

Unfolding Perspectives

Making Sense of What it Means to be Human



THE LITTLE-KNOWN SECRET OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT...

I've been reading a lot lately about the process of human development, so that's what I want to touch on. This thinking has been stimulated by reading a lot of Ken Wilber, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Kegan, and Jane Loevinger (in case you want to google any of them).

Human development takes many forms--humans undergo moral, cognitive, ego (or self), interpersonal, emotional, values, and spiritual development--just to name a few areas of development. A thread running through all these streams of development is our ongoing attempts to discover meaning in our existence, to find some sort of significance.

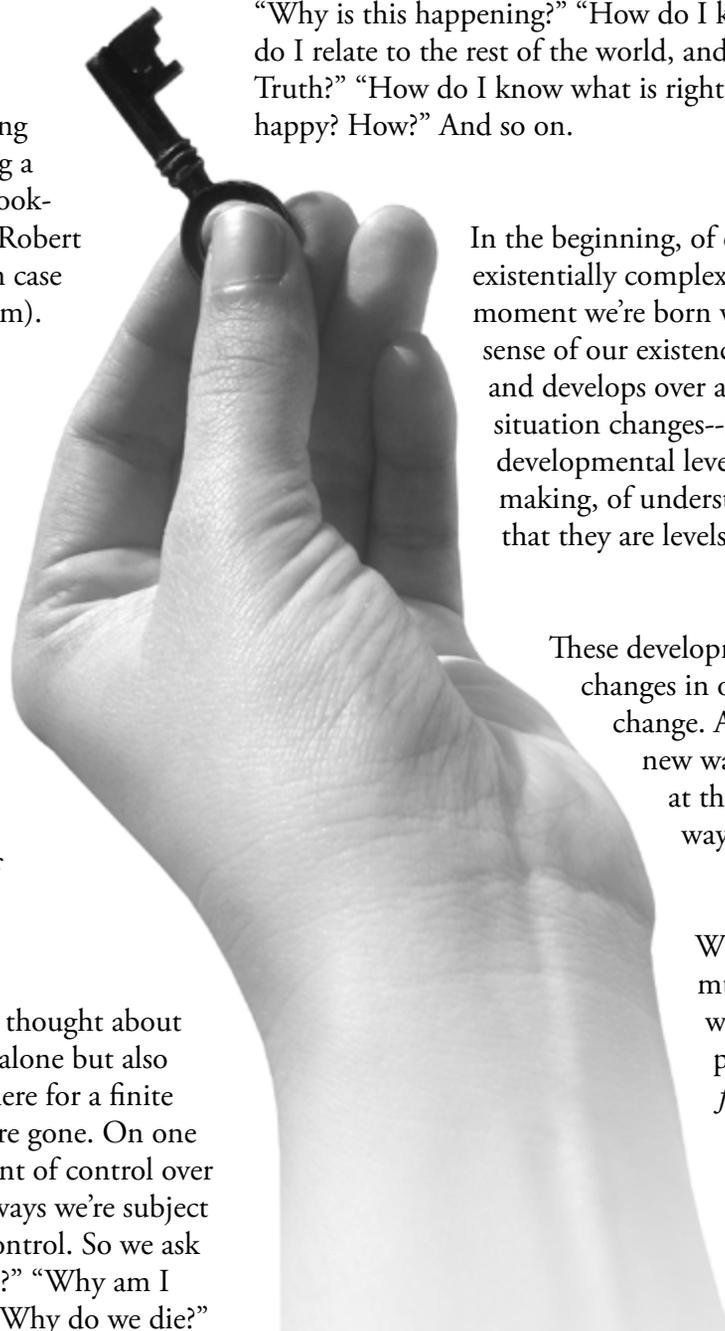
I suspect that you've probably thought about this. Here we are: vulnerable, alone but also part of a larger whole. We're here for a finite amount of time, and then we're gone. On one hand, we have a certain amount of control over our existence, while in other ways we're subject to forces we can't predict or control. So we ask questions such as, "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "What's it all about?" "Why do we die?"

"Why is this happening?" "How do I know what to do next?" "How do I relate to the rest of the world, and to other people?" "What is Truth?" "How do I know what is right and what is wrong?" "Can I be happy? How?" And so on.

In the beginning, of course, we aren't asking such existentially complex questions. But from the moment we're born we do start trying to make sense of our existence. How we do this changes and develops over and over as our environmental situation changes--hence the idea of developmental levels. These are levels of meaning-making, of understanding. You might even say that they are levels of wisdom.

These developmental changes happen when changes in our environment force us to change. At such times we must find a new way to function, a way to look at things from a new perspective, a way to adapt to our new situation.

When we are born we don't have much of a perspective on who we are. We experience what psychologists call an *oceanic fusion* with our environment. We can't even tell where we end and the rest of the world begins. But with a bit of experience (we bite our blanket and nothing hurts, but when we bite our toes,



The little-known secret of human development continued...

it does hurt) we figure out what is “me” and what is “not me.” This is the first of many developmental shifts. And, at this point, this is the extent of our ability to make sense of our world. Is it me, or not me?

At the other end of the spectrum, some few individuals grow into a perspective (by moving through many intermediate stages) where seeing and meaning making no longer happens from the perspective of the separate self, but rather includes an experienced unity with everything in the universe--a universal, or cosmic, perspective. And, there are probably unrealized perspectives beyond that.

Why am I sharing this with you? Why should you care about any of this? Because you're very likely sitting there, just as I am, doing your best to make sense of what it means to be human, vulnerable, mortal, and conscious, and I have found this idea of human developmental levels to give a very helpful perspective on this human need to make sense of our existence.

When you think about it, it's very weird being a person. Just when you think you might have it figured out, something new happens that lets you know that you don't. Or, you latch onto a group of people, or a set of ideas, that *seem* to explain things, but alone in bed some nights you still have a weird sense that there's something unfathomable about being human, something profoundly mysterious. These feelings come especially when something terrible happens to you or someone you love, or you ponder the incredible suffering in the world.

So, I thought you might benefit from understanding this idea of levels of developmental, as I have.

Before I go on, I also want to say that I'm not trying to say that some people are “better” than others (though I do think that saints are better than Nazis, for instance) so much as I'm saying that there are increasing levels of perspective, where more of what is can be included in one's view, and a wider perspective is better.

There are many ways to slice these developmental steps. One broad way would be to talk about four basic divisions: preconventional, conventional, postconventional, and transcendent. Let's look at these. Another time, perhaps, we can drill down a bit more.

Remember that each of these levels represents a *perspective*, each of which involves 1) a certain way of *doing*, 2) a way of *being*, and 3) a way of *thinking*. *Doing* would include how you interact, what needs you act upon, what ends you try to achieve, how you see the purpose of your life, and what role others play in your life--how you act.

Being would include how you feel about things, how you deal with your feelings, how wide your awareness is and what you choose to pay attention to, and how you experience and process whatever is going on around you--how you feel.

Thinking would include how you think about your experience, how you structure it inside your mind, how you explain it and make sense of it--how you create a mental map of reality.

Preconventional thinking, the first perspective, is very egocentric. It's all about *me*. It's very *body* oriented (as opposed to mind-oriented, as in the second perspective). The preconventional

The little-known secret of human development continued...

perspective is *impulsive* and *opportunistic*. It's all about me, and my needs, now. The preconventional way of looking at time is narrow--it's all about what happens now. There's little or no ability to delay gratification, and little if any ability to take the role of others, to realize that other people have their own needs and their own agenda. It's just me, looking out at the world and trying to get what I want or need.

Most people at this stage are children (up to about age 12), but some people stay at this stage well into adulthood.

This is usually because they live in a culture where the center of gravity is preconventional, or they have suffered some sort of trauma during this stage, which has prevented them from developing past it.

People at this stage of development tend to answer the existential questions I posed earlier (Why am I here? What's it all about? etc.) through a kind of magical thinking. Some of the thinking surrounding *The Secret*, for instance, comes from this level of development. The idea that you can control the universe with your mind is a highly egocentric, narcissistic point of view. About 10% of adults are at this stage of development.

At the next developmental level, the conventional perspective, things are more about *us*, about our group, whether that group is the Catholic Church, the Democratic Party, the Marine Corps, the kids who live on my block, the people who go to my school, or Red Sox fans. Instead of me against the world, as at the preconventional level, it becomes *us*

against the world. You're either with us, like us...or you aren't. The way we think is the right way, and the way others think is, well, wrong. People in this stage do see that others have needs and wants, and as long as they are part of the our group, those needs and wants make sense. Otherwise, they don't.

Those at this developmental level have traded the more me-centered approach for the security of being part of the group, even though this involves following rules and ways of thinking set by the group. This security

provides huge benefits in that it allows us to have a clear way to make sense of who we are (we are a Catholic, or a Marine, or a part of the junior class), and clear-cut ways to decide what is right or wrong, what is important, and so forth.

A person at the conventional level is capable of introspection, of symbolic and abstract thinking, of the ability to follow the *rules* of the group and to assume a certain *role* in the group. This is the beginning of the creation of a true independent self, and at the higher reaches of the conventional perspective we find some people are who true experts. This perspective is often described as *groupcentric*, or *ethnocentric*.

People at this level of development answer the existential questions I posed earlier from the point of view of rationality, cause and effect, subject-object thinking, and materialism (if you can't see it and measure it, it doesn't exist). Metaphysical explanations, popular at the preconventional level,

“

The idea that you can control the universe with your mind is a highly egocentric, narcissistic point of view. About 10% of adults are at this stage of development.

”

The little-known secret of human development continued...

are seen as fluffy and irrational. Instead of magical, life is very concrete at this stage. About 75% of adults are this stage.

