

Dear People Whom God Loves,

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I find the work of Ken Wilber helpful in looking at spiritual growth from another perspective.

Growth goes through a series of stages. This applies not only to spiritual growth but also to many kinds of growth. He mentions cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, and musical intelligence as examples. The common denominator is that when we enter a stage, we arrive at it from a lower stage. We then hold it permanently, and it is the basis for further growth.

The whole journey can be divided into a few stages or many stages. For example, a travel journey from New York to Los Angeles may be divided into New York to Chicago, Chicago to Denver, and Denver to Los Angeles. We could also divide it into many places in between. If we divide our growth journey into too many stages, it tends to become unmanageable.

It is also helpful to remember that we can have brief glimpses into a stage higher than we are. These glimpses are not permanent so they are called states rather than stages. For example, lifted to a state of wonder and awe when seeing a sunset or state of peace when listening to music that transports us. These are called states because they have not become stabilized into permanent stages.

Also, different parts of us can be at different stages. For example, we can be at a high stage of cognitive intelligence and a low stage of emotional intelligence. When we are in this situation, we are good thinkers; we can reason well and plan well. We will be very bright but...have little emotional connection to other people. We will have little compassion. Being bright, we can find ways to get what we want and have little feeling for those we hurt and destroy along the way. This is a very deadly combination. We need to recognize its existence.

Continuing with thoughts from *Integral Spirituality*. We will look at the line of moral development through three stages. There are others who trace that line through six or seven stages.

Remember that stages could be called levels. Also they are permanent and not passing. For example, a person may be honest at times but not have the virtue of honesty. Also as we are graced to grow through the stages, the lower stages are not eliminated but integrated into the higher stages.

Stage I is called pre-conventional or egocentric. An infant is largely self-absorbed in his/her awareness. In other words, everything is about "me." This does not mean that the infant is bad. We all start there. What is tragic is to remain there. When we look inside of ourselves honestly, don't we see hints of that even when we have moved further along?

Stage Two is called conventional or ethnocentric: awareness centers on the person's group, tribe, clan, nation, gang, or religion. Those who do not belong to the person's group tend to be excluded. A lot of this remains in us as adults. How many of us continue to think that our nation, our political party, our religion is the right one and we are superior to the rest. This shows itself when we only want to make our case and are unwilling to listen to another other point of view.

Stage Three is called post-conventional or worldcentric. Now our identity expands to care and concern for all people regardless of race, color, sex, creed or nationality. For those of us who believe in God, when we are graced to realize that God is the Lover of everyone and that Love is present in everyone, this begins our entry into this stage. People who do not believe in God can also enter this stage. People who do believe in God may never enter it.

This is the movement from "me" to "us" to "all of us".

Ken Wilbur also writes about lines of development. Lines are the various capacities or energies that we have. He writes about five. They are called developmental lines because they show growth and development. The five intelligences are 1) cognitive 2) interpersonal 3) psychosexual 4) emotional and 5) moral.

These intelligences can grow through the three stages that we discussed last time. Also, remember that all of these intelligences will not have grown to the same height or—we might say—to the same depth. The levels of awareness will not be the same for all of them; nor should we expect them to be the same. But it is good for us to see where we are. Being aware of where we are can help us not to make some bad decisions and will alert us to when we need growth.

In his book, Wilbur has what he calls a Psychograph. The graph describes a person who excels in cognitive intelligence, is fairly good in interpersonal, is poor in psychosexual and moral, and is really poor in emotional. For example, a person may have great cognitive intelligence and at the same time be lacking in compassion and empathy. Hurting others will not bother him. This person can be brilliant in pursuing a life of hatred and destruction.

We may have passing peak experiences (that is a state) of something in a stage above us. We don't have to have actual growth or practice to have such an experience. For example, we might look into the Grand Canyon and have a peak experience of wonder and awe.

However, to enter into that stage (remember a stage is permanent) it takes practice, practice, and practice. The good news is that we can accelerate through the stages by various types of state-practices such as meditation. These practices change our brain and so bring the higher stages of consciousness. From my belief in God, I also see the Loving Energy that we name God drawing us to Him/Her Self.

Before continuing with Ken Wilbur, I'd like to take a little sidetrack with Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. They write of moral development into six stages and merely touch on a seventh that I won't consider.

