addition to the natural states of waking, dreaming, sleeping, and nondual, there are various ‘non-natural’ or ‘non-typical’ states that have to be trained and therefore are not spontaneously available to all stages: certain meditative states, for example, or various states of shamanic visualization: these all tap into different potentials of the gross, subtle, and causal states, but their actual contours are not usually available unless specifically trained or induced.)

“Now, those of you who are familiar with the 7-chakra system can substitute the 7 chakras for the 5 levels and you will get the same results (there are still 3 major natural states, of course—waking, dreaming, sleeping—but in this case, the overall subtle realm includes 5 levels and not just 3: it includes chakras 2-6, for the same reasons explained above, namely: according to various types of meditative collaborative inquiry intersubjectively conducted by many of the contemplative traditions, the same subtle body/energy supports *all* of the levels between the two end limits of material-gross and causal-formless. Even if there are variations on that subtle energy—astral, etheric, etc.—they are variations on a type, just as there are types of gross or electromagnetic energy—infrared, ultraviolet, x rays, radio waves, etc. And remember, here we are talking about the general subtle *realm* itself, and not any specific subtle stage, which we will discuss later). The point is that any level model can be substituted for the 5-level model of Vedanta and the same general conclusions still apply.

“In a moment, we will take this state and stage/level conception and apply it to the 8 levels/memes of Spiral Dynamics, just to make sure the relation of states and stages can be made as clear as possible—well, at least at this rudimentary level of our own understanding. So stay tuned for that upcoming thrill!”

Part II. States and Stages in Development

“Before we proceed, let me get one last, ugly, technical issue out of the way. This will not be pleasant. Those of you in the audience who have some drugs, now would be the time to take them.” Everybody laughed. I also saw several people reach into their pockets.

“I and many of my colleagues use the term ‘subtle’ in two different ways. Recall that for the Vedanta/Vajrayana, the *overall subtle realm* actually refers to *everything* in between the two end limits of matter (gross) and formless (causal). Vedanta does this because meditative experience discloses that the three basic realms (gross, subtle, and causal, with their corresponding energies) are all that is required to support all of the levels of consciousness: at one end is the densest limit, the material realm with its gross bodies and material energies; at the other end-limit is the formless realm with its causal body and causal energy (the finest energy of all); and in between is everything else—all the various levels of emotions, feelings, mind, higher mind, and so on—because they can all be supported by the vast subtle body and its subtle energy. Of course you can subdivide this if you want, but Vedanta and Vajrayana maintain that these three great realms—gross, subtle, and causal; or Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya—cover the important bases. (They add two more: the ever-present Witness, or *turiya*, and the ever-present Nondual, or *turiyatita*/Svabhavikakaya, but those simply use the energies and realms already present and do not substantially add anything new; e.g., the ever-present Witness simply witnesses all realms and energies, and does not itself contain any; and the Nondual—or Svabhavikakaya—integrates everything that is present, and is not some other or separate realm).

“So, we were talking about the meaning of the word ‘subtle.’ In the first and most technically correct sense, the subtle can contain *all* of the levels between the gross and causal: if you have 5 levels between gross and causal, then the overall subtle contains those 5 levels; if you have 12, then 12. As we saw, the Vedanta itself uses 3 basic levels between the two end-limits of gross and causal, and therefore the overall subtle includes those 3 in-between levels: it includes the prana-mayakosha (the emotional-sexual level, or—to switch to SD—beige), the mano-mayakosha (the levels of the mind, which include, roughly: purple, red, blue,

orange, green, yellow, turquoise), and the *vijnana-mayakosha* (or higher mind, which includes coral/psychic and subtle). And right there you can see the second way that we use the term ‘subtle,’ namely, as the highest *level* of the overall subtle *realm*. And obviously, the subtle realm and the subtle level are not at all the same (the subtle level is only one of many levels in the subtle realm)—which is part of the terminology problem.

“Now, here is where it gets interesting, especially when it comes to human development: we believe that the evidence and research strongly suggests that, in an infant, the three great *states* are given as *actualities*, but the levels/stages themselves are given only as *potentials*. Thus, an infant wakes, dreams, and sleeps—it therefore has *fully* available the three great states (and the three great realms—gross, subtle, causal). But an infant does not yet possess, in any actual fashion, the levels/stages of, for example, blue, orange, green, yellow, and so on. The *potentials* for those levels are present—not as fixed or predetermined structures, but as morphogenetic potentials that unfold according to contingent realities in all four quadrants. [See ‘A Summary of My Psychological Model,’ especially note 24, posted on this site.]

“So what happens in human development appears to be this: while the individual is cycling through the three great states roughly every 24 hours, *in the waking state* the various levels/stages of consciousness developmentally emerge, thus becoming permanent traits, acquisitions, or stages. Thus, as the child develops, first the magical stages or waves develop (purple to red); then the mythical stages develop (red to blue); then the rational waves (orange to green); then the integral waves (yellow, turquoise); then the third-tier or super-integral waves (psychic, high-subtle). The stages, *as stages*, evolve in that flowing order simply because each stage, as a stage, must build upon its predecessor—each transcends and includes—just as cells transcend and include molecules, which transcend and include atoms, and so on. The components of one stage become the sub-components of the next, which is why actual stages cannot be skipped (any more than you can go from atoms to cells and skip molecules). Thus each wave becomes more and more inclusive, until the entire Kosmos is

embraced in conscious identity (nondual). Of course, none of those levels/stages of consciousness emerge as rigid rungs, but as fluid and flowing waves of increasing awareness.

“I should also mention that in reality we have the existence of levels and lines, or waves and streams: many independent developmental streams moving through these great waves, so that a person’s actual development is not linear at all. But for this example we are only focusing on waves/stages of consciousness, on the one hand, and states of consciousness, on the other, just to make a few points.

“We add one more technicality: these waves/stages are not Platonic archetypal givens but Kosmic habits inherited by morphic resonance and formative causation (in the RH dimensions) and by prehensive unification (in the LH dimensions): they first emerge as creative, nondetermined novelty, but are subsequently laid down as morphogenetic grooves inherited by subsequent development, so that yesterday’s *a posteriori* becomes today’s *a priori*.

“The leading-edge of creative novelty is, in today’s world, somewhere around yellow, which means that the deep features of the memes from beige to green have already been laid down as Kosmic habits—and the earlier the meme, the more set and determined it is. But the features of yellow are today still largely unformed; they are still congealing at the leading-edge of evolution, a leading-edge that, as always, is wildly chaotic, frothy, turbulent, novel, and ferociously unforeseeable, a creative frisson of Spirit’s Eros bubbling up from infinity in ways that nobody, including Spirit, could (or would want) to foresee.

“On the other hand, this means that in today’s world, many of the deep features of memes up to around green are relatively set and ‘predetermined,’ not by timeless archetypes but by morphic resonance from past creative novelties now settled into habits. Of course, even though the general patterns (or morphogenetic grooves) of these holons are handed to us by Kosmic karma, all of the actual contents, concrete features, and expressions of these habitual patterns are determined by relative, culturally contingent factors in all four quadrants. Moreover, when those deep patterns themselves were first becoming Kosmic

habits, they were also four-quadrant events: at no point are any features of these waves disconnected from intersubjectivity. (For an extensive discussion of the inheritance of the past and its relation to the spectrum of consciousness, see *Kosmic Karma*, the tentative title of volume 3 of the Kosmos trilogy, forthcoming. Short summaries of this are given in **sidebars I and J.**)

“Okay, let’s return to our main topic and look at the various types of altered *states* available at each of the major *stages* (levels, memes, waves) of development. Of course, today we are limiting our discussion of states to the great *natural states* of waking, dreaming, sleeping, nondual. We are not discussing non-natural or induced states, such as drug states, specific meditative states, hypnotic states, trance states, visionary states, shamanic states, and so on. As I briefly said earlier, most of these non-natural states are not freely available to everybody; they have to be trained or otherwise induced. But the interesting point is that all of those induced states are nonetheless variations on the three or four great states of gross, subtle, causal, and nondual. For example, if you are having a shamanic experience of enhanced sensorimotor perception—colors are brighter, sounds are sharper, the world is brilliantly alive with vivid impressions—you are having a variation on waking-state consciousness, because you are still primarily oriented to the gross realm, even if enhanced. But if the shamanic experience deepens and you are ushered into visions of the upper realms or lower realms, you are having a subtle-state and subtle-realm experience (because you are no longer oriented to gross objects; you are instead perceiving subtle objects, bodies, beings, energies, forms, visions). Likewise, if you are doing holotropic breathwork, and you suddenly find yourself existing as vast formless awareness, you are having a causal-state experience. This is not to say that all these different, specific, nonordinary states can be reduced without remainder to the three or four natural states, only that, once you have worked out the relation of natural states and natural stages, much of the opaqueness of this relation of states and stages dissipates, and you can more easily construct integral models that include the incredibly important truths of both states and stages.