At the next stage, postconventional, it's about *all of us*--not our group, but everyone. The idea that all men and women are created equal, the ideals of the American and French revolutions, republican and democratic government, and so forth, are postconventional ideas. Another postconventional realization is that *what something means depends on one's personal perspective*, whereas conventional thinkers assume that there is some sort of Truth out there, and they've found it, or at least they are in the process of finding it.

At the postconventional stage, objects are permanent and "out there" but what an object or an action means comes from the observer, and varies depending on who is doing the observing. There is an assumption that truth is relative rather than fixed. "It depends," a postconventional thinker might say. Postconventional thinkers, then, look to discover the underlying assumptions in any situation, and from their perspective, those assumptions are relative.

Postconventional thinkers tend to look at the system as a whole in whatever they are doing--another example of looking from a wider or more all-encompassing perspective. Ecology, for instance, is a postconventional concern. From this systems view of things, everything is interdependent. Also, boundaries are open, meaning that where you draw the boundary for anything is arbitrary. Boundaries can be drawn in many different ways, depending on what is considered within or outside a system, and that distinction is arbitrary.

Those at this level see, and are comfortable with, the

paradoxical nature of the existential questions I have posed. Those at this stage are comfortable with the fact that, as they see it, nothing is fixed (as opposed to the conventional level, where things are very much black and white, either/or), and that what seems to be true varies with the context. Where the conventional person has simplified existence into black and white categories, the postconventional person sees the complexity, the multidimensionality, and the relativity of everything.

Existential questions are about "all of us" at this stage, whereas they were about "me" at the preconventional stage, and about "us" (our in-group) at the conventional stage. It's estimated that about 14% of adults are at this postconventional level.

There is yet another stage. This fourth stage, or perspective, could be termed *transcendent*, or *unitive*. Those at this stage come to realize that all objects--including abstract ideas such as the self, the ego, and even the idea of three-dimensional space and time--are human-made constructs, based on layers upon layers of symbolic abstraction. There is an awareness that language presupposes many things that may not be true about reality, and traps us in a view that may not always serve us.

For instance, the whole idea of subject and object as separate things--one of the main premises in language--is seen by those at the unitive stage as constructed rather than actual and real. Subject and object, a unitive thinker would say, "go together." They are actually one thing, not two. In fact, all polarities created by the mind (and language) arise together: up makes no sense without down, good makes no sense without bad, me makes no sense without not-me. All of these polarities, say unitive thinkers, are arbitrarily constructed.

The little-known secret of human development continued...

At this transcendent stage what I, and many others, have called a *witness perspective* allows the person to stand aside and observe what is without adding meaning, without creating a mental map of what is being observed, or at least view things with a realization that all meaning being added is just something made-up. A person at this level realizes that the mental map we make of reality isn't reality itself--that the map is not the territory it represents.

At this level the existential questions I've posed are seen from a very cosmic perspective, where the typical separate self-identity is no longer seen as the essence of the person. Instead, everything is seen from a universal or cosmic perspective--you might say, from an experience of being "one with" everything. Consciousness or rational awareness assumes either background or foreground status depending on one's momentary attention. This stage is often spoken of as "enlightenment" or "self-realization." It is estimated that less than 1% of people are at this level of development.

Each of these stages can be further subdivided in various ways, and perhaps we can look at that a little later. What I've described is but a skeleton of each of these stages, each of which are made up of several sub-stages.

We could, for instance, look at each of these stages in terms of their perspective on time (for instance, the pre-conventional person sees only *now*, while the transcendent human being sees eternity). We could look at what type of cognition is used, what is "true", what constitutes right or wrong, the interpersonal style of each stage, how decisions are made, what creates anxiety at each stage, what defenses are used, what constitutes "me" and what is "not me" (or even if that idea makes sense). And, there are other aspects of how people at each

level try to make sense of being a human being. Religion, government, and organizational structures are perceived in a different way at each of these stages--there are pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional, and transcendent versions of each.

The point I want to make right now is that we each have a way of making sense of the world and how we fit into it, and as long as we continue to develop, this way of making meaning changes, expands. As our world changes, we find new ways to make sense of it. When you went away to school at about age five, your world changed. It was no longer about mom and dad and sister and brother. Now there are teachers and rules and a schedule, and the challenge of being away from home, and you had to adopt a new perspective in order to manage and understand that new world. When you went away to high school, things changed again, and once again you had to develop a new perspective and new ways of making sense of your new situation.

When our world changes, we struggle for a while, and then, hopefully, our perspective expands in a way that allows us to deal with the change. If we don't, we have problems. In fact, many people come to Centerpointe in the first place because they failed to fully make sense of life during one of these shifts. The world doesn't make sense anymore and they need to move to a new perspective but haven't yet been able to do so. Some people (actually, many people) have been abused or traumatized at a certain stage and, as a result, part of them is stuck at the level where the trauma happened.

Understanding these stages will help you navigate life more easily, to better make sense of who you are, to more easily find fulfillment--and, to more easily move yourself to the higher levels, where the real fun begins.

MY THOUGHTS ON RELIGION, OR, "HEY, BILL, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF JESUS?"

I'm going to get back to continuing my discussion of the whole idea of human development in the very near future, but I want to take a little detour and address something I'm often asked about.

People often say that to avoid problems one should avoid discussing religion or politics, but I want to talk a bit about religion today anyway. I get letters from time to time asking what my religion is, or what I think about Jesus, or Christianity, or if I believe in this or that religious idea or point of view, and I'd like to address those sorts of questions here.

Now that I think about it, this actually does relate to what I said about stages of human development. You'll remember that I discussed four broad stages of development--preconventional, conventional, postconventional, and transcendent (also sometimes called integral or unitive). The interesting thing about these levels of development is that no matter who you are, no matter what experience you have, no matter what idea you look at, you will view it from the perspective of your developmental level. Each developmental level sees things in a different way and from a different perspective. This includes religion

(and, for that matter, politics).

So, if you are at the preconventional level of development, you will view religion from that perspective. The preconventional perspective is, in a cognitive sense, pre-rational. In other words, this level does not yet use rationality and logic to evaluate ideas, situations, and so forth. It is a level where magical thinking is the order of the day. A Christian at this level, then, would be likely to focus on and be attracted to the magicalness of Jesus and Christianity--Jesus's miracles, the virgin birth, the resurrection, heaven, and anything else that conforms to the person's magical view of reality.

The same would be true for any other religion, too--Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, or any other religion. A preconventional thinker will interpret that religion from a magical-thinking point of view. Hinduism, for instance, is full of "miracle stories"--things that don't conform to the known laws of physics, but are believed to be true anyway, regardless of the lack of anything other than anecdotal evidence.

My thoughts on religion, or, “Hey, Bill, What do you think of Jesus?” Continued...

Someone at the next level, the conventional level of development, tends to see things in terms of black and white thinking. There is a Truth, we have it, and you don't. You're either with us, or you aren't. We're the in-group, and those in the out-group are in serious trouble, because they don't have the Truth that we have. Thinking at this level is dogmatic, and so is religion. Rational thinking begins to be available at this level, and magical thinking fades, but the choices are very black and white.

From the conventional level, IF you were to choose which religion you wanted to follow (which is a big if, since in most cases, you'd probably just believe whatever your family, or your culture, believed), you'd probably look at the beliefs--the dogma--of each, and pick the one that either made the most sense to you, or made you feel the greatest amount of security or pleasure, or perhaps the one that had the social environment in which you felt most comfortable.

The point is that you'd be looking at someone else's idea of what the Truth is, and then deciding whether you liked it or wanted to believe it.

Thinking at this level is very much in-group/out-group thinking. Those who agree with our Truth are okay, while those who believe something else are in a heap of trouble. In Christianity, those who

don't accept the True Faith will burn in Hell for eternity. Islam has similar ideas about “infidels.” Buddhists and Hindus believe you will remain on the wheel of samsara for thousands of lifetimes.

And so forth.

At the next level, postconventional, you're past black and white thinking. You see that the world is complex, multi-dimensional, paradoxical, and that black and white thinking, while tempting in its simplicity, doesn't even come close to accurately describing what's really going

on. You also see that rational thinking, while valuable, isn't everything (a pathological version of postconventional sees all thinking and rationality as bad, and thinks that everything is or should be about feelings--we'll address this at another time). While healthy postconventional sees rationality as useful, it has also found other ways of “knowing” (intuition, for instance), and since life doesn't happen all at once, linear thinking, which sequentially looks at one thing at a time, doesn't capture reality very well.

Thinking is *worldcentric* at the postconventional stage, so the idea of us vs others doesn't work anymore. In terms of religion, you begin to see the commonalities, rather than the differences, between religions. The World Council of Churches is a postconventional idea.

“The preconventional perspective is, in a cognitive sense, pre-rational. In other words, this level does not yet use rationality and logic to evaluate ideas, situations, and so forth. It is a level where magical thinking is the order of the day.”

My thoughts on religion, or, "Hey, Bill, What do you think of Jesus?" Continued...

At this level you're no longer looking for a dogma to answer the questions of what is right, what's it all about, and who you are. Instead, you're starting to look inside yourself to find your own answers. You might say that at pre-conventional and conventional levels, the authority for what is comes from outside. At the post-conventional and transcendent levels, the authority is *you*, not some outside authority.

A Christian at this level would, for instance, see Jesus as an *example* of the kind of consciousness all humans can attain, whereas the conventional Christian sees Jesus as the great *exception*--he's IT, and you're not. On a similar note, conventional Christians see humans as sinners needing saving, whereas post-conventional Christians tend to believe that people are basically good, with unlimited potential, that God wants you to be happy, and so forth. These Christians tend to say things like, "God wants you to be prosperous."

Examples of post-conventional Christians would include Joel Goldsmith (I particularly love his books), Emmett Fox, Mary Baker Eddy (founder of Christian Science), and Ernest Holmes (founder of the Church of Religious Science).