Kohlberg's study was exclusively with men. He found the stages that they went through in valuing human rights. All of these stages have to be gone through in sequence. You can't skip over anyone of them. Also you can't understand or value stages above where you are. You may get a glimpse of the stage above you before you enter into it. Stages above you just seem wrong and you think that the stage you are in is absolutely right and stubbornly and righteously discount anyone who is in a stage above.

Remember, we all start at zero when are born.

- Stage I Everything is about "me". Other people don't count.
- Stage II I will do something for you if you do something for me.
- Stage III I will have concern for those in my social group, and I will conform to my group's values.
- Stage IV I will obey the law. What the law says is what is good.
- Stage V I will see that the law is not always right, and the law should be changed by social contract.
- Stage VI Absolutely everyone has rights that must be respected. In stage I, it is o.k. to hurt anybody. No one has rights. In Stage II, I will respect the rights of those who are useful to me.

In Stage III, I will not discriminate against those in my social group. In Stage IV, I will not discriminate against those that the law protects. In Stage V, I will work to get the law changed to protect others that the law does not protect. In Stage VI, I will work against discrimination against anyone regardless of whether or not they are protected by law or custom.

Gilligan's study was done with women. She found the women went through the same stages as men. She did find a difference. She found that focus with women was not so much about expanding growth in expanding rights, but in expanding growth in care and compassion to more and more people.

I find these studies valuable, not just to see how "high" we are, but to acknowledge our need to grow. We tend to want to draw people up to the stage that we are and, at the same time, to prevent them from going further. Institutions have the same problem. They will want to draw people up to the level that the institution is and keep them from growing further. Why? Because people at higher stages are seen as wrong and even dangerous. This is why institutions fear people who are very deep, such as mystics.

I see three things (there are others) that can help our growth.

1. Listen to people who think differently
2. Associate with different kinds of people
3. Meditate and let God change us

What I wrote about Kohlberg and Gilligan is what I remember from reading them a long time ago. Please remember that weakness. I will now write about Ken Wilber's thoughts about Carol Gilligan's moral growth stages.

He writes about two different types that show themselves in the various stages. He names them "masculine" and "feminine." Gilligan's very valuable contribution was that she interviewed women whereas Kohlberg interviewed men.

Quoting Wilber: "Male logic, or a man's voice, tends to be based on terms of autonomy, justice, and rights; whereas women's logic or voice tends to be based in terms of relationships, care, and responsibility. Men tend toward agency; women tend toward communion. Men follow rules; women follow connections. Men look; women touch. Men tend toward individualism, women toward relationships."

As an aside. This shows how important it is for any society and organization to listen to both men and women. Not that every man or woman fits neatly into these categories. When we look at history, we see that men's voices have been dominant and women's voices have been suppressed.

Wilber then writes that Gilligan identifies the highest stage of moral development as integrated. That means, he says, that people befriend both the masculine and feminine voices, though they may act predominantly from one or the other.

Also remember that people can be gifted with mystical knowledge (love) without going through all the moral stages. This is a grace given to some and not to others. Some unlearned people have received this grace.

This knowledge helps me to understand our disagreements better and see myself more clearly. It also helps me to see how I need moral growth.

Continuing with the masculine and feminine principles of Wilber. He writes that these healthy masculine principles of autonomy, strength, independence, and freedom can become unhealthy. He writes: "There is not just autonomy, but alienation; not just strength, but domination; not just independence, but morbid fear of relationship and commitment; not just a drive toward freedom, but a drive to destroy. The unhealthy masculine principle does not transcend in freedom but dominates in fear."

He then continues that the healthy feminine principle tending toward flowing, relationship, care, and compassion can become unhealthy. "Instead of being in relationship, she becomes lost in relationship. Instead of a healthy self in communion with others, she loses herself altogether and is dominated by the relationships she is in. Not a connection but a fusion; not a flow state, but a panic state; not a communion but a meltdown. The unhealthy feminine principle does not find fullness in connection, but chaos in fusion."

Wilber then says that recognizing the healthy times is not to judge people (I would add not to judge ourselves) but to learn how to communicate with each other.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in spiritual growth and to anyone whose task is to facilitate the spiritual growth of others.