“So what I would like to do at this time is very briefly run through a typical course of individual development and look at the various types of *states of consciousness* (gross, subtle, causal) available to each of the major *stages of consciousness* (levels, memes, waves).

“An infant at the magical-purple meme has acquired that meme as a permanent acquisition or competence, which means that the deep potential of the purple wave (inherited not as Platonic given but as Kosmic habit) has actually emerged and taken on concrete form and content, shaped by all four quadrants (including especially the social and cultural backgrounds: *there is a pluralistic dimension built into every holon*). Thus, the purple meme of a Chinese infant and an American infant would share only a few deep patterns and features—the deep morphogenetic grooves of Kosmic habits—but not very many surface patterns and features. Of course, there is a spectrum of the spheres of influence of LH prehensive inheritance and RH formative causation, stretching from patterns that individuals alone inherit from their own past, to patterns inherited by families, by subcultures, by cultures, and by universal cross-cultures [see **sidebars I and J**]. In this discussion we are focusing on the small handful of patterns—such as purple, red, blue, etc.—that evidence suggests are cross-cultural, but if you are a diehard relativist and insist that the only significant universals are those in your pluralistic meta-theory, then you can take these as patterns evidenced by some people in Western culture. Our main point is the relationship of any sort of stage, however conceived, with any sort of state, however conceived. So we are following what happens when a stage emerges in a psyche that also has access to various states.)

“As the purple potential stably emerges, the infant has more-or-less permanent access to that purple structure or stage as an actual (not potential) wave of consciousness. But the infant also has access to various subtle and causal *states* (because it *dreams* and *sleeps*). Thus, the purple-stage child can have an *authentic* subtle-realm experience and causal-realm experience, but the *content* of those experiences will be colored in large part by

the *stages* that have developed (in this case, beige, purple, and beginning red, as set in their AQAL context).

“Accordingly, the infant’s consciousness would NOT contain *actual elements* from the higher *stages*—it would not contain, e.g., the logical syntax of orange (and research consistently shows that it does not). We just saw that the deep patterns of the higher stages—up to around green—are potentials inherited by the infant as Kosmic habits. But those higher stages, as stages, must actually emerge and develop, taking on form and content as molded by AQAL space. Thus the infant has direct access to subtle and causal *states*, which are already present, but NOT to higher *stages*, which must unfold and build upon each other in actual manifestation: an atom cannot bypass molecules and go directly to cells, because the Kosmic habits have already laid down the deep grooves of that unfolding as layered sediments in prehension and formative causation.

“Likewise, the *dream world* of an infant whose center of gravity is purple would not contain elements from blue, orange, or green stages—for those do not yet exist as actual entities. Rather, the infant’s dream world would contain *magical* elements (beige to purple), because those have *already emerged* and taken concrete form (based on all four quadrants), and they would therefore invade dream states as ‘day residue,’ and would also form most of the signifiers that the dream state uses to express its subtle realities. Also, the infant’s dream world—particularly as the infant reaches ages 2-4—would also increasingly contain emerging *mythic* elements (red and eventually blue), because those are the level/stages that are now crystallizing out as permanent acquisitions (and thus becoming part of the concrete contents of the waking and dreaming landscapes). Finally, the infant’s dream world might also contain various archetypes or collectively inherited images (or deep Kosmic habits); however, as Jung pointed out, archetypes are ‘forms devoid of content,’ and thus, as I would put it, they only pick up content from the existing AQAL matrix, which means that their actual elements will be supplied in part by the stages and contexts that have already emerged in the individual. So

even ‘archetypal’ material reverts to the developmental and interpretive AQAL scheme we are presenting.

“Next, notice there is also sense in which we could say that a child at the magical stage might have a type of peak experience of a mythic stage (but not any stages higher than that). Precisely because it is the *next* stage of development, the mythic can indeed be ‘peeked’ into, since it is already starting to form and take on actual characteristics, so it can be an ‘Ah ha!’ experience (I’ll give some examples of this in a minute).

“So an individual can have an altered state or peak experience of an emerging stage, but rarely of a stage beyond that. Thus, as the mythic wave begins to crystallize, it can be experienced in waking states, in dream states, and in many altered states. Accordingly, a waking-state child at the purple-red meme could have an altered state or peak experience of a blue-mythic meme (in addition to any subtle and causal altered *states*; but *not* higher stages—not orange or green or yellow, etc.). But as the child develops permanently to the mythic/blue stage, he or she would no longer have peak experiences of those particular mythic structures, simply because they are now *permanent acquisitions* in consciousness (i.e., they are no longer an *altered* state but an *ordinary* state). People often ask why a person can’t have, e.g., a conop altered state, and the answer is, you can! At age 5.

“To say it one last time: Can a magic child have an altered state or peak experience of any *stage* higher than mythic? Not as far as we can tell. The mythic wave, being the next wave to emerge, is already starting to form and crystallize, and thus it can be experienced in both the waking and the dream state (and certain ‘peek’ experiences), since it is already taking on actual forms and elements and beginning to build upon the magic stage (in prehension and formative causation). But *stages* higher than the mythic are still potential at best; the child can still experience the general subtle realm and causal realm in various states—in dreams, for example, in deep sleep, and in various peak experiences—and, most importantly, those will be interpreted by the stages at hand (in their particular AQAL setting). But a magic (purple-red) child cannot experience, say, orange rationality or green

pluralism, since those have not begun to crystallize out, and, as always, actual stages cannot be skipped. A preop child cannot have a peak experience of a formop thought; a stage-1 moral child cannot have a stage-4 moral idea. A preop child's waking and dreaming world consists essentially of only those waves that have developed or are just beginning to do so: thus, a preop/magical child's dream state would consist of archaic, magical, and beginning mythic elements (beige, purple, red, blue), while all the higher *levels/stages* of the general subtle realm—in this case, orange, green, yellow, turquoise, coral/psychic, and high-subtle levels—would remain as morphogenetic *potentials* in the overall subtle, 'forms devoid of content.' And, as we saw, only the forms up to around green have settled in as Kosmic habits of any significant density (and formative causation); beyond that, the deep forms themselves are still their formative phases, which does not mean that those higher spaces are not available, only that their morphic patterns are still at play at the chaotic, frothy, insanely creative edge of evolution's dance.

"Okay, then, is this clear to everybody?" Hazelton asked. "Oh dear. Well, let's just push on and see if this helps." Hazelton cleared her throat. "Let's take individuals who are at, say, orange. And once again, let's ask what *states* and what *stages* are available to them?"

"Their waking state and dream state will contain elements of all the levels/stages that have actually emerged in their own case, as well as elements of the next level about to emerge—green, in this case. That means that their waking and dreams can contain archaic elements (beige), magic elements (purple), mythic elements (red-blue), rational elements (orange), and some emerging green elements. That's clear, yes?"

A student in the audience asked out loud, "Dreams can be rational?"

"Oh, yes, some of them. Wake these people up—wake most adults up—when they are dreaming and they will often say things like, 'I was thinking about what to buy at the grocery store tomorrow.' Of course, their dreams also contain magic and mythic elements, since those have also emerged. However, these individuals will not experience, in their dreams or in their waking state, any actual elements from higher *stages*. But they *can*

experience the general features of higher *states*—the subtle and the causal, just as a child can experience the subtle and the causal, since everybody wakes, dreams, and sleeps.

“Thus, with regard to states, a person whose center of gravity is at the orange stage can have:

(1) A peak experience of the *next higher stage*, in this case, a green stage (this is often experienced as a genuinely overpowering peak experience or ‘eureka!’ experience—in this case it might be a eureka experience that ‘There are multiple realities and pluralistic truths in world! Wow!’).

(2) A peak experience of various *subtle* or *causal states*, such as a temporary experience of gross-nature mysticism, subtle-deity mysticism, and/or causal-formless mysticism (although he or she will interpret them largely in orange terms. We will return to this idea in a moment).