One more thing about post-conventional religion. Though post-conventional sees the commonalities in all religions, they still do not like conventional

religion. They may see the truths in all religions, but they see the religious point of view of prior stages as wrong and harmful. You see this in the attitude the American left has about the conventional Christianity of the religious right.

Finally, there is the view of religion from the transcendent level. This is where things like enlightenment come in, where you're looking at the reality behind all the other realities--the

Ground of Being, the Void, the Field of All Possibilities, the One, Unity Consciousness, Christ Consciousness, and so forth. Meister Eckhart, or Father Thomas Keating (of Contemplative Prayer fame), would be examples of Christians at this level. From this perspective, you

certainly are no longer dogmatic, because the whole idea at this level is to BE it, not to believe in something about it. At the transcendent level you do the internal investigation and the spiritual practice to find out for yourself what it's all about.

And, from this perspective, instead of seeing the point of view of the other stages from a critical point of view, you see that magical, conventional, and post-conventional approaches to religion are all exactly what you would expect from someone at that level. Though someone at the transcendent level may see the limitations of these other views, they don't make them wrong, which would be like making a child, or a teenager wrong for not being able to see the world from an adult perspective.

“

At the transcendent level you do the internal investigation and the spiritual practice to find out for yourself what it's all about.

”

My thoughts on religion, or, “Hey, Bill, What do you think of Jesus?” Continued...

So, if I make what sounds like a critical remark about Christianity (which I’m actually not sure I’ve ever done), I’m speaking of conventional and preconventional Christianity, not ALL Christianity. And, more to the point, when I use examples from Buddhism, Hinduism, or Taoism to describe certain spiritual ideas, or put forth a point of view from one of these religions, it doesn’t mean I’m trying to get Christians to become Buddhists, Hindus, or Taoists. It just means that these groups have done a lot of internal investigation into spiritual states and stages, that I happen to be familiar with their investigations (both intellectually and in terms of my own experience) and these groups have some pretty good metaphors to describe them. Actually, transcendent level Christians say the same things about reality, why we’re here, what’s it all about, and so forth, as do transcendent level Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus, or Jews.

All religions definitely have their dogmas, which are adopted and clung to by those at that level of development. But the mystical wings of the Eastern religions tend to be much more developed than those of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, in the sense that many more people have gone inside, investigated that realm, and shared their experiences and their instructions for doing such an exploration with the world. I wish it weren’t so, but I would say that fewer Christians have reached the postconventional and transcendent levels of development.

If a conventional Christian hears me talk about Buddhism, then, they naturally assume that I’m advocating a Buddhist *dogma*, since that’s how they look at religion--as a choice between this or that theory, this or that dogma, as offered by an outside authority.

But I’m not advocating a certain dogma. I’m not interested in dogmas, and I don’t get my information from outside authorities. I get it from my own internal investigation (though I do appreciate the “how to find out” instructions of those who have gone before me).

What I’m really saying is: *don’t just believe what someone else has told you regarding who you are and what it’s all about* (including me). Established churches, whether Christian, Islamic, Jewish, or anything else, tend to be at the conventional or preconvention level, and have a doctrine ready-made for you. They have their idea of who you are, what it means to be human, what the important issues are, how you should behave, how you should relate to God, what constitutes right and wrong, and a lot more. And, they have a perceived “institutional power.” They must know what they are talking about, because they’ve been around for centuries, or even millenia, and they have zillions of followers.

Perhaps you think that your favorite religion does have it figured out. And, maybe they do. I’m not saying that everything taught in a dogmatic religion is wrong. But to just accept that they do and what they believe with no personal investigation is, I think, a mistake--or, at the very least, a type of spiritual laziness. Dogmatic religions discourage you, in fact, from doing any personal investigation.

This is one reason why conventional religions emphasize faith. If you actually investigate something for yourself, you don’t need faith. If you’ve never been there, and I tell you what it’s like in Bolivia, you have to take what I say on faith. But if you go there yourself, you don’t need faith.

My thoughts on religion, or, “Hey, Bill, What do you think of Jesus?” Continued...

(As a matter of fact, I’ve never been to Bolivia, but I’ll bet I could convince a lot of people that I knew what it was like, and *the people who are telling conventional level people the nature of reality haven’t been there either!*)

I’m suggesting that you do your own investigation to find out who you really are--instead of accepting on faith someone else’s ideas about this. And, there’s a lot of evidence that meditation is the most potent way to do this type of investigation. And, as you know, my personal favorite is Holosync meditation, though that’s certainly not the only way to do it.

Of course, if a person wants to accept the dogma of a certain religion, and that’s as far as they want to go, that’s a personal decision, and I’m not suggesting that anyone has to do anything different.

Though they do have their own forms of dogmatism, in most of the Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, for instance) this type of inner investigation is standard practice. Buddhism, for instance, is essentially a dialogue with a teacher designed to help you discover who you really are, and over the centuries Buddhism has evolved sophisticated and repeatable methods for doing this. Nearly all religions have a sub-group that has similar methodologies for looking within. These sub-groups are generally referred to as “mystical” but you could read this as “investigative” rather than as something woo-woo and metaphysical. There are mystical Christians, mystical Muslims (Sufis), mystical Jews (Kabbalists), and so forth.

The connecting link between these mystics is that they follow a certain recipe, a certain injunction, that has been found to be effective in revealing the secrets of what it’s all about--“do this, and you’ll get this result, have this experience, gain this insight”--and, it is repeatable in the sense that if you do it, you’ll get the same results. And, in each case, regardless of the cultural context, you find those who follow the injunction (“meditate in this way,” “pray in this way,” “contemplate in this way”) describing the same basic experience, the same insights, the same realizations, regardless of their culture or religion.

So, when people ask me what I think of Jesus, or what my religion is, or some similar question, or when people see me using examples from Eastern religions, it definitely is not because I want you to become a Buddhist, or that I want to destroy your faith in Jesus, or anything remotely along those lines. It’s because I want to take you beyond the stage of blindly following a dogma (if you are), and get you to look inside, where I know from experience that the real answers can be found. There’s a price to pay to find them, but it’s very much worth it.

Those who have done this tell me that their faith is strengthened, not diminished. If they are a Christian, they become more solidly Christian. They end up saying, “Ah-ha. NOW I know what Christianity is really all about.”

So don’t take my word (or anyone else’s) for anything. I’m not asking you to. I am, though, saying that if you want a certain result, here is the method for getting it. Try it for yourself and find out.

A FEW NUANCES ABOUT DEVELOPMENT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND...

First, let me say that this information about developmental levels isn't just my opinion. It's the result of a huge amount of peer-review research extending back 50-60 years, done by incredibly smart people who have no ax to grind and certainly aren't promoting any particular religious point of view. They are simply observing the way people make sense of their world in different areas, looking for patterns, and noting that these ways of making sense of the world are, indeed, developmental.



Here are a few basic truths about developmental theory:

1) Developmental stages, in whatever area, always occur IN A CERTAIN ORDER.

2) You *cannot skip stages*. Everyone begins at

ground zero and progresses through the stages, in order.

3) Some people go through a few levels and stop, while others continue to develop. This partly has to do with the developmental center of gravity of their culture, partly to do with the demands of their immediate environment, and partly due to the person's degree of openness to new information and their flexibility in the face of new situations.

4) Each new stage *transcends and includes* the previous stage. The new stage involves a larger and more inclusive perspective than the previous stage. A totally new perspective emerges, which could not even be imagined before. At the same time, some aspects of the previous stage are retained and other aspects are left behind.

A few nuances about development I want you to understand... Continued...

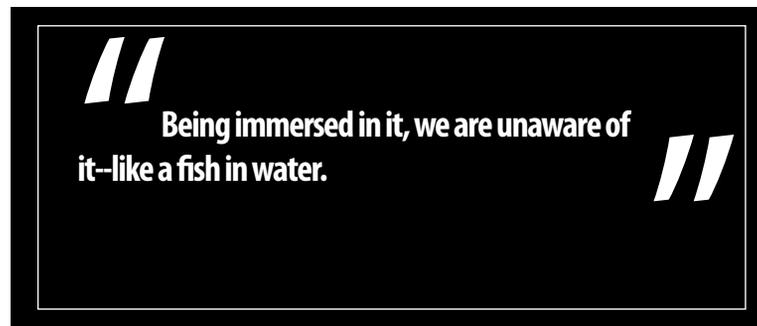
5) Each new stage, each new perspective, appears because you need it in order to deal with challenges, new situations. Life no longer makes sense or works very well with the old perspective, and the new one is a response, a solution, to this problem. Without the necessity of a new perspective, it is doubtful that one will emerge.

6) Each new stage is more inclusive than the previous stage, and offers a broader view.

As I probably said, in each level *we are immersed in our perspective, our point of view, our way of being*. By this I mean that we ARE that point of view or way of being. Being immersed in it, we are unaware of it--like a fish in water.

In emotional development, for instance, at earlier stages we are immersed in our feelings. Because of this, we cannot step back and observe our feelings, Nor can we choose them or exert any control over them. They seem to just happen, and we have no perspective on them. If and when we develop into the next level, though, we gain the ability to observe these feelings, and in gaining this new perspective we now HAVE those feelings rather than BEING them.

So a person who is immersed in the preconventional, magic view of religion can't see that they are immersed. Their view seems to be THE view--the only view. They don't have the ability to step back and observe what they are doing.



The same for those who are at the conventional level--they don't see what they are doing. In fact, this is true *for all levels*--whatever you're immersed in, you don't see it. It's just that as you progress you're immersed in fewer things (or, you could say, you have perspective on more things), and are consciously aware of more of who you are and what you are doing, as you move to higher developmental levels.

This goes for any developmental line--emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, kinesthetic (physical skills), moral, values, needs, spiritual--or any other. In each new developmental shift, what was the *subject* (what we were immersed in, and therefore unaware of, in the previous level) becomes the *object* of a new subject (the new point of view we're immersed in).