The book again is Integral Spirituality by Ken Wilber. Published by Integral Books.

Chapter 6 in Ken Wilber's book Integral Spirituality is titled "The Shadow and the Disowned Self."

He makes the important observation: "...an understanding of psychodynamic repression as well as ways to cure it, is something contributed exclusively by modern Western psychology." Consequently, it is possible to be a good meditator or spiritual teacher and still suffer from the psychopathology of this disowned self. This then makes us quite dangerous. In this case, meditation is not a substitute for psychological therapy.

Now what is meant by this disowned self? My disowned self is a part of me that I do not recognize as belonging to me. That is called putting it into the shadow. Carl Jung was the great beginning of understanding this condition.

Here is how it works. It can happen with any feeling, emotion, or impulse. When we have any feeling, emotion, or impulse that is not acceptable to us, we will work (consciously at first) to tell ourselves that we don't have it. We believe that it is unacceptable because we learned that from our family, our church, our group, or our society. My self-image is that I am not like that.

I will use anger as an example. If I think that it is bad to be angry, I will begin by suppressing it. We are still aware that we are angry, but less aware than before. But then something deeper happens. I repress it. That is not a conscious process. We really don't know that we are angry. We don't own our anger. Our angry feelings have been split off from us. We have disowned them. I really believe that I am not angry. We now have the pathological condition of a shadow self or a disowned self. We are emotionally sick and don't know it; but it may show itself, for example, in depression, irritability, or obsession.

Next, we will see how we project this disowned self onto others and then see what needs to be done for healing. Some of what I have written is mine, so don't blame Ken Wilber for it.

We now turn to how we project onto others these disowned parts of ourselves that we no longer see as part of us.

To use anger again. When our anger has been put into our shadow (which means we aren't aware that we are angry), why do we see others as angry? At some level, we know that anger is present, but since it's not in me, it must be in you. Maybe the other person is angry, but we don't see it in ourselves. We are only half-right. At other times, the other person or persons are not angry, but I think that they are because since it is not in me, it must be in them. In this case, we are completely wrong. When other people really bother us, it most often means that there is a part of us that we don't recognize.

I quote this from Wilber's book: "You might have seen the recent studies where men who were anti-gay-pornography crusaders, and who had dedicated a large portion of their lives to aggressively fighting homosexual porn, were tested for their levels of sexual arousal when shown photos of gay sexual scenes, the crusaders evidenced substantially more sexual arousal than other males. In other words, they themselves were attracted to gay sex but, finding that unacceptable in themselves, spent their lives trying to eradicate it in others, while claiming they had no such "nasty" desires

themselves. Yet all they were really doing was projecting their own despised shadows onto others, then scapegoating them.”

This doesn't mean that we do not see things in others. It is good to do so as this gives us information about them in order to understand them better or, on occasion, to protect ourselves from them. If their behavior “drives us up a wall” and is really not threatening us personally, it is a good sign that they are touching our shadow.

I find it valuable to look at some public figures that really bother me. That helps me to see parts of myself that I have disowned. This is hard for me to do. It is very uncomfortable. But I recommend it to you.

As we understand what the shadow—also called the disowned self—is, we can look at how our disowned self can be owned once again. We could also put it this way. How can we become aware of our shadow and thus prevent the harm that it does to ourselves and others.

Since we are not aware that the shadow is there, it might seem impossible to bring it to awareness.

First of all, I find it helpful to realize that my having a shadow does not make me bad. Because I do bad things because of my shadow, I have the responsibility to seek healing. We may need competent help to do this.

I must let myself think about people and situations that are deeply irritating and upsetting to me. They draw me to lose my cool and I have to struggle to contain myself. I must ask myself, is seeing or even thinking about this person just giving me information that might help me deal with the situation or person or is it “driving me up a wall.” My tendency would be to rationalize that it is the former rather than the latter.

For example. Suppose I am in a situation where someone is micromanaging. I see that I don't like that. Do I just use this information to learn how to recognize that the micromanaging—when it is a pattern—is not a good way to manage? Or do I think this person is bad, that I can't stand them, or that I wish them harm. When this is the case, it is a sign that something is in my shadow. Maybe I don't micromanage anymore, but there is still a resentment down inside that has not healed. This can result in symptoms like headaches and depression. It may also come out in actions which are harmful.