(3) Any *nonordinary states* that are peak extensions of the three major realms (such as a drug experience where one identifies in a paranormal fashion with any past actuals, such as experiencing an identity with all atoms, all plants forms, all animals; identification with a nature spirit; a re-experiencing of the birth trauma, etc.)

(4) Any *induced states* (such as meditation). Of course, in this presentation we are focusing on items 1 and 2, since the essentials features of the relation of states and stages can be gleaned from those, but these other states should not be overlooked in any integral cartography of consciousness.”

One Last Clarification, with Due Apologizes

“Here’s another terminology mess, and I’m so sorry about this: we saw that we can use the word ‘subtle’ to refer to both the subtle *realm* (*everything* in between gross matter and causal formlessness) and to *just* the highest *level* or stage of the subtle realm, which I will refer to here as ‘the high subtle.’ Well, it’s worse: we usually subdivide the high subtle into

what we call the psychic and the subtle. Oh dear, not enough words to go around, huh? Well, it made sense at the time.” The audience laughed.

“Here’s the source of the difficulty. When many of the members of IC were pioneering studies in these higher states and stages—and given the paucity of information about these higher realms in our culture—they had to coin various new terms or neologisms for these higher realms. And I don’t have to tell you what the editors of books and journals think about neologisms—they hate them. So these researchers tried to make a few neologisms cover as many bases as possible. So, for example, they used the word ‘subtle’ to refer to a state, a body/realm, AND a level: the subtle state, the subtle body, the subtle level. The problem, of course, is that those are not the same things at all (e.g., the subtle level is only one of 3 or more levels in the subtle realm). Oy vey, the headaches here.

“In fairness to the original researchers, they themselves knew that a subtle state was different from a subtle body, which was different from a subtle level. The qualifiers were the words ‘state,’ ‘body,’ and ‘level’—clearly different things. But most people understandably saw the word ‘subtle’ and took all three of those items *to be the same thing*. Well, we are in the process of going back and cleaning up all this terminology. In particular, ‘subtle’ and ‘causal’ should really be used for states and realms, and not for levels, since that causes the most problems. But until there is a widespread agreement on how to use those terms, people will continue to use the old terms; if so, please remember, for example, that the subtle body/realm and the subtle level are quite different beasts. At the orange level you can have an experience of the subtle realm and the causal realm but *not* an experience of the subtle level or the causal level, okay?

“All right, here’s the last major glitch in this terminological nightmare, and then we can move on. Where the overall-gross realm intersects the overall-subtle realm, you can have an experience of *oneness with the entire gross realm*—we call that the psychic, or the Over-Soul, the World Soul, the Eco-Noetic Self, and so forth. It is a *state* that can become a permanent *stage* acquisition, which means it can become permanently conscious. Thus, in

this (old but still used) terminology, the psychic *stage* is the stage after turquoise and before the highest stages of the subtle (thus, as *stages*: yellow, turquoise, coral/psychic, subtle level, causal level). I know, I know, we will have to clean up the terminology at some point! But these realms and stages are real phenomena, *whatever we call them*.

“There’s a simple way to remember this. We already understand that everybody, even infants, have access to the gross realm in waking consciousness, the subtle realm in dream consciousness, and the formless realm in deep-sleep consciousness. Yes? That’s simple enough. Now, the ultimate peak experience in each of those three realms is to experience a oneness with that entire realm, yes? The experience of oneness with the entire gross realm is a type of *nature mysticism*; the experience of oneness with the entire subtle realm is a type of *deity mysticism*; and the experience of oneness with the causal realm is a type of *formless mysticism*. (And, of course, nondual mysticism is a union of all of them.)”

A student yelled out, “But does that mean that even children can have spiritual experiences of all three of those types—nature mysticism, deity mysticism, formless mysticism?”

“Of course they can,” Hazelton replied. “Children experience them as temporary states, not permanent traits, and they are interpreted by their particular stages (in their particular AQAL matrix), but there is significant evidence of children having all three or four of those great spiritual peak experiences. That’s another topic, dear soul, so perhaps later, yes? [See **Sidebar D**: ‘Childhood Spirituality’].

“Now, we simply call the experience of oneness with the entire gross realm—the experience of *nature mysticism*—we also call that the *psychic*, or the Over-Soul, or the Eco-Noetic Self, and so on. We call it ‘psychic’ instead of ‘gross’ at this point because it really is moving beyond the gross altogether, and so we wanted to give it a name that reflected its increasingly noetic character—‘noetic’ means ‘consciousness-related,’ yes? With psychic states, it is increasingly understood that the world is not merely physical, it is psychophysical. So we often say, instead of gross, subtle, and causal states, that a person can

have psychic, subtle, and causal states—it basically means the same thing, but when we say ‘psychic’ instead of ‘gross,’ we are emphasizing the highest of the gross realm experiences—namely, a oneness with the entire gross realm, which we call psychic. When that *psychic state* becomes a more-or-less permanent acquisition, we call it the *psychic stage* (which means that the person’s center of gravity, or proximate self, has transformed from the turquoise-centaur to the Eco-Noetic Self or Over-Soul).

“Okay, to summarize what we have so far: a person at virtually any *stage* of development can have a *temporary* experience of a gross/psychic, subtle, or causal *state* of consciousness, because those are all variations on the three great states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. But for those temporary states to become permanent traits, those states have to be converted into *stages* by sustained development, yes?

“Here’s a final example that might help.” Somebody yelled out, “I doubt it,” and we all laughed, including Hazelton.

“Oh dear. Okay, let’s take somebody—I tell you, this states and stages thing is really easy if you can get over the terminology—the messy terminology is just a remnant from that idiot who did *The Atman Project*, but never mind. Anyway, let’s continue the examples and take somebody whose center of gravity is at, say, turquoise. What *states* and *stages* are available to those at turquoise?

“Well, just as at all previous stages, they can have an altered state or temporary peak experience of the gross/psychic, subtle, and causal realms (which might include temporary experiences of nature mysticism, deity mysticism, and formless mysticism)—because, again, they wake, dream, and sleep. But once they develop to the next stage—namely, from turquoise to the psychic/coral stage—then they would *cease* having psychic peak experiences: they would *permanently* be at the psychic stage; they would now have *permanent* access to the state of nature mysticism—they would more or less *constantly* experience themselves as the Eco-Noetic Self, the Over-Soul that is one with the World Soul. They would *be* the

Over-Soul as continuously as, say, somebody at orange is more-or-less continuously the egoic-rational self.

“Is this getting any clearer?” A few people nodded their heads yes. Annoyingly, Kim was one of them.

“Okay, so what would happen if that person then developed from the psychic stage to the subtle stage (meaning the high-subtle, or the highest stage in the subtle realm at this point in evolution)? Two things would happen: (1) for the most part, they would *stop* having subtle peak experiences (because they now have permanent and continuous access to even the upper reaches of the subtle as it has unfolded so far, and therefore they are permanently accessing the overall subtle realm—they have objectified the subtle realm—so there is no need to have any subtle peak experiences—the overall subtle is now an *ordinary* state, not a nonordinary state). And (2), they would often lucid dream at night. Why? Because they have made the overall subtle realm conscious at this point, and thus the entire dream state would remain conscious as they entered it each night. Their self would be one with subtle Deity, more or less permanently. Their self-sense would now be Divine. Their self would continuously be one with the God/dess....

“What would be left for such a soul? Well, they could still have a temporary peak experience of the causal state/realm, namely, a peak experience of formlessness—an altered state or peak experience of the Godhead beyond God, the limitless Ursprung form which both God and the soul emerge, the great Kosmic Void or pure Emptiness that is the groundless Ground of All. (And although we are not mentioning it very much in this summary, they could also peak experience the Nondual, or the union of Emptiness and Form, since that is based on ever-present or always-already awareness.)

“But if they continued their development from the high-subtle into the causal itself, then they would generally cease to have causal peak experiences, because they would *permanently* have access to the great Emptiness that is the Source and Suchness of the entire World—not merely as a temporary satori, but as a constant consciousness. And this also

means—do you understand why?—that each night when they entered the deep dreamless sleep state, they would remain aware.”

“Why?” somebody yelled.

“Well, dear soul, because they have made the entire causal realm conscious, and thus they cease ‘passing out’ whenever they enter it. Okay?”