In other words, there is a "you" that sees/feels/cognizes things in a certain way, but you aren't consciously aware that you're doing it. That way of seeing things, and the "you" that sees it that way, is the subject. At the next level, though, a new you (a new subject) *can* see it. What was

A few nuances about development I want you to understand... Continued...

subject (what you were immersed in) is now an object (something you can observe), and the new and more expanded “you” that observes it is the new subject.

In terms of religion, if you are at the magical, pre-conventional stage you can't see it. Instead, you *are* it. But if and when you develop to the conventional level, the new “conventional you” *can* see it. The previously unconsciously held point of view is now something you have stepped back to observe, which gives you some perspective on it--and, some choice about it.

Once you have that choice, it will be obvious that certain aspects of the old view are unresourceful, unworkable, while others that *are* resourceful will be integrated into the new point of view (in this example, the conventional point of view).

So there's this constant process of being immersed, then stepping back to see what you previously were caught in, which gives you some perspective on it. At the same time you become immersed in something else. Then, if you are to develop further, you eventually step back from that, and the process goes on, each time expanding your perspective.

Often it takes years between these shifts (though Holosync greatly accelerates this process), because once you arrive at a new level, a new perspective, you have to *integrate* it, become more skillful at it. And, quite often, people move to a certain level and just stay there for

the rest of their life (which is fine). This just means that being at that level *works* for them. In figuring out how to be human and making sense of life, it works.

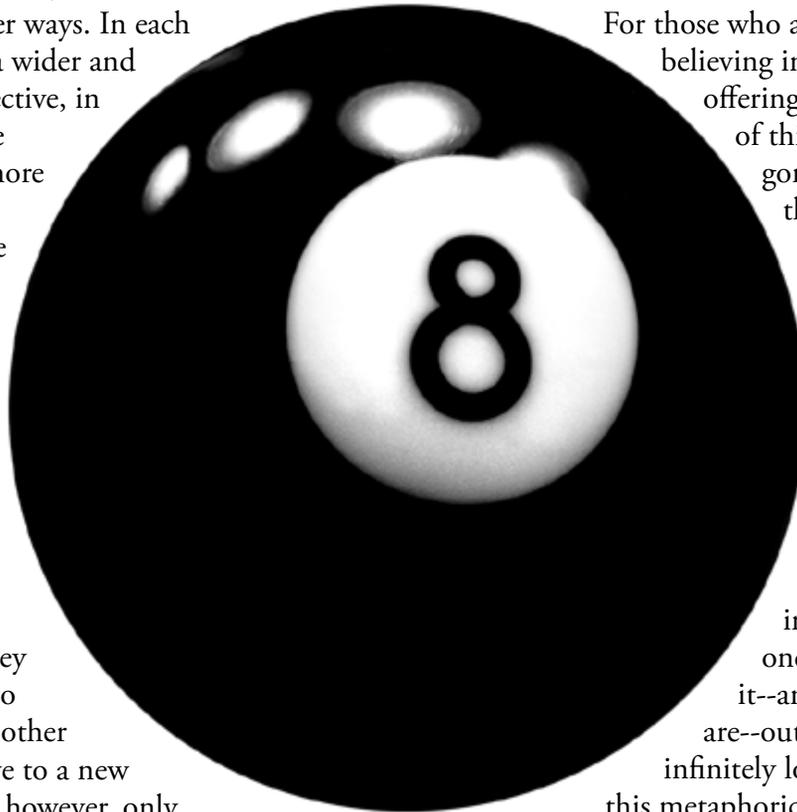
MAGIC, MAGIC, AND MORE MAGIC...

What I'm trying to say about the developmental process is really quite simple. Many, many researchers have found that people (and societies) move through developmental stages--cognitively, morally, spiritually, in terms of ego development, in terms of their values, and in many other ways. In each new stage, a person has a wider and more all-inclusive perspective, in which they see (and have conscious choice over) more than they could see or consciously choose at the previous stage. What they were immersed in before, they can see and exercise choice about from the new perspective.

In this sense, higher developmental stages are more resourceful, and they involve a greater ability to see other points of view, other perspectives. People move to a new and broader perspective, however, only when the old perspective doesn't work. The environment changes, and to deal with it, they have to grow into a new way of thinking, acting, and seeing.

For those of you who cling to magical explanations of the world, life, and so forth, and who argue so strongly for your view--I wish you well. I don't know what else to say. I'm not trying to get you to give up your point of view--UNLESS, of course, you're having a hard time

functioning well in the world. In that case, you might want to examine whether or not believing in magic is holding you back.



For those who assumed that by “not believing in magic” I was somehow offering a dry and lifeless view of things, where all the joy is gone from life (indicating that I'm a desperate and sour human being living in a tortured hell), all I can say is...WHAT? Are you kidding? Existence, being human, being in this universe, and all that goes with it is 1000% awe-inspiring, amazing, overwhelmingly incredible. The universe, once you get your IDEA of it--and your IDEA of who you are--out of the way, is entirely, infinitely love. And I don't mean this metaphorically, I mean it literally, because that's the way I experience it. I didn't always experience it this way, but I certainly do now.

My world is one of bliss, and I invite all of you to jump in, because the water's FINE.

And you can jump in. Keep using Holosync, and keep doing whatever else you're doing to grow and

Magic, magic, and more magic... Continued...

expand your perspective. As you do, infinite love as the ground of reality will become more than just a lovely idea, I promise. You ARE infinite love, and you deserve to experience yourself as such.

Only your mind, and your ideas of who you are and what the world is, stands in the way. Stop confusing your ideas of who you are with the reality of who you are, and it happens.

In a metaphorical sense, you could say that the feeling of awe and love about being human in this universe *is* “magical”--if by magical you mean, “delightful, awesome, joy-inspiring.” What I’ve been referring to, though, is something entirely different.

The kind of magic I’m down on involves thinking (or hoping) that the laws of nature can be suspended so you can have something you want but can’t figure out how to get, but without actually doing anything to generate it or deserve it. (Magical thinking with children is a bit different--it’s just a matter of not yet seeing how things work, such as thinking that the moon is following you as you ride along in a car, because that’s what it looks like to a child. They don’t know enough to realize this isn’t possible.) As someone said in their comment to me, magical thinking is all about “me” whereas post-conventional thinking (and beyond) is about “us.”

The idea that there is no such thing as something

for nothing is the real meaning of the Law of Attraction--things are always balanced. You get back in equal measure, in one way or another, what you put out. Hoping to get something for nothing is a sign of magical, pre-conventional thinking.

“
The idea that there is no such thing
as something for nothing is the real meaning of
the Law of Attraction--things are always balanced.
”

A few of you referred to using “magic” to get parking spaces. I’ve parked my car thousands of times over the 41 years I’ve been driving. Somehow I always seem to get a parking spot. As I drive by all the other parked cars, I notice that those people also ended up with parking spots (there they are: parked). Amazing! (I think I can remember one time when I literally could not find a place to park--not because my mojo left me, but because *all the spaces were full.*)

So, when you’re looking for a parking spot, did all those people who already have one use magic to get it? Or were there just fewer spots than cars at that moment? And if you’re looking for a place to park (while you “put it out to the universe” that you’ll get one), do you finally find one because you used your mind to make someone’s car disappear from their spot, so you could have it? Does this seem a little bit me-oriented? Or maybe your call to the universe made someone leave their spot before they really wanted to, just so you could have it?

If this is what you think, this IS magical thinking (it’s also very self-centered thinking--should you have someone else’s spot just because you used the

Magic, magic, and more magic... Continued...

right magic charm?). Look, people, either there's a spot available, or there isn't. And, as anyone who drives can tell you, there nearly always there IS a spot, so finding one isn't proof of magic. It's the result of driving around until you find it.

Big sigh...

I could say something similar about "synchronicity," the idea that it's magic if you meet just the person you need at just the right time, or it's magic if someone calls you just when you were thinking about them. There's a very logical explanation for why you often meet the person you needed to meet, or why you find the resource you need, just when you need it. This happens because you had your attention focused on the need, or on finding such a person.

So, when you came across him (or her), he or she stood out like a sore thumb. If you hadn't been looking, you'd have met the same person, but the meeting would have been unremarkable. As I said, focusing your attention on what you want *alerts you to people and resources that might help you get it*. This is just one example of how focusing your mind works to generate actions that lead to the result you want. Trust me, you would have run across the same people or things--you just would have overlooked them.

And when someone calls when you were thinking about them, this is *a coincidence*. Think of all the times you're thinking about someone and they don't call. You probably think of other people during the day hundreds of times, without receiving a call. Yet some of you jump on the times when someone coincidentally does call as "proof" of some sort of magical Vulcan mind-meld.

Another sigh...

If you're counting on this type of magic to functionally get through your life, you're not going to do too well. Look, the only reason I bring any of this up in the first place is that I get many letters from people who are madly "putting it out to the universe" and (of course) getting no results. They write to ask me why it isn't working. These people are having trouble making money, getting a decent job, attracting friends, having a relationship that works, and so forth. It's sad--and unnecessary--to live this way. Life does not need to be a struggle.

The real problem is that such people (for various reasons) haven't learned the basic skills of the conventional level of development--the functional ways people use to get along in the world in the areas of job, money, social interaction, and so forth. Because they don't know how to do these things very well, they are easy prey for the idea that magic will somehow get them what they want. But magic isn't going to help, my friends, unless you want an occasional coincidence. What does work? Learning how to focus your mind on what you want, and then taking appropriate actions to get it--actions *that create value*.

Since I care about people who are stuck in this way, I just have to tell them that magic isn't the solution.

But, as I've said, if you really want to give magical thinking a try, go for it.

This might be a good time to bring up another nuance on this whole subject of developmental levels and magic. Many of us see the limitations of rational thinking. This actually started with what

Magic, magic, and more magic... Continued...

is called The Enlightenment, which began in the 15th century. This “Age of Reason” supplanted the previous church-centered reasoning (which was, quite frankly, magical, or pre-rational, in most ways).