I find it helpful to me to reflect on this in the presence of Love who knows me just as I am and not the false self-image of myself. That helps me to look at some of my ugly stuff because Love still loves me.

I think that being human is wonderful, especially with my belief that Love is drawing us to that wonderful goal where we all love fully and our false self-images are gone. I also find it comforting to realize that I am one individual screwed-up person in the midst of a screwed up humanity.

When I read *Integral Spirituality* about five years ago, I learned something. In reading it again, I realized that I had remembered only that meditation was not a substitute for psychological therapy. I now see more clearly why this is so. Here is what is clear to me, but I have much more to learn about it.

We continue to look into the feelings, emotions, and impulses that we put into our shadow. We have them, but we don't recognize them as belonging to ourselves. We will use anger as an example.

At the beginning of our spiritual growth, we all have anger. We continue to have it, but there are healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with it.

At this early stage, we identify with the anger. I am the anger. At some point, we realize that we are not our anger. In other words, the anger isn't who I am.

When I recognize that the anger isn't me—I am not my anger—I can go either of two directions. The healthy direction is to recognize that I am not my anger and, at the same time, to acknowledge that I am angry. I own the anger. The anger is mine. This means that the anger doesn't go into my shadow.

If I go in the unhealthy direction, I do not identify with the anger, but I disown it. That means that I don't see anger in me. There is anger, but it is perceived by me—as Wilber says—as “you” or “it”. This means that I see someone either as angry or it is just anger out there somewhere.

The reason I do this is because I think that it is not safe or okay to be angry. I think this way because of what I have experienced. Perhaps I was taught by my family or my religion that it is wrong or a sin to be angry. Perhaps my anger has gotten me into big trouble. Whatever the reason, the anger is now in my shadow. The anger is no longer mine. It is out there.

Now, how does meditation fit in all of this? When we meditate, we just let ourselves be aware of any thoughts, feelings, emotions, or impulses. We don't judge them. We just let ourselves be aware of them. They are just there.

Now, what is wrong with that? Nothing. What is crucial is whether I have owned my anger or have disowned my anger. In other words, do I recognize that I am angry or is the anger outside of me?

If I have owned my anger, meditation will help me grow in the process of integrating my anger in a healthy, productive way. If I have disowned my anger, when I meditate the anger is seen as outside of me. I am aware, but I am aware of anger that is outside of me. No matter how much I am meditating and am aware, my anger doesn't get integrated. Anger is still in my shadow. Only when I acknowledge I am angry can the healing begin.

Meditation may help in other lines of spiritual growth, but it won't help what is in my shadow. The problem is that we don't recognize what is in our shadow. That is why it is valuable to look at persons or situations that deeply upset us, make us angry, repulse us, cause us to hate. When we notice these strong reactions inside of ourselves, it usually points to something in our shadow. I find it helpful to notice prominent people in politics or religion that I can't stand, people who drive me up a wall. They teach me a lot about myself. What is instructive is not whether they are right or wrong or whether I agree or disagree with them. What is instructive is my reaction to them. That is hard for me to look at.

We continue with the shadow and meditation. Difficult as it is for me to acknowledge my shadow, I do find it helpful to pray and ask God to help me see myself as I truly am. I know that this will reveal a lot of ugly stuff. It is good, though, because that little bit of willingness gives God an opening to work in me.

I used the example of anger in our shadow. There are many things that we can put in our shadow, things that we so cleverly rationalize. Here are some: They are not bad in themselves. When they are put into the shadow, they become destructive.

My feeling of superiority	My feeling of inferiority
My anger	My sexual desires
My greed	My gluttony
My envy and jealousy	My laziness
My fear	My desire to control
My need for "me first"	My need to be right
My need to feel certain	My desire for the spotlight
My need to be perfect	My desire to win
My need to feel holy	

I'm sure that you can think of some more.

An after-thought:

I think that most of the harm that we do to each other comes out of the dark shadow. Also, we have a white shadow. When we admire something good and healthy in others, it is often a sign of something good and healthy in us that we have not recognized.

We humans are complex. And God loves us just as we are and only wants us to grow in goodness and happiness.

Smile, God Loves You
Father Clay