“So what is the overall pattern here? It’s very simple, yes? All of the states—waking, dreaming, and sleeping—have now become permanently conscious waves, and thus all of their *potentials* have become *actualized*. The result is Awakening or Enlightenment by any name—again, not just a passing satori, but a permanently conscious realization. But these are *not* potentials that were predetermined, pregiven, and merely lying around, already formed, awaiting discovery by unearthing or digging. They are potentials that were co-created all along by the unfolding AQAL matrix as it creatively unfurled in the frothy, chaotic, formative, dynamic, nonpredictable dance of evolutionary happenstance. When various occasions emerged in their undetermined potential space and began to take on concrete forms and contents, those forms that were repeated on numerous occasions began to settle into Kosmic habits available to all subsequent holons, inherited forms that had originally emerged in a creative and nondetermined fashion, but were then handed to the future as a given inheritance of the past (a future that will add its own creative moment, and then itself pass into the given past).

“Of course, I am presenting here a highly idealized and absurdly abstract account: nobody actually scoots through the spectrum like that, cleanly turning all states into permanent traits. There are numerous levels and lines involved, so that some lines might be highly developed while others lag far behind: actual development is a messy, chaotic, turbulent affair, unfolding in an AQAL space whose determinants are largely and inherently a mystery. I am simply outlining some of the abstract milestones of development, insofar as they can be determined, in order to suggest some of the more important features of states and stages in general. Likewise, when somebody starts lucid dreaming, it might only be once or

twice a month; same with lucid sleeping; and these might very slowly increase in frequency over the years and decades—you don't simply go from nonlucid to lucid once and for all! The point is simply that, on balance, the more one evolves through the spectrum of consciousness, the more 'enlightened' and 'awakened' one becomes, because the states and stages of one's own being become increasingly transparent, released from a subjective identity and eased into the Mystery that is their inherent radiance.

“If a person achieves this type of transparency or Enlightenment, does that mean growth has stopped in his or her case? Not at all. Not only is there a great deal of translative learning that will still occur, the causal itself continues to creatively bring forth more subtle states, which can eventually become stages. For example: imagine a thousand years from now. What we now call 'the high-subtle wave'—namely, the general stage between psychic and causal—will almost certainly have differentiated into several more stages. Really, the manifest game of development and evolution is endless. But once one has sufficiently mastered the general waves of consciousness that are present in the world today, then one can more easily step off the cycle altogether: the causal 'stage' is not merely or even mostly a stage; it is rather the ever-present ground of Emptiness that is equally present at each and every stage of development. It is simply that, at the highest stages of manifest development, one can experience the causal not just in temporary altered states, but as a permanent acquisition, so that Emptiness pervades all Form, rendering the Kosmos transparent, as all knowledge fades into Mystery and all certainty dissolves in the radical Openness of this and every moment. Spirit then is no longer a drive-by shooting but an ever-present shimmering in the heart of all that arises.”

Part III. A Lattice of Altered States

“Okay, this part will be easy,” Hazelton announced.

“You said that last time!” a student yelled out, and everybody laughed.

“Oh dear,” Hazelton smiled. “Well, this time I hope it’s true. I just want to repeat the simple notion: although a person can have an altered state or peak experience of gross/psychic, subtle, and causal states at virtually any stage of development, how they *interpret* that peak experience will depend in large measure on their actual stage of development. That is why we say: *states are always interpreted by stages* (in their AQAL, cultural setting)—a truly crucial component in a more integral view.

“Thus, somebody whose center of gravity is red will tend to interpret various peak experiences in red terms; somebody at blue will interpret them largely in blue terms; somebody at green, in pluralistic and participatory terms, and so on. Much of the peak experience itself might be, and often is, nonverbal. But when the person comes out of that state and starts to wonder what it all meant, they interpret it using whatever tools they have. And obviously, they can only use the tools that they have already developed. Of course, some theorists, myself included, maintain that there are no pure experiences, only mixtures of experience and interpretations (i.e., with the exception of purely formless states, all experiences have a LL component). But in either case, the point is the same: every altered state will be interpreted through the lens that the person has available.

“If for arguments sake, we say that there are 10 waves/stages/chakras/structures/memes/sheaths/levels of consciousness, and 3 great states of consciousness (gross/psychic, subtle, causal), then we would have a grid or lattice of 30 different types of altered states or peak experiences. You could have a purple experience of psychic-nature mysticism, a green experience of nature mysticism, a turquoise experience of nature mysticism, and so on. You could also have a red experience of subtle-deity mysticism, a blue experience of deity mysticism, a yellow experience of deity mysticism, and so forth. All in all, some 30 very different, but very real, types of altered states and spiritual experiences.

“Of course, you can also add the various types of non-natural or induced states, and this would fill out the lattice even more. Fleshing out that lattice is a very important part of

the ongoing development of a truly integral psychology. But, as I suggested, the main themes are already present using natural states and stages, so if you generally understand why there are, say, at least 30 major types of altered states, then you have the central points.

“Of course, there is nothing fixed and final about that lattice. Not only can you use different models for the number of stages, but—no matter what model you use—the leading edge of evolution itself is frothy, chaotic, creative, with new emergents coming into being all the time, which are not captured by any model. Nonetheless, much of the lattice is composed of stable Kosmic habits (red, blue, green, etc., along with the great natural states), and those can be phenomenologically investigated, along with the creative emergents at the frothy edge. All of that is meant to be included when we speak of the lattice of altered states.

(Technical aside: When we say that states are interpreted by stages, there are two different types of interpretation involved, which we might call intra-level and para-level. As for intra-level: A central claim of the AQAL matrix is that every holon has a LL dimension—e.g., even electrons interpret the stimuli in their environment in ways that are partially nondeterministic—and these interpretations arise within a worldspace tetra-created by other electrons, such that even the electron has an intersubjective and interobjective background, or a culture and a society. Thus, individual and cultural Kosmic habits are inherently part of the electron’s behavior at any given moment, which is why there are no pure experiences, only AQAL moments. Also, every holon’s moment of creativity—the moment where it inherits its past and then injects its own creative novelty, which is the “transcend” part of the “transcend and include”—every holon’s moment of creativity includes the capacity to interpret its givens in novel ways. All of those types of interpretation are “intra-level”; they are interpretive moments that are inherent aspects of any holon at any level. “Para-level” interpretation simply means that a holon at a given level has an experience of a set of realities not of its level. Generally, this is possible only for holons that have both states and stages, which means holons starting around the level of evolutionary complexity of reptiles, not to put too fine a point on it. In humans, this means

that a person at a general level or wave of development has an altered state or peak experience of realities that cannot in any way fit into that level. That level's cognitive apparatus is therefore temporarily overwhelmed, the person is ushered into states far beyond his or her normal capacity, and the mind is flooded by phenomena quite beyond anything it can easily recognize. Nonetheless, the person still has this extraordinary experience, which clearly shows that some part of the person can indeedprehend this experience—and that part is simply the person's higher Self. But unless the mind, or consciousness itself, has developed to a level comparable to that higher experience, then that experience will indeed fade—it will be temporary, not permanent. And as it fades, the person's conventional mind comes back onto the scene and begins to interpret that experience in the only way that it can: namely, by using the tools that it has already developed. That is “para-level” interpretation—a higher reality interpreted by a given level. The lattice of altered states that we are discussing is a lattice of para-level interpretations, yes?)

“Okay, I won't dwell on this topic much more than that, since various IC members have dealt with it elsewhere [see ‘A Summary of My Psychological Model,’ posted on this site; and Allan Combs, *The Radiance of Being*, second revised edition, forthcoming]. We call this lattice of the varieties of altered states, or the varieties of spiritual experience, or the varieties of states-interpreted-by-stages, the “Wilber-Combs Lattice,” after two of the researchers who pioneered it. Just let me say that this lattice offers us, I believe, a useful way to integrate an enormous amount of theoretical work and practical research; it allows us to include massive evidence on both states and stages; and it honors more data from more different sources than any alternative conception. The applications of this lattice have just begun, and hopefully some of you students out there will take the idea and run with it.”

Part IV. The Ranking of Spiritual Experiences: How Dare You Do That!

“I agree with all of what you said,” someone from the audience yelled, “but to tell you the truth, I still have trouble with the ranking that you do of spiritual experiences. How

can you possibly say that nondual mysticism is higher than formless mysticism, which is higher than deity mysticism, which is higher than nature mysticism? Isn't that just your own imposed value system? Aren't you marginalizing or degrading the so-called lower expressions of spirituality? Surely the critics are right about that."