Here’s a good example of this type of pre-rational thinking. When it was discovered that Jupiter had seven moons (we now know that there are more than seven, but at this point only seven had been discovered), the pre-rational thought-leaders of that time responded with statements such as, “Well, of course there are seven moons. There are seven orifices in the human body, so it makes sense that Jupiter would also have seven moons.” This numerological view is a type of magical thinking, the idea being that there is some magical reason for things to come in sevens.

This new Age of Reason began to find out many things about the world that had previously been explained by some sort of magic or otherwise assigned a pre-rational source or reason. This new rationalism was the beginning of the age of science, and this shift from pre-rational to rational was in many ways a very good thing for humanity. It brought modern technology, modern medicine, longer life-spans, better food production, and many other positive changes. The reason you have the time to read this (and that we can communicate at a distance like this), instead of having to till your fields from dawn until dark just to survive is one result of the Age of Reason.

But the Age of Reason wasn’t all moonbeams and rainbows. In suppressing pre-conventional views it also threw out the baby with the bath water. It decided that unless something could be empirically proven or seen, it didn’t exist.

Some of what couldn’t be seen was, indeed, magical nonsense, but not all. But, unless it could be backed up empirically, out it went. This meant, among other things, that the huge discoveries of Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist, Sufi, Christian, and Jewish mystics (to name just a few traditions) regarding internal states of awareness were seen as irrational fluff. This led to what some have called “Scientism”--an over-reliance on reason and empiricism.

So, today, we have a fairly large number of people who see themselves as post-rational, or post-conventional (“rational” and “conventional” are really names that refer to the same developmental level). These people see the limitations of rationality (some of these people also throw the rational baby out with the bathwater, though, just as the rational advocates threw the pre-conventional baby out with the bathwater earlier in history). Some of the limitations of rationality include, for instance, the post-rational observation that everything is situated in a cultural context, and that this context must be taken into account when looking at what seems to be empirically “real”--in other words, that all meaning is context-dependent.

Another is the realization that the internal dimension (thrown out for the most part by the rationalists), even though it cannot be seen in the same way as “the stuff out there” is still real--and valuable.

So, we have this group of people who see the limitations of rationality--they have moved to at least a post-conventional perspective (this, by the way, doesn’t mean that rationality is *wrong*--it means that it is *partial*, that it isn’t the whole story). At the same time we have a lot of people

Magic, magic, and more magic... Continued...

who are still at the pre-conventional stage. These people definitely don't like rationality because it deconstructs their magical ways of looking at things. (These are the people, by the way, who are angry at me for telling you to give up believing in magic as a method of navigating the world. They love their magical perspective.)

Anyway, because both groups are anti-rational, they look similar, superficially, and are often confused with each other. This is called the *pre-post fallacy*, or sometimes the *pre-trans fallacy*. Seeing the limitations of rationality is not the same as being pre-rational, though the two at first glance look the same. When pre- and post- are confused, one of two things can happen. One possibility is that pre-rational magical thinking is elevated to some sort of "trans-rational glory" (as Ken Wilber puts it). Magic is seen as being more advanced than rationality, when it actually is not. Such people want to elevate "the ancient ways" as a solution to the problems of the world.

The other confusion is a reductionism, an explanation of actual, higher, trans-rational ways of seeing the universe as if they were all primitive magical baloney. This is the way most of science sees meditation and other trans-rational points of view. They don't make the distinction between magical ways of seeing reality and POST-rational ways of seeing reality. One is a NO-rationality stance, while the other is a reality-PLUS stance (it sees the truths in rationality, but realizes that rationality is also limited in some ways).

The pre-/post- fallacy can be seen in social issues, too. During the Vietnam war, for instance, the rationalists (those at the conventional stage, with clear black and white thinking) were for the war. Of those who were against the war, some were

looking at it from a post-conventional point of view, where certain principles about life and how countries should interact were more important than "killing those commies."

Others, though, were against the war because "nobody is going to tell me what to do" or "I'm not going to sacrifice my life to save Vietnam from Communism"--a me-centered, pre-conventional point of view (believe me, I know about this--I was one of them). Both groups were against the war, and from the outside it was difficult to tell them apart. These two groups were, though, against the war for very different reasons.

The same sort of confusion comes up with the abortion question. A pre-conventional person is okay with abortion because the only thing that's important is their own needs. They're interested in what they want, and the hell with anyone else (including an unborn baby)--a typical narcissistic view. The conventional person is against abortion because it takes a life, and their Truth says taking a life is wrong, and they see this as a purely black and white distinction, with no shades of gray (yes, I know that in other areas such people are fine with taking a life). The post-conventional person is, like the pre-conventional person, okay with abortion, but for a totally different reason: they believe that there are principles that transcend those cited by the conventional people. They aren't, however, pro-abortion for selfish "me" reasons. Yet the two pro-abortion groups look, superficially, the same.

This pre-post fallacy will come up again as we delve more deeply into this treasure-trove of information about development and what it means to each of us.

PIAGET, COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT, AND HOW YOU MAKE SENSE OF YOUR WORLD (PART 1)

In this section we'll continue our investigation of the developmental process, looking at cognitive development. Cognitive development is one of the most important, if not *the* most important, line of development. Why? Because many theorists and researchers believe it is necessary (though not sufficient) for development in all the other areas. Unless you can be *aware* of something (which is what cognition is all about) you can't be moral about it, feel something about it, create art about it, develop faith around it, organize a self around it, or develop in any other way regarding it.

The great pioneer in cognitive development is Jean Piaget, and I will draw heavily from his work, with additional help from Ken Wilber, and also from Dr. C. George Boeree.

This is a pretty big topic, and I have a lot to share with you, so I'm going to split this into three parts. Part one will cover the first two levels of cognitive development as defined by Piaget. The second, which will come a few days later, will cover the next two. Then in another segment I'll cover the current thinking about cognitive development beyond Piaget's stages. *I think you will find this*

information to be particularly fascinating, so let's get started...

Cognitive development refers to our ability to perform various types of operations on what we encounter in the world and in our awareness. To live in the world, accomplish various things, and deal with the challenge of being human, we first learn to "work with" (deal with, manage, get things done with) our body, then with objects, then with symbols, concepts, and ideas, and--if development continues to the highest *transpersonal* or *transrational* levels of development--we eventually add ways of dealing with life that are beyond the realm of ideas.

Always keep in mind that these developmental levels (which, remember, are *perspectives*) are ways we *make sense of what it means to be a human being living in a complex and often paradoxical world*. As our environment changes, and as we change, our way of responding to the world and making sense of it changes.

Piaget's work on development is particularly important because it has been closely scrutinized over three decades of cross-cultural research. As a result, Piaget's basic levels of cognitive development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational) are considered to be universally applicable *to all human cultures*.



Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

Other researchers have taken Piaget's work further, describing levels of cognitive development beyond his highest level, formal operational. We'll look at these more advanced stages (generally referred to as *transrational* or *transpersonal*) after I describe Piaget's basic levels.

As you'll see, Piaget's levels of cognitive development correspond roughly to those I've described so far in previous sections (if you haven't read those, it might be helpful to do so). The stage I've described as *preconventional* roughly corresponds to Piaget's *preoperational* level, *conventional* roughly corresponds to Piaget's *concrete operational*, and *post-conventional* roughly corresponds to *formal-operational*. What this really means is that preconventional people use preoperational cognition to deal with the world, conventional level people use concrete operational cognition to deal with the world, and postconventional people use formal operational cognition to deal with the world.

Sensorimotor, Piaget's first stage (the stage before preoperational), is sometimes referred to as *archaic* in other naming conventions (in this case, in that of Jean Gebser).

As I said earlier, different naming schemes are used by different scholars and researchers, depending on which *line of development* (cognitive, moral,

ego, emotional, etc.) is being studied. This is partly because these researchers were often working independently, without knowing much if anything about each other's work, each creating his or her own terminology. Ken Wilber, to his credit, has pulled together many of these different developmental approaches and has pointed out the many parallels between them.

Over time we'll visit a number of different developmental approaches, and

hopefully you'll begin to get a feeling for the different names and how they correspond to each other. These different naming protocols can be a bit confusing at first (I know it took me a while to sort them all out). I'm hoping that I'll be able to describe them in a way that makes it easier for you to make sense of them.

Remember that with all these developmental schemes each person begins with the first level and must develop through each level, in order. This is because each level builds on the previous level—each new level *transcends* the previous level in certain ways (it creatively introduces new ways of cognizing the world), but also *includes* key aspects of the previous level.

To use an example from the physical world, atoms represent one level of physical organization. Molecules, the next higher level, *include* atoms,

“
...Piaget's basic levels of cognitive development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational) are considered to be universally applicable to all human cultures.
”

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

but also *transcend* them (molecules can do things atoms cannot do--they operate in the world in way that transcends the way atoms operate in the world, while at the same time including them).

The point I'm making is that atoms had to come into existence *before* molecules could exist, since atoms are a building block of every molecule. In the same way, each developmental level (each new *perspective*) in humans is necessary to the development of the next perspective. This is why everyone must begin at the beginning and go through the levels in order.

Not every person moves through all the levels, however (just as not every person moves from kindergarten all the way through grade school, high school, college, and graduate school). Some people move through a few developmental levels and then stop, while a smaller number move to the highest levels. This depends on the person, their environment and its demands, the developmental center of gravity of their culture, and other influences. The higher the level, the fewer people will reach it. For instance, fewer individuals in any culture reach Piaget's highest level, formal operations, or "formop," and even fewer reach the transpersonal levels beyond that.

Having made those introductory remarks, let's move on. Piaget divided cognitive development into four broad stages: 1) sensorimotor (0-2 years), 2) preoperational, or "preop" (2-7 years), concrete operational, or "conop" (7-11 years), and formal operational, or "formop" (11 years onward). Each of these can be divided into several substages. The ages are averages, and since a person could stop and remain at any level, you can find many adults at each level (though not many are found at the sensorimotor stage).

In this discussion I'll also use some of the stage names used by Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber: archaic (similar to sensorimotor), magic (similar to early preoperational), magic-mythic (late preoperational), mythic (early concrete operational), mythic-rational (late concrete operational), and rational (formal operational). This is just to confuse you, of course.

In the sensorimotor stage, the infant uses *senses and motor abilities* to understand the world, beginning at first with reflexes and eventually using complex combinations of sensorimotor skills. At the beginning of this stage, the infant cannot yet distinguish itself from its environment (what some have called an experience of *oceanic oneness*). This has also been called a state of "primary narcissism," because the infant is embedded in or undifferentiated from the environment.

[A quick aside: You may remember that all development is a process of *immersion* in something, followed (hopefully) by eventual development of the ability to *observe* it, i.e., to see it from a wider perspective. *We are* what we are immersed in; we are so caught in it that we are unconscious of it, unaware of it--like a fish in water. And, because we're unaware of whatever we're immersed in, we have no conscious control over it.

Once we develop the ability to step back and observe that which we've been immersed in (in other words, once we begin to be aware of it), we shift from *being* it to *having* it. Being aware of it, we have more control, more choice. This is the true meaning of expanded spiritual awareness.

You can *be* your body or, in becoming aware of

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

it, you can *have* a body. You can *be* your emotions or, in become aware of them, you can *have* them. You can *be* your thoughts and other mental processes or, in becoming aware of them, you can *have* them. You can *be* your idea of who you are or, in becoming aware of it, you can *have* an idea of who you are. In each case, having it gives you some amount of intentional control, whether of your body, your emotions, your mind, or your sense of who you are.

You could also say that what we are immersed in is *subject* (in other words, it's *me--*part of who I am), while what we can observe becomes *object* (something *I have*). The developmental process, then, is one in which more and more of what you have been *immersed in* ("subject") becomes something you can observe, and therefore *have* ("object"). What you have you can intentionally use and control.]

Okay, back to Piaget. Between four and nine months of age, the infant--who has been *immersed* in his entire environment--finally *differentiates* itself from this environment. He moves from *being* the environment to *having it*. The infant bites his thumb and it hurts; it bites it's rattle, and it doesn't hurt, and in doing so he learns the difference between self and environment. At this stage, the infant's only contact with it's environment is here and now, in the moment, experienced through his sensory and motor abilities (hence the name of this stage, *sensorimotor*). As of yet there are no true emotions, nor any thoughts.

During this period it is said that "consciousness seats itself in the physical body." If some sort of trauma interferes with this process, the result is psychosis (lasting beyond infancy and generally into adulthood). Without a grounded

physical self that is clearly differentiated from the environment, the psychotic is constantly "jumping out of the body," as Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing put it. He cannot clearly tell where his body stops and the environment begins, creating a hallucinatory blurring of subject-object boundaries.

A healthy sensorimotor stage, then, is one of differentiating self from environment, and ends with the infant 1) knowing the difference between self and other, 2) understanding that physical objects exist independently of himself, and 3) being able to manipulate physical objects in many different but rudimentary ways.

This manipulation begins with simple reflexes, such as sucking and grasping; moves to such things as opening and closing the fingers repetitively; then to actions designed to produce a certain interesting consequence, such as kicking one's feet to move a mobile suspended over a crib; to more complex tasks such as reaching behind a screen to obtain a hidden object; the discovery of novel ways to achieve a goal, such as pulling a pillow toward oneself in order to get a toy resting on it; and finally to rudimentary symbolic thinking in which the solution of a problem is symbolized internally before taking action.

As the beginnings of mental life (as opposed to merely sensory and physical engagement) emerge at the end of the sensorimotor period, the infant begins to create mental images. Initially the infant confuses these images with the outer world--another example of immersion. This confusion is one reason for the strong magical thinking of the next (preoperational) stage. This is created by an inability to differentiate one's own mental imagery and symbology from the external objects they represent. As a result, mental imagery and

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

certain actions seem to cause things when they are actually merely linked in other, non-causative, ways (they happen at the same time, for instance, or happen in the same place, but aren't really linked by causation).

Thus at the end of the sensorimotor stage--and into the preoperational stage--the child believes, for instance, that the sun or moon "follows him" as he walks or rides in a car (I noticed this during the recent full moon--Denise and I went downtown for dinner, and the moon followed us the whole way). When a child is asked which child the moon will follow when two children are traveling in different directions, he finds the question confusing, as if he'd never considered such a possibility. His perspective does not yet include the awareness that other people experience things in a different way than he does, i.e., that there are other points of view. He cannot yet take the perspective of another.

From the child's point of view, things notice him and tend to obey him--the wind, the clouds, the night, and so forth. Or, the child experiences a type of animism in which he endows things with consciousness and life (one oriented solely toward him). Another type of magical thinking involves thinking that the things around him are made for him: the grass is there so he won't get hurt when he falls, for instance.

These points of view are all based on a type of egocentrism, *an inability to transcend one's own perspective and take that of another*. The child takes his or her immediate perceptions to be true and interprets them according to his own egocentric concerns, without realizing that others have a different point of view. In other words, the child is immersed in his own perspective.

At this late sensorimotor stage the child may, for instance, hold a picture so that he alone can see it while assuming that because he can see it, others can see it, too. Or, he covers his eyes and assumes that since he can't see others, they can't see him. If someone hides a toy while he watches, and another child then enters the room, the child, because he knows where the toy is hidden, assumes that the second child also knows where it is.

As the child moves from sensorimotor to preoperational (and later to the edge of the concrete operational stage), such magical beliefs gradually disappear because 1) the child begins to see that other viewpoints exist and 2) he gains the ability to adopt these other points of view. As this happens, egocentric (magical) logic is replaced with a more rational logic developed through concrete interactions with the world and other people.

Piaget described the sensorimotor and early preoperational stages as being that of "magical cognitions": "To every desire corresponds immediately an image or illusion which transforms this desire into reality, thanks to a sort of pseudo-hallucination or play. No objective observation or reasoning is possible." By "objective" Piaget refers to the ability to take the perspective of another, to step out of that which one is immersed in. This objectivity also refers to the ability to "have it" rather than just "be it"--to make what was subject into object.

In the preoperational stage, the child increasingly uses verbal representations, but speech is egocentric (two children at this stage may talk while playing, but what they say is never in response to what the other has said). As the child masters language, play begins to involve this new ability to use symbolic

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

thinking (rather than relating to the world solely through sensorimotor play). For example, the child can think about something without the object being actually present. A picture of a dog or the word “dog” can represent a real dog. Or, objects can represent something else: checkers can become cookies, leaves can be dishes, a box can be a table.

Using this new tool, symbolic thinking (the ability to make mental images which represent real things), the child begins to develop an understanding of past and future. If the child is told that something desirable will happen soon, he may stop crying. If he is reminded of the time he fell down he may make a sad face.

At about four years of age, speech becomes more social and less egocentric, and the child begins to grasp logical concepts in some areas. There is a tendency, however, to focus on one aspect of an object at the expense of others. If you tell the child, “Your father is my brother,” they will not understand the two separate aspects that make up the relationship. Or, the child may say, “I don’t live in America, I live in Oregon,” not understanding that one thing can be a part of another. If you show the child five black marbles and three white ones, and ask, “Are there more marbles, or more black marbles,” he will answer, “More black marbles.” Each of these examples involve understanding and holding in awareness two different, but connected, relationships or ways of categorizing that are beyond the child’s cognitive abilities at this point.

Another result of this inability to focus on and hold in awareness different types of relationships or ways of categorizing is a preoperational belief in magical increase, decrease, or disappearance. If you pour juice into a tall, skinny glass,

and then transfer the juice to a short, fat glass, the child (focusing on just one aspect of the glasses) will assume the taller glass contained more liquid. Reality is not yet firm, and immediate perception (rather than logic) dominates judgment. This ability to see and hold in awareness more than one aspect of a situation or compare more than one way of categorizing is called *decentering* and is mastered in the next (concrete operational) stage.

In terms of morality, the preoperational child is unable to organize his behavior around principles of what is right or wrong. If he is caught and punished for something, it’s wrong. If not, it isn’t. What constitutes right and wrong comes from an authority figure, not from any particular principles that might be carried forward to other situations.

As the child differentiates himself from his environment, he develops a grounded emotional self. His emotional self, however, still is dissociated from the emotional selves of others, particularly that of his mother. At about 18 months, however, the child learns to differentiate his feelings from those of others. This is termed the “separation-individuation phase,” where the child creates a stable emotional self. This is also referred to as the “psychological birth” of the child, because the child emerges from emotional fusion with the mother. As before, what the child was immersed in (in this case, emotionally), he now *has*. Once again, what was subject has become object.

If the child is traumatized during this shift, clinical narcissism or borderline pathologies can result. In such pathologies the child is open to being “flooded” and “swept away” by his emotional environment (the borderline disorders) or he treats the entire world as an extension of his own feelings (the narcissistic disorders). In both, the child (and

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

later, the adult) remains merged with or stuck in his emotions.

By age three, if things have gone well, the child has a stable physical and emotional self. Language has begun to emerge, and with it the beginning development of the *mental self*, some aspects of which I have already described (the use of symbols to represent things).

The first layer of emotional development (at the preoperational stage) is magical. The newly emerging images and symbols don't merely represent objects, but rather are thought of as being actual parts of the things they represent. This form of magical thinking happens in a few different ways. One happens when two things are linked because they are similar in some way. If one dog is bad, all dogs are bad.