"Shall we go into it a little bit?" The audience groaned. Joan laughed. "Oh, people, be nice.

"Here's a simple rundown on that delicate, difficult issue of ranking spiritual occasions. But let's forget any labels right now—forget 'nature mysticism' or 'deity mysticism' or whatnot—and for now let's just focus on four of the major types of spiritual experiences. These are not the only types of spiritual experiences, just four of the more interesting ones.

"Experience #1 is an overpowering feeling that you are one with the entire world that you see out there—you are one with nature, one with the manifest universe, one with everything in the waking state—you actually experience yourself as this oneness with all of life. This is a profound, genuine, authentic spiritual experience, I believe.

"What happens, dear souls, is that this experience is often temporary for many people. It is not permanent, it does not last. Also, when a person has this experience, even if it tends to be permanent during the day, when they fall asleep at night and begin to dream, they do *not* have this experience of oneness. But some people remain conscious during the dream state, and thus if they have an experience of being one with everything in the waking realm, they might also begin to have an experience of also being one with everything in the subtle dream state. Of course, the dream state—and the overall subtle—sometimes contains images of gods, goddesses, angelic beings, bodhisattvas, beings of light and love and bliss, and so on. That's sort of what the subtle is all about, isn't it? And whether you interpret those as actual entities or just aspects of your own higher consciousness, well, they can be numinous, awe-inspiring, transcendently divine!" Joan looked at each of us and smiled.

“Now, we are using the example of somebody who, having had spiritual experience #1—and therefore experiences being one with everything in the waking, gross realm—now enters the dream state and eventually remains conscious during that state—so-called lucid dreaming—and eventually has an experience of being one with everything in the dream state, too. So this person has an experience of being one with everything in the waking/gross realm AND being one with everything in the subtle/dream realm. Call that spiritual experience #2.

“Take it further. Say this person continues his or her growth and development, and thus they continue to ‘strengthen’ their consciousness, so that they start to remain conscious even as they enter deep, dreamless sleep. People who do so report often that they have an experience of being one with formless, infinite consciousness—or we can simply say, they experience being one with everything in the deep dreamless state (which is literally nothing: or boundless, limitless, formless). So this person has had an experience of being one with everything in the gross waking realm, in the subtle dream realm, AND in the causal formless realm. Call that spiritual experience #3.

“Now, this is the ONLY claim that we have EVER made about the ranking of spiritual experiences: we claim that experience #3 is higher than #2, which is higher than #1.

“Why is #2 higher than #1? Because #2 can do everything that #1 can do (namely, gross-realm unity), but it ALSO experiences a subtle-realm unity. And #3 is higher than #2, because it experiences all of those PLUS a causal-realm unity. Does anybody have any trouble with that ranking?” I looked around; nobody moved.

“Right, there’s nothing wrong with that ranking, because it is a simple description of events. In other words, each senior state has everything the junior state has *plus something extra*; the ‘extra’ part makes it deeper, wider, higher, more inclusive, take your pick. These are concentric spheres of inclusiveness. Each of those higher states are higher because they are more inclusive, less marginalizing, less partial, less exclusionary.

“(Notice that we are not saying that the dream state is higher than the waking state, but that a consciousness that has access to both is higher than a consciousness that has access

to only one of them. Technically, the dream state is not higher than the waking state, because the waking state can be extended into the dream, and then into deep sleep, so that all of them are converted to waking realities by being suffused with ever-present Wakefulness. What is higher in each case is the consciousness that grows to include more and more of these states in the brilliant clarity of ever-present awareness.)

“So that is why we claim that some spiritual experiences are higher than others—each higher state includes the lower plus something extra—and I can see that nobody here really objects to that once they understand how we actually mean those words, as opposed to how some critics misreport it,” she laughed.

“But we definitely have to be careful when we assign names or labels to those states, because names often carry all sorts of extra baggage that we might not intend. I have to confess that I and some of my colleagues—Mark and Charles, for example—have been somewhat sloppy here. We sometimes refer to experience #1 as nature mysticism, #2 as deity mysticism, #3 as formless mysticism, and #4 as nondual mysticism—well, we didn’t talk about #4, but #4 is integral or nondual mysticism, which includes the other three. Anyway, some people who call themselves ‘nature mystics’ actually have experiences of subtle-realm phenomena or even nondual events; some deity mystics also have causal-realm unity, and so on. Therefore, strictly speaking, we ONLY claim that the spiritual experience of #4 is higher than #3, which is higher than #2, which is higher than #1, because each senior occasion transcends and includes the junior. So when you hear us slip into easy generalizations or loose labels, please remember that we are actually talking about nothing but these increasingly inclusive states—or more specifically, a consciousness that increasingly includes more states.”

“Are those four types *universals*?” the same questioner yelled out.

“Yes, of course they are, at least in some ways, because waking, dreaming, and deep sleep are universal. Of course, none of those exist apart from their AQAL setting, which includes cultural and social backgrounds. But reducing the general features of these states to

nothing but cultural relativism is an agenda backed by ideology, not evidence. So let us put it this way: when a Jew in Tel Aviv goes to sleep at night, and enters the deep dreamless state, and when an Palestinian in Jerusalem goes to sleep at night, and enters the deep dreamless state—do you think those states have anything in common at all? If you believe they have anything in common, then those are what we mean by the universal features of these states; they are deep Kosmic habits available to humans anywhere on the planet.

“More specifically, this is what we seem to find. In the Upper-Right quadrant, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep are defined, among other things, by specific brain states (or specific objective states of affairs in the human organism), such as theta waves in REM sleep and delta waves in deep sleep. Those universal, biologically given patterns or *brain states* (i.e., Kosmic habits of the objective domain, or formative causation acting on objective exteriors) have interior correlates in *states of consciousness* in the Upper-Left quadrant. As we have seen, none of the contents of these broad states of consciousness are given (which only occurs via development in an AQAL matrix). However, the broad contours of these brain states and consciousness states are given, in that all humans wake, dream, and sleep, and those general states are similar-enough wherever we find them.

“So notice, for example: in Buddhism, the Dharmakaya is often correlated with the deep-sleep state of formless emptiness; the Sambhogakaya, with the luminous dream state; and the Nirmanakaya, with gross waking form. But Hinduism also claims that the causal body of Brahman is experienced, among many other ways, in deep formless sleep; the subtle body of Brahman, in the dream state; and the gross body, in the waking state. Green-meme reductionists are fond of saying that you can NEVER equate any part of nirguna Brahman with Buddhist Emptiness—because that would be, oh dear, to impose rigid universal abstractions on richly different pluralistic realities. But clearly, if you believe that there are ANY similarities between deep formless sleep in a Hindu and in a Buddhist, then of course you can make these types of universal comparisons. And please, nobody is oppressing somebody

if we point this out. Good grief!” Joan Hazelton oppressing Buddhists was indeed pretty funny.

“Of course, as we have often seen, when a person—Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or agnostic—comes out of the causal formless state—or if any of them has a waking-state experience of formlessness—then they most definitely *interpret* that experience according to all four quadrants in their own case: that is, they interpret these spiritual experiences based on their cultural background, on their social system, and on their own particular wave of development: as we said, a blue soul will interpret this largely in blue terms, an orange soul in orange terms, a green soul in participatory terms, and so on; and further, the actual forms of those will often vary from culture to culture, as determined by the AQAL matrix in which they arise.

“All we want to do, if we are aspiring to an integral embrace, is to make sure that we don’t create interpretive structures that marginalize any waves in the spectrum of consciousness, so we don’t want to follow green’s example and marginalize blue, orange, yellow or turquoise. At the same time, any second-tier and truly integral approach will point out when some engagements are more inclusive than others, as long as it is done with great care. This is why the green approach of pluralistic sensitivity is profoundly necessary, but not sufficient, for integral constructions: it is a preliminary preparation platform for that quantum heap into the hyperspace of second-tier consciousness, where green’s own values are completed, fulfilled, included and transcended.”

Part V. Two Types of Stages, and Why the Contemplative Traditions Only Have One of Them

“Okay,” Joan said, as she closed her notebook and walked to the front of the stage. “One last item, it won’t take long. But it’s very important. If you look at the psychological systems of the great wisdom traditions—from contemplative Christianity to Vedanta to Sufism to Buddhism to Neoconfucianism to Taoism to Shamanism—you will find a strange,

glaring deficiency: you might find levels of consciousness as they appear in an individual (such as the 5 koshas or the 9 vijnanas or the 10 sefirot)—but you will not find anything resembling the levels or stages that were discovered by Clare Graves, Jane Loevinger, Carol Gilligan, Robert Kegan, and so on. Why this *serious lack* in systems that claim to cover the entire spectrum of consciousness from matter to mind to spirit? They are clearly leaving something out; does that mean their systems are incapable of producing liberation or enlightenment?

“First, why do they lack an understanding of the types of stages presented by, say, Clare Graves and Spiral Dynamics?

“The answer is actually fairly simple, and it has to do with the *types of research* used in each case. In the meditative traditions, for example, you basically sit on a cushion and watch the contents of the mind. As meditation deepens, different contents tend to arise, often moving from gross contents (objects of the senses and mental representations of them) to subtler contents (visions, illuminations, bliss) to very subtle or causal contents (vast formlessness, consciousness without an object). The traditions have left various types of detailed phenomenologies of subjective consciousness, including a catalog of its many elements and the various phenomenal stages that some of them undergo (e.g., gross contents to subtle contents to causal contents). These are essentially *first-person accounts* (or first-person phenomenologies) that are then checked with other first-person accounts *within that culture or subculture* to see if they have any similarities.

“Western psychological researchers have often used an entirely different type of research, one that focuses not just on subjective phenomena but on *intersubjective* phenomena in large populations across time. In this research, you don’t look at an *individual* mind, you look at a *group* of people; you pose a problem to them (you ask them, for example, ‘Is it okay if a poor man steals medicine that will help save his sick wife?’); and then you record all the different types of answers that people give. You then look to see if there are types or classes of similar answers (in this case, there are: researchers have found

that responses to this question generally fall into at least three major types, often called pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional). You then follow these individuals over the years, and you find that if somebody gives response #2, they might move to response #3, but they will almost never move to response #1. That is, these 3 responses constitute a *stage sequence*. You then test these stages in different groups of people, and if you continue to get the same responses, you are justified in saying, ‘This type of moral response develops through at least 3 major stages, pre-conventional to conventional to post-conventional, at least in the people tested so far.’ It appears that, based on available evidence, some types of stages apply only to a single individual; some to families; some to subcultures; some to cultures; and a few stages hold cross-culturally.

“We might conjecture that the reach of various waves is connected with their more widespread repetition setting up morphogenetic grooves or Kosmic habits which are then available to more holons, with the broader the repetition the wider the reach. At one end of that spectrum would be Kosmic habits universally available to all holons of a given class; at the other end, habits peculiar to a single holon.

“Of the various wave sequences discovered by developmental psychology, exactly which are universal is hard to tell in all cases; but that some of them are universal has never been doubted by serious researchers. For example, take the cognitive capacity to form images, symbols, concepts, and rules. An *image* is a mental sign representing an entity via resemblance (e.g., a mental image of my dog looks more or less like my real dog); a *symbol* represents an entity by denoting it (e.g., the word or symbol “Fido” represents or denotes my dog, but does not look like my dog—a harder cognitive task than images); a *concept* represents an entire class of entities (e.g., the word “dog” refers to all dogs, not just Fido—a harder task still); and a *rule* is a mental operation using images, symbols, and concepts—which is even harder (a rule might involve, say, how to add three dogs and two dogs to get five dogs).

“Those four general tasks, as far as we can tell, are available to all healthy human beings in all cultures. We simply do not know of a single culture that cannot form images, symbols, concepts, and rules. Of course, not all cultures have the same types of concepts and rules, but all cultures recognize classes of events (e.g., earth, wind, water, fire), and all cultures have rituals that show sophisticated operations and mental rules.

“Moreover, since each task builds upon its predecessor, those tasks emerge in a sequence that cannot be changed by environmental, social, or behavioral conditioning. No amount of cultural conditioning can make rules emerge before images and symbols (rules operate on images and symbols, and you cannot have operations if there is nothing to operate on). In other words, wherever we find all four of these capacities, they form a true *stage sequence*, like atoms, molecules, cells, organisms; or like letters, words, sentences, paragraphs. You simply cannot form paragraphs before sentences, or sentences before words. And this is true cross-culturally—it is literally true for all cultures, at least as far as we can tell.

“So, as I said, no serious researcher ever has doubted that some types of stage sequences are universal. (Of course, the denial of universal waves, or universal anything, is a standard agenda of leftist pomo theorists, but it is executed only by positing an extensive meta-theory of knowledge, a meta-theory that itself is claimed to be 100% true for all cultures at all times—e.g., it is claimed that all knowledge is contextual, all knowledge is interpretative, all knowledge is culturally bound, there are no universal or absolute truths, etc. This meta-theory is not held to be true for just some cultures, so that some cultures have relative truth and some cultures have absolute truth; nor is this meta-theory itself open to interpretation, nor is there any pluralism in it at all: rather, this meta-theory is claimed to be cross-culturally, universally, absolutely, 100% true. Thus, not even pomo relativists really doubt that there are universals present in all cultures. The question is, what types of universals are actually there? Developmentalists attempt to answer this question by careful research into various groups of individuals, from subcultures to cultures to cross-cultures, and

they have found that some very general sequences—such as images, symbols, concepts, rules—are found in every culture that has been studied. The pomo theorists, on the other hand, maintain that the only cross-cultural givens, or the only true universals, are the ingredients in their particular meta-theory of knowledge, such that every human being should accept the pomo meta-theory as the one and only correct way to view all cultures. [See **Sidebar F** for a discussion of the hidden absolutism in the pluralist’s agenda.] This is a domineering agenda that has, after three decades, finally run its course and is now rather exhausted; so it is very encouraging that at this time, the existence of the various types of universals has been taken out of the hands of ideology and put in the hands of research and evidence.)

“Now, that type of careful research is what is what James Mark Baldwin did, and Clare Graves, and Jane Loevinger, and Robert Kegan, and dozens of other researchers who have enormously enriched our understanding of the mind by outlining the many types of capacities that undergo stages of growth, development, and evolution, and they have done so in most cases based on extensive research.

“But one thing is certain: you can sit on your meditation cushion for 50 years, and you will *never* see any of those types of stages. You will never see or observe a thought that says: ‘This is a stage-5 moral response,’ or ‘This value is a stage-blue value,’ or ‘The self observing the stream of dharmas is at a green-meme stage.’ In other words, you will *never* discover the important types of waves occurring in your consciousness that were discovered by these modern psychological researchers. Because the only way you can do that is to take entire *groups* of people, pose a dilemma to them, see how they respond, and then track those responses over a long period of time. What you are looking at, in other words, are not *subjective* patterns but *intersubjective* patterns (and their interobjective behaviors). In fact, you are looking not so much at the Upper Left but at the Lower Left, not individual interiors but collective interiors. Naturally, these two can never be separated, but different types of research can better access these different dimensions, and it is only the *intersubjective*

developmental approaches that have been able to get at these particular types of stages of consciousness. And that is why you do not find them in any contemplative or shamanic or meditative tradition anywhere in the world.

“(A small but important technical point: these intersubjective stages have been investigated using two major approaches, both of which are needed: an *interobjective* investigation that looks at these stages from a third-person or exterior perspective, and attempts to outline the syntax or structure of these stages as they unfold: this is the province of genealogy, developmental structuralism, genetic epistemology, and evolutionary systems theory. The other approach looks at these stages *from within*, using a second-person collaborative inquiry of subjects at the particular wave of consciousness as they reach, or attempt to reach, mutual understanding: this is hermeneutics proper, which attempts to describe the shared interiors and semantics of inter-subjects: not, how can you describe these stages in an exterior fashion, but what do they look like from within when you are actually there? The most comprehensive of the hermeneutic schools is genealogical hermeneutics in its many forms, which follows these waves from within as they unfold in the asymmetry of time’s arrow, and attempts to give not just exterior descriptions of the syntax and structure of these waves but an evocative resonance of the interior felt-meaning or semantics of these waves, or what they look like from within their own horizon—Jean Gebser was a master of this; Charles Taylor and Hans-Georg Gadamer brought it to near perfection. The first major approach is interobjective, the second is intersubjective—and my point is that you need them both. For convenience sake, I refer to both of them as ‘intersubjective,’ but these important differences should not be overlooked. This topic is explored at length in **Sidebar I**: ‘Integral Methodological Pluralism.’)