Or, two things are linked because they are connected by being contiguous with each other: daddy's car keys, his hairbrush, or other personal items contain daddy's power (I remember feeling this way when I handled items belonging to adults when I was a little boy). Or, in preconventional/preoperational tribal societies, a lock of a warrior's hair contains his strength, or eating the heart of a lion gives one courage. This sort of magical thinking explains the preconventional attraction to talismans such as an eagle's feather, religious icons such as crosses, statues of the Buddha, or other religious iconography, four leaf clovers, rabbit's feet, medicine bags, etc., etc. (And, yes, many conventional, postconventional, and even integral or transcendent-level people keep such things--including me--but they don't REALLY believe that they are magical.)

In this kind of magical thinking, two objects are seen as having something in common which enables them to act upon one another at a distance, or a thing is in some way an emanation of, affected by, or caused by, another. Piaget found that children often "reason" in the following way: the book makes a shadow; trees and houses make shadows. Therefore, the book's shadow comes from the trees and houses also.

The idea that one object can magically alter another changes during the preoperational period. Interaction with the world eventually leads the child to realize that his thoughts alone do not egocentrically control or create the world (if there is trauma at this stage, however, magical thinking can continue as an ongoing pathology). The child eventually finds that the linkages I mentioned above, where something affects something else because it is similar, or because it is physically connected or contiguous, don't hold up in reality.

As the child's view that he has magical powers over the world diminishes, however, *that power is transferred to others*. The child may not be able to order the world around, but Daddy can, or God can. Gods or goddesses--or whatever the human equivalent might be to a child--are able to miraculously alter the patterns of nature in order to cater to the child's wants.

This perspective (which, though still magical, is a developmental advance over the previous perspective) is often referred to as *mythic*. A magical element still exists, but at the mythic level the power to alter the world has been transferred to others. Previously, in the magical stages proper, the secret was to learn the right type of word-magic in order to directly alter the world. Now the focus shifts to knowing the right rituals or prayers that

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

will make the gods and goddesses intervene and alter the world for the child.

In the New Age movement we see a lot of this--in the various types of “channeled beings,” for instance, and in what has been called “putting it out to the universe,” which is really just a form of asking “the gods” (or some similar powerful substitute) to give the seeker what he or she wants. In another part I discussed miracles attributed to Yogananda and other Eastern saints. These, too, are examples of this magical-mythic perspective, where “great others” are accorded powers beyond that of normal mortals.

[And, by the way, when I use the word “powers” in this situation, I mean *magic* powers, in which the laws of nature are supposedly suspended, as opposed to what I would consider to be non-magical powers (for instance, the ability to solve differential equations, or be incredibly persuasive, or intuitively diagnose a therapy client, or manage a large organization, or create a work of art, or create a spell-binding story, or flawlessly fly an airplane, or be a virtuoso musician--or even the power to access transcendent, enlightened states of awareness). These definitely are powers, but without involving what Piaget--or I--would consider “magic” in the sense that the laws of nature are supposedly suspended.]

The miracles of Jesus would also fall into this category. From this mythic perspective, the laws of nature can be suspended by a powerful other. A confusion, in effect, still exists between physical and personal causality.

It is from this stage that most of the world’s classical mythologies come. At this stage children

(about age 6) have already developed elaborate mythologies about cosmic questions such as the nature of life and death, the cause of the wind, why the sun shines, where babies come from, and so forth.

There are still problems at this stage in taking the role of other, but the nature of this problem changes (the problem remains, but its form changes). As the mythic point of view replaces the magical point of view (*powerful others are magical* rather than *I am magical*) there is a shift from a purely egocentric position to an ethnocentric, or group-centric position (culminating in the concrete operational stage, which we will visit later).

This is a shift from “it’s all about me” to “it’s all about my group.” The previous magical “me” stage is organized around blood ties and family (societies at this stage were organized into clans based on family ties). At the mythic stage, the group is organized around *ideas*. People at this stage band together because they share the same myths, and the unit of social organization moves from the clan to the tribe. For a child, the center of his world moves from his immediate family to his age-related peer group at school. The child is now better able to take the role of other, because he needs to do so to become a member of the group. His ability to do so, however, is limited in the sense that he can only see the perspective of others who share the same myth.

This continuing difficulty in taking the role of other at the late preoperational (“magic-mythic”) stage stems in part from a difficulty in differentiating the physical world, on one hand, from the symbols and names used to represent it. Even in late preoperational thinking the child still believes that names are a part of, or

Piaget, cognitive development, and how you make sense of your world (part 1) Continued...

even exist in, the object being named. “Names are what you see when you look at things,” a child of five once said to Piaget. When asked, “Where is the name of the sun?” the answer was, “Inside the sun.”

Though most adults would not say such things, adult magical-mythical thinkers still confuse the physical world with the symbols and maps that represent it. (Interestingly enough, one of the key insights to spiritual enlightenment is the realization that “the map is not the territory” --that our *ideas* of the world and who we are, our *Map* of Reality and our idea of who we are, are easily confused with the real thing, and the ability to tell the difference creates a huge shift in perception).

This confusion of the map with the territory continues to exist through several more developmental stages, but the nature of the confusion changes with each new perspective. One change we’ve already seen is the change from “I am magical” to “*Powerful others* are magical.” We’ll follow this shift as we look at each new perspective.

Each new level involves a progressively greater ability to differentiate self from other, and to do so in continually more sophisticated ways. At this late preoperational stage (magic-mythic), the use of language to represent the world is the main tool used to differentiate the mind from the body--in other words, to differentiate the child’s new ability to have mental intentions from mere bodily impulses.

As I said above, the failure to differentiate body and mind--being stuck in the body (*being* it rather than *having* it)--results in narcissistic or borderline disorders, which pretty much always continue into adulthood. Another potential pathology at this

stage (if certain traumas happen) is at the opposite end of the spectrum. If, instead of a failure to differentiate mind from body, there is *too much* differentiation, it can lead to *dissociation* from the body. Instead of *transcending* and *including* the body (the healthy form of the developmental shift at this point), aspects of the body are repressed (for instance, sensuality and emotional-sexual feelings).

This repression creates neurosis. Repressed physical urges return in a disguised form, called *neurotic symptoms*: anxieties, depression, obsessions, etc. Healing of these symptoms happens only as the repression is relaxed and the person recontacts and befriends the body and all its impulses and urges. *Being stuck in the body* (*being* it rather than *having* it), then, results in narcissistic or borderline disorders, and *repressing the body* results in neurosis.

(By the way, just as an aside, a general rule about developmental pathologies: the earlier the trauma, the more difficult it is to heal--psychosis is more difficult to heal than are narcissism and borderline disorders, which are more difficult to heal than neurosis, which is more difficult to heal than still later traumas).

But assuming that all goes well, the child moves to the next stage, the *concrete operational* stage, or conop. In children this stage generally lasts from about age 7 to 11 (many adults, of course, stop at this stage, staying in it throughout life). In my next segment, we’ll look at concrete operations, the stage of most people in the Western world, and then at Piaget’s highest stage, formal operational. Then, we’ll look at the stages many thinkers and researchers have found (or are postulating) beyond formal operational.

HOW YOU MAKE SENSE OF YOUR WORLD, OR, MORE SECRETS ABOUT LIFE, PART 2

This is the second in a series about cognitive development and the work of Jean Piaget — and *the huge benefits* of understanding this developmental process. In part one, I described Jean Piaget’s first two levels of cognitive development (sensorimotor and preoperational). In this section, we’ll look at the third stage, concrete operational, the stage of most adults in the Western world.

I know the names of these stages can be confusing at first. And some might see the topic itself as dry and intellectual. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. I think that you’ll find this information to be extremely practical and pertinent to your life. You might even find yourself saying “Ah-HA!” as you have insights that allow you to better understand your life. Understanding how the developmental process works will accelerate your mental, emotional, and spiritual growth. It will expand your awareness of who you are, where you’ve been, and where you’re going (or at least, could be

going).

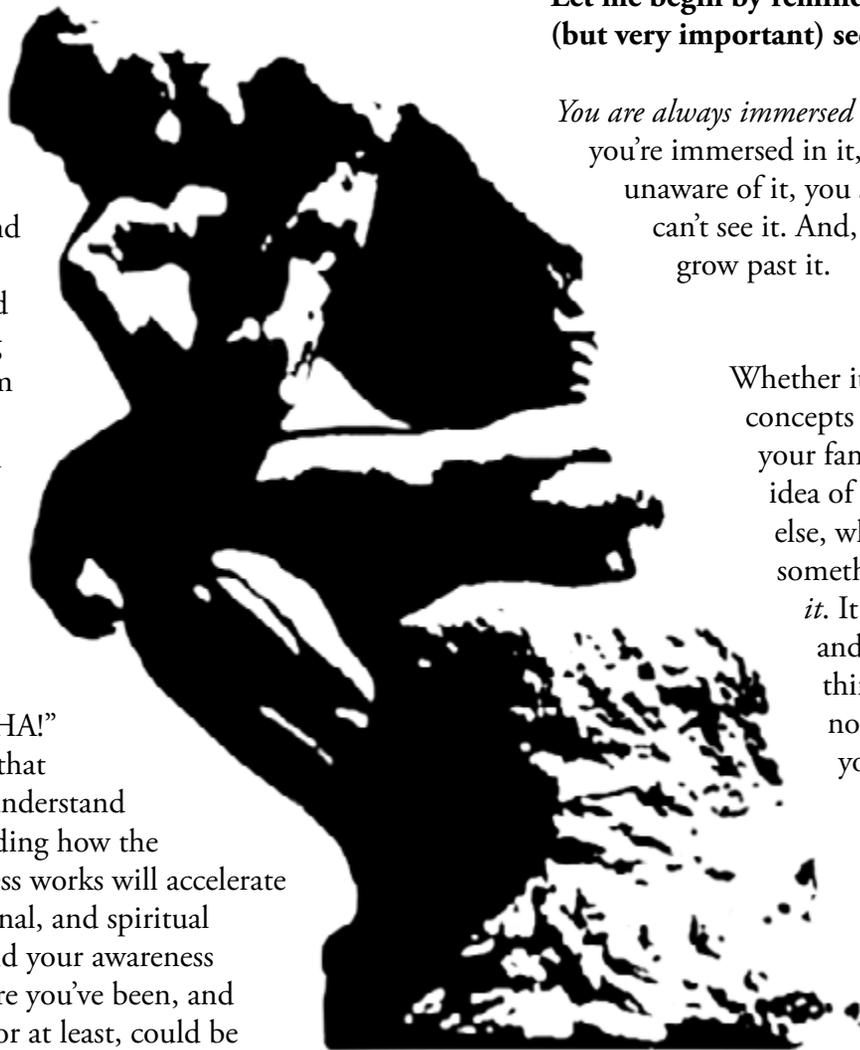
And, it will very likely help you understand some of the reasons why certain areas of your life aren’t working as well as you’d like them to.

Let me begin by reminding you of a little-known (but very important) secret about life...

You are always immersed in something, and because you’re immersed in it, you’re unaware of it. Being unaware of it, you *are* it. It’s a blind spot. You can’t see it. And, until you see it, you cannot grow past it.

Whether it’s your emotions, your concepts and beliefs, your role in your family or peer group, your idea of who you are, or something else, when you’re immersed in something *you have no control over it*. It operates on autopilot — and it controls you. This causes things to happen that you did not intend, and consequences you don’t want.

I don’t want to get too philosophical here, but this is the deeper meaning of “shit happens.” This is Wile



How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

E. Coyote with the ACME Safe landing on top of him, over and over. This is you continually getting yourself into situations you never wanted to be in.

As you gain awareness of what you've been immersed in you gain more control over your life. Once this happens, you "have it" (instead of being it) and you can use it (whatever it is) to create a better life for yourself. In being able to see it, your perspective becomes larger. You see your life from a higher spot on the mountain. And, the times when things "just happen" become fewer and fewer until eventually little if anything happens that you did not intend. And, eventually, instead of life being all about you, it will begin to be all about *us*--all of us. Instead of working on getting your own life together, you'll be working on getting the world together.

What's more, by seeing the map of where you've been (those stages you've been through), you'll more easily and more resourcefully use the skills of those stages. By seeing the map of where you're (hopefully) going (the stages you haven't been through) you'll see the future, the possibilities, When you get there, it will be much easier to navigate, and even become a master of, these stages.

When I talk about the concrete operational stage of development, the term *operations* refers to cognitive and/or logical tools, operations, or principles used to solve problems or accomplish something in the world. It's the stuff you learn, through experience, that allows you to tie your shoes, ride a bicycle, use the telephone, operate an automobile, cook a meal, make change, figure out what to buy at the store, or, really, successfully accomplish an endless number of other concrete daily tasks.

In the preoperational stage, which we discussed last time, the child doesn't quite have enough experience in life to figure out the *concrete operations* that would allow him to navigate the world successfully. That's one reason why he often sees things in magical terms as he tries to make sense of what's going on around him. Though he's working on it, he hasn't yet seen how cause and effect works to make things happen in the world. This is why he needs help (from parents or teachers) to get along in the world. Adults at this stage have trouble succeeding in the world, which is the *only* reason why I keep harping on the fact that magical thinking isn't a very good way of navigating your life (it isn't because I'm a sourpuss, or because I have no sparkle in my life).

The child at the concrete operational stage has accomplished quite a bit. He can use symbols to represent things (developed during the late preoperational or *magic-mythic* stage). What's more, he can manipulate these symbols and representations in a logical way in order to accomplish many concrete tasks. These manipulations, though, can be used only in the context of concrete situations — "as if" thinking and other types of abstract thinking are not yet possible.

This, then, is the developmental stage where we learn to get around in the world and perform concrete, everyday tasks. This is accomplished through logic, through the ability to create internal representations and symbols for things, and through the ability to create generalizations (doors have handles, you sit in a chair to have your hair cut and pay at the end, someone will come to take your food order in a restaurant, you look for traffic before crossing the street, you can find and

How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

buy food at the grocery store, when your hands are dirty you can get them clean by washing them, and on and on — as long as these cognitive tools are applied to *concrete* situations).

One of these new cognitive tools is *decentering*, something I mentioned previously. Decentering happens when two or more different aspects, relationships, or ways of classifying objects can be held in the mind, understood, and operated upon *at the same time*.

Children at the preoperational stage have trouble understanding ideas such as “my brother is your father,” where two kinds of relationships or ways of categorizing (brother, father and, in this case, a third--uncle), exist and must be understood at the same time. The preoperational child has trouble because he *centers* on one way of categorizing at a time. The conventional operational child, however, can *decenter*, and therefore deal with more complex combinations of categories.

If the preoperational child is given five black marbles and three white ones, and is asked whether there are *more marbles*, or *more black marbles*, he will have trouble simultaneously cognizing “marbles” in general as a class of objects and “one particular color of marbles” as another class or category, and then, at the same time, comparing them or “operating on them.” As a result, the preop child will say that there are more black marbles (even though this isn’t true), because when he looks at the marbles, the classes black and white are the most obvious to him, and the idea of “all marbles, of whatever color” is difficult to hold in awareness at the same time. The conop (concrete operational) child, however, *can* hold both types of categories in mind, and easily gives the right

answer.

Another example: the conop child easily sees that when liquid is poured from a short, fat container into a tall thin one the amount of liquid remains the same. The preop child believes that the thin container, being taller, holds more, even though it’s the same liquid. Instead of *centering* on one aspect or category (tallness), the conop child is able to *decenter* and, in doing so, sees that it’s the same liquid, and that the short, fat container holds the same amount as the tall, thin container.

One more example: if a ball of clay is broken into twenty smaller balls, the preop child (centering on the size of the pieces) thinks that there is now less clay. The conop child, however, isn’t fooled. He can logically see that the amount of clay is conserved, just as the amount of liquid was conserved in the previous situation.

I once saw a mother give an older child two cookies and a younger (obviously preoperational) child one cookie. The younger child cried because he had only one cookie, so the mother broke his cookie in two, saying, “There. Now you also have two.” The child, unable to decenter, was satisfied — he didn’t get that while he had two cookies, they were each half the size!

In addition to mastering categorization and conservation, and being able to see that there are different ways to categorize or conserve, the conop child can also place a group of things in order of size, called *seriation*. Since arithmetic is basically a combination of categorization and seriation, the conop child can begin to learn basic arithmetic.

How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

I mentioned earlier that the shift from preop to conop also involves moving from “it’s about me” to “it’s about us.” In making this shift, the child exchanges his previous immersion in “me” for the collective security of the group. The group is organized around the group’s idea of what is important, what their truth is (“our myth”) — something we’ll investigate further in a moment.

At this stage there is little or no ambiguity. Life is about this or that, about concrete objects and concrete procedures (hence the name *concrete operations*). Things are either black or white, this or that, with no shades of gray. What is true is visible. There are no internal, abstract ideas or principles yet, just concrete objects and concrete ways to manipulate them to achieve outcomes.

Along the same lines, a child at this stage will describe his emotions in very concrete and simple terms, with none of the nuance available to later stages, where a larger palette of emotional descriptions becomes available. The child is happy or sad; what happens is good or bad; a person is nice or mean. The finer nuances of happy, sad, good, bad, nice, or mean, come at a later developmental level.

Concrete operational is the stage of collecting things (concrete things) — toy soldiers, marbles, butterflies, coins, dolls, etc. — another aspect of the *concreteness* of this stage. Adult collectors are either still at this stage or are expressing remnants of it. As I said, the child at this stage learns how to perform concrete, in-the-world tasks, like how to ride the bus, spell, do arithmetic, shine shoes, use a computer, operate the television, ride a bike, make change, make the bed, cook a hotdog, and so on.

Adults who remain in this stage (this stage makes up the largest percentage of adults in Western countries) are capable of mastering incredibly complex concrete operations: flying an airplane, being an expert locksmith, building a house, repairing complex engines or other machines, being an expert woodworker, and on and on.

To move into this stage the child must transcend a merely bodily orientation, where the world is experienced solely through physical actions and bodily feelings (an immersion in the body), and learn to experience the world through the mind as well as through the body. To do this, the child must learn to take the role of other, to shift from an *egocentric* orientation to a *sociocentric* (or group-centric) orientation. This is a shift from a bodily identity to a *role* identity, an identity based upon one’s role in the group.

This new ability to take the perspective of others is more than just knowing that others have a perspective, though. It also includes the ability to mentally reconstruct that perspective, so as to put oneself in the shoes of another. The preoperational child can’t do this; the concrete operational child can. For example, Piaget exposed children to a play set containing three clay mountains, each of a different color, and a toy doll. The doll was on one side of the play area and the children on the other. Piaget then asked the children two questions: what do you see, and what does the doll see?

Preoperational children answered that the doll’s view and their’s were the same. They were not aware that there were two different points of view, their own and the doll’s. Concrete operational children, however, clearly understood

How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

that the doll, being on the other side of the room, would see a different scenario.

Because the concrete operational child sees himself as a member of a group, he identifies with his *role* in the group. He also learns that others have their own roles. What's more, he can *differentiate* his role from that of others, and *integrate* that role into his newly emerging perspective of life. I've pointed out several times that we are immersed in something at every stage of development. At this stage the child is immersed in his role, which means that he is totally identified *as* his role. He will *transcend* his role when he moves to the next stage and *include it* in his developmental tool-kit (moving from *being* that role to *having it* — while at the same time becoming immersed in something new). At this stage, however, he *is* his role.

Because one's identity is one's role, pathology at this stage is called *script pathology