“Because the wisdom traditions did not undertake this specific type of research, they do not possess an understanding of these types of stages, and therefore *there is nothing in all of the Buddhist teachings that will tell me if my center of gravity is, say, at the red or blue or green meme*. Or at Jane Loevinger’s impulsive, conformist, individualistic, or integrated

waves of development. Or at Bob Kegan's, or Carol Gilligan's, or Jan Sinnott's, or Cheryl Armon's, or Deirdre Kramer's....

“That, indeed, is a glaring deficiency. To tie this in with our present topic, if there is nothing in the wisdom traditions, including Buddhism, that would let me see if I am at, say, green, then there is likewise nothing that would let me spot when I have slipped into a pathological version of green: namely, boomeritis. And therefore there is little in Buddhism or any other spiritual tradition that would or could help me directly to get over one of the great epidemics of our time.

“In fact, if my own center of gravity is green, then I might start identifying Buddhism with the green meme itself and even its boomeritis forms, since I will interpret most of the meditative states that I have through the green meme. As we earlier discussed, I might have numerous profound and completely *authentic* states of spiritual awareness, but I will tend to *interpret* them through the general stage of my own development, namely green in this case. (See **Sidebar F** for several examples of this.) If so, then extreme pluralism and deconstructive postmodernism will start to look like a fine explanation of the meaning of Emptiness; I might write a paper on deconstruction as a new approach to Shunyata; Derrida and Dogen will start to look wonderfully similar; Foucault and Fa-tsang are somehow saying much the same thing; and come to think of it, wasn't Buddha a patriarchal, hierarchical, marginalizing, sexist swine?

“Oh dear. The point is simply that the great wisdom traditions, unexcelled in showing us some of the phenomenal (or first-person) stages of individual subjective consciousness as it unfolds from subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious, are nonetheless ill-equipped to show us the intersubjective stages that consciousness assumes as it manifests in its interactive, communal, or collective forms. And because the traditions are ill-equipped to spot these stages, they are ill-equipped to spot pathologies in them: and thus they are poorly suited to diagnose, let alone cure, the great nightmare called boomeritis....

“Worse than that, many of the wisdom traditions in our culture have actually succumbed to it: boomeritis Buddhism is born. And boomeritis shamanism, boomeritis ecology, boomeritis New Age, boomeritis paganism, boomeritis spirituality in general.... (See **Sidebar H**: ‘Boomeritis Buddhism.’)

“Does this mean that the great contemplative traditions, like Buddhism, are partial and limited? I’m afraid so, yes—but then, so is any system that we could ever come up with, including ours. Even if we produce what we feel is a perfectly integral model at this time, a hundred years from now, a thousand years from now, a million years from now, our ‘complete system’ will look something like a flea on the elephant of the system that the future will disclose. Of course our systems are always partial, and of course new ones will always dwarf our discoveries. But we persist in attempting to be as integral as we can be at this time, because even a little bit of wholeness is better than none at all.

“Does this mean that I can’t get any sort of Enlightenment if I only use Buddhist meditation? Actually, no, it does *not* mean that. Let me be more specific. Buddhism—and all great contemplative traditions—offer meditation with form (gross or subtle) that eventually gives way to meditation without form (or the causal unmanifest). Both forms of meditation are important and should be included, but it is meditation in the pure formless state (nirvana, nirvikalpa, Ayn, formless Godhead) that is said to constitute the Great Liberation, because when you discover that you are Consciousness-without-an-object—or pure Emptiness—then you are freed from the torture and torment that all objects inflict, partial and finite and lacerating as they are.

“Of course, once you have awakened to the pure Emptiness of the I AM state, then that Emptiness is perfectly integrated and united with the world of all Form, such that Emptiness and Form are truly ‘nondual.’ At that point, but not before, you are indeed one with the Earth, but only because you have found formless Heaven. Both are crucially important.

“Perhaps we could put it this way: In discovering formless Emptiness, you become FREE. Free, because you realize that what you are in reality is not in any way limited to the finite manifest realm. When you discover the Original Face that you had before the Big Bang, you are infinitely, radically, wildly free from all possible limitation, boundaries, manifestation, constriction. This is why nirvana, or formless release, is always said to be the Great Liberation.

“But that is not the entire story, is it? Because once you discover nirvana or the formless, and once you actually push through it, then you further discover that nirvana and samsara are ‘not two.’ That is, the formless Self is actually one with the entire world of Form in ever-present One Taste. At that point, you are not merely Free, you are FULL. You are saturated by the entire Kosmos which is your own Body of Form. Having found nirvana or FREEDOM, you now find that nirvana and samsara are together eternally in a FULLNESS that is none other than the love that moves the sun and other stars.

“Both Freedom and Fullness, or Emptiness and Form, are integral aspects of the ever-present Nondual. But if you have one without the other, a lopsided moment greets you each day. If you have only Emptiness, only Freedom, you are divorced from the body and its earth and its radiant vitality (you are a mere Ascender). If you have only Fullness, you are not merely one with the body and earth, you are fused with them, attached to them, bound to a series of finite objects that you confuse with infinite spirit (you are a mere Descender). Obviously, if you are identified with body and earth, you cannot find the Original Face that existed before the Big Bang. In other words, becoming ‘one’ with the Earth before finding Emptiness is merely a type of immersion in phenomenal experience, which is very prevalent now in the many spiritual movements that equate oneness with the gross realm with nonduality.

“But as for the great formless Emptiness itself, it does not evolve, develop, or even exist in time. It has no moving parts, so it can’t break down, nor can it be improved: there’s nothing, literally, to improve. So if you discover pure Emptiness right now—and the great

traditions can most certainly show you how to do that—then it will be the same Emptiness that those smarty-pants future folks will be discovering as well.

“In other words, in the two components of Enlightenment, Buddhism (or any of the great wisdom traditions) can definitely show you how to find infinite FREEDOM. And having found that Freedom now, one is Free eternally. Find the Great Liberation right now—by discovering that you are Empty consciousness-without-an-object—and you are Free for all time.

“But when that Freedom becomes one with the world of Form, we must then ask: what is the nature of the world of Form at that moment? If I have my Great Liberation at the time of, say, Gautama Buddha, then the world of Form does not include computers, the internet, a man on the moon, an understanding of neurophysiology, the discovery of intersubjective stages, and so on. In other words, although my formless Freedom is perfect, the world of Form as it existed two-thousand years ago lacks many things that are in today’s world of Form.

“Put bluntly, while the Formless is timeless, *the world of Form evolves*. The world of Form grows, changes, develops, evolves. As Whitehead often pointed out, the world of evolution, the world of Form, is marked by *novel emergence*—new things come into being with the unfolding of time. In healthy development, in fact, there is an increasing complexification—an increasing differentiation-and-integration—and thus the world of Form becomes fuller and fuller and fuller. Atoms to molecules to cells to organisms: *the world of Form becomes Fuller*, as evolution unfolds and embraces more and more realities.

“(Of course, the world of Form can also become Sicker, precisely because there are more and more realities to screw up. But here, of course, we are focusing on the positive sides of evolving Form.)

“Therefore, compared with the Enlightenment that I might achieve two-thousand years ago, the Enlightenment that I might achieve today can be Fuller—even though it will

never be Freer. The formless Freedom of the Great Liberation is the same, but there are simply more and more things in the world of Form to be one with.

“This is where a more integral spirituality enters the picture. In an integral or AQAL approach, we cannot really improve on the Emptiness or the Freedom; we are simply trying to be more adequate to the world of Form at this time—we are working to insure a Fuller expression and celebration of the Emptiness that you are in any event, and we do so by trying to offer more comprehensive and more integral maps of the world of evolving Form, so that, being more aware of all of these manifest potentials, you can embrace them with the love and compassion borne of fierce Emptiness. [See the discussion about this ‘evolutionary Enlightenment’ between Andrew Cohen and KW in the latest issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*]

“Thus, find formless Enlightenment now, you have found it for all time, because the Formless is radically prior to time itself. And you can certainly do that *right now* with Buddhism (or any of the great causal traditions). But how will you *express* that Enlightenment? What Forms will it be one with? What vehicles will it embrace? Will it be an integral embrace or a fragmented one? And will it be temporary or permanent?

“I had a spiritual teacher, with much enlightened wisdom (i.e., alive to the Formless), who nevertheless believed, based on his tradition, that smoking one cigarette was equal to killing a hundred people. Which, due to a misspent youth, puts me somewhere alongside Pol Pot as a mass murderer. You see, even if you are Enlightened in that sense (numerous experiences of causal satori and Freedom), you still have a relative body with a relative mind existing in the relative world. Will your mind be adequate, or lost in ancient myths and prejudices? Will it be comprehensive to the times? Will it be as compassionate, as all-inclusive, as integral and as Full as it can be? Or will it be partial, prejudiced, perhaps even shot through with boomeritis?

“So we try to use an integral model in order to express Enlightenment (Freedom) through the most comprehensive vehicles that we can (Fullness), which includes an embrace

of body, feeling, earth, the feminine, the lunar, the diffuse (in addition to, not instead of, logic, thinking, the masculine, the solar, the focal). All of those more comprehensive identities help to make our realization, not Freer, but Fuller.

“Our particular version of that Fuller approach we call AQAL. But please notice: ‘all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states’ refers to the manifest realm or the world of Form. In other words, for us, the Nondual—which is defined as ‘Emptiness plus all Form’—means ‘Emptiness plus AQAL.’ *But in and by itself*, the world of Form, the world of AQAL, is merely the world of illusion.

“IF the world of Form is realized to be one with Spirit, then that Form (or AQAL) is indeed seen as the radiant manifestation of the pure Emptiness of the Great Perfection, and as such, the entire world of Form is simply the radiant Body of your own Consciousness. But if one is merely immersed in the world of Form, identified with the body and the earth and the manifest realm, one is indeed lost in the Cave of Shadows, hugging finite objects in the hope of finding Freedom. One confuses kissing the shadows with finding the Light.

“In other words, on the other side of nirvana (or on the other side of the realization of Emptiness), the manifest realm is indeed (and always has been) the radiant Body of Buddha. But on *this* side of nirvana, the manifest realm is merely the prison of samsara. You might find a type of Fullness here, but you will never be Free. And thus what fullness you find will torture you to death, here in the passing shadows and searing pain of samsara.

“So why do we spend so much time mapping out all these quadrants, all these levels, all these lines, all these states, if, in themselves, they are nothing but the illusions that are our prison? Well, if you were in prison and you wanted to get out, wouldn’t it help to have a floor plan of the prison?

“That’s what an AQAL map is: it is the most accurate, most complete floor plan of samsara that we can find, the most comprehensive map of the prison, useful precisely because studying it will better help you to plan your escape from this mess altogether. (And yes, it is an escape from the shadows that paradoxically resides in embracing the shadows with such

passionate equanimity that they yield the light that was hiding not beyond them, but within and beyond them: the causal gives way to the nondual as Emptiness and Form unite in the Heart, and Heaven and Earth become One Taste. The problem with a mere Earth embrace is that it can find no beyond of any sort, and thus indeed is stuck only with shadows.)

“Just as important, a more integral map of the prison will let you more easily spot that architectural mess called boomeritis. Sticking with our simple metaphor, there are at least four quadrants, or four major rooms, in the prison of samsara. And the Zen master who is helping you escape from the prison usually doesn’t know about some of those rooms (the Lower-Left quadrant, or the intersubjective stages researched by, e.g., Spiral Dynamics), and therefore he or she will leave a bunch of prisoners—aspects of your own relative, manifest personality—stuck in those rooms, fixated in those rooms, one of whose walls is covered with graffiti that says: boomeritis slept here.

“And boomeritis is still sleeping here: because its existence is unsuspected, boomeritis continues to dominate the relative personality, even if Emptiness otherwise saturates your being and you have had many profound satoris. On the Freedom side, you might be very Free, but on the Fullness side, you are stuck with boomeritis.

“You will continue to interpret your higher and highest states of consciousness using the general developmental wave of your own *conventional* mind, which very well might be the green meme, and even the mean green meme, so that boomeritis will haunt your life, skewing your insides in ways that you just can’t quite figure out: all this meditation, and something is still wrong....

“Can a person with a bad case of boomeritis reach permanent realization or permanent Enlightenment (as opposed to passing states or temporary satori)? In my opinion, no; and I think the evidence here agrees. You can, as we have repeatedly seen, have numerous satoris, altered states, meditative states, or peak experiences of Emptiness (the causal and even the Nondual). That is, you can have numerous authentic satoris. But the way you convert those temporary states into permanent traits is by developing through the

waves of consciousness in a stable fashion. If your center of gravity is caught at green, circling in an endless stream of boomeritis, then it will be very hard to move permanently to yellow, turquoise, and third tier. You will have a glitch in your center of gravity, as it orbits its own shadow and fails to reach escape velocity from the planet Ego.

“There are many teachers, in many traditions—Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Neopagan, Feminist, Pluralist, Shamanic, Transpersonal—that have had numerous profound satoris, kenshos, unio mystica states, luminous raptures, embodied revelations—but their conventional personalities are still structured by boomeritis. With every good intention—and their intentions are often solid gold—they end up equating the ultimate truth of Nonduality with the relative truths of the green meme, and there the sad story commences. If and when green goes sour, which it often does in Boomer culture, then the nightmare begins, because now God/dess and Spirit and Buddha are on the side of boomeritis. Some examples of this are given in a lecture called, appropriately enough, Boomeritis Buddhism [**Sidebar H**], so if you’re interested, please drop by.

“But my point is that the tangled web of boomeritis spirituality is almost impossible to untie; the knots in consciousness are so dense, so encouraged by cultural pressure, so supported by social consensus, that it takes something of a heroic effort to shake them off and get on about your own evolution. Even worse, because virtually none of the various spiritual approaches—yesterday or today—possess an understanding of intersubjective waves, then there is little in any of today’s spiritual approaches to help directly dislodge boomeritis.

“Fortunately, there has lately been a shift in the samsaric winds: the MGM has run its course, boomeritis is starting to recognize that what it called liberation might be just another room in the prison, and sensitive souls everywhere are again looking for a genuine Light on the other side of their selves.

“How to begin? Perhaps a good place to start is by getting a better floor plan of the prison. Get an integral map—or a map that is as integral as today’s age can recognize. Of course, in the opinion of us at IC, it should at least include all the quadrants, levels, lines, and

states. You don't have to obsessively memorize them all or know every boring detail—although you're welcome to do so—but simply familiarize yourself with enough of the general contours to make sure that you are taking all of your subpersonalities in all four rooms of the prison and getting the heck out of there—so that you *then* can embrace them all with passionate equanimity, and not merely identify with some of them to the exclusion of others.

“In a more integral approach, many of the things that you have learned from the psychological systems of the great spiritual traditions are still true enough, it's just that they are largely dealing with the Upper-Left quadrant. They are still true as far as they go, and you can continue to mine that extraordinary wisdom. But you can also add the insights from the other quadrants—especially the Lower Left and Lower Right—and thus begin to take advantage of things like Spiral Dynamics, Carol Gilligan, Robert Kegan, Jane Loevinger, and so on.

“And that is the final reason, the real reason, to adopt a more integral approach—not so that you can become Freer, but that you can become Fuller. An AQAL map reminds us of places in ourselves that we might not yet have touched; potentials we might not yet have tapped; areas to which love and compassion can yet be brought—so that my eternal Freedom can become Fuller and Fuller the more that I can love, the more that I can embrace, the more that I can honor in the Kosmic Consciousness that is ever-present yet ever-unfolding.

“In that ever-present Light, samsara isn't a prison, it is the direct manifestation of a radiant Spirit overflowing with a Love that not even infinity can contain, a wildly reckless Passion that manifests entire galaxies so that it will have someone to love, that constantly exalts the Beloved in Kosmic hymns of relentlessly mad and lunatic praise, hymns that appear to mere mortals as the cascading rain, the sheltering sky, the whispering winds, but are really nothing but the infinite insanity of a Spirit that loves so intensely that the entire Kosmos arises to bear witness....

“More sure-footedly tiptoeing through the rooms of your despair, you might one day—perhaps very soon—awaken to find that the entire drama of the separate self was simply the worst dream of your entire Kosmic life, and that you can, once again, breathe in and dissolve the worlds easily, breathe out and create them all over again, just... like... that!, timeless radiance to timeless radiance, magnificent howl of eternal release, ever present and always shining, even now whispering its name in the gentle winds that softly sing around you, if you listen very, very carefully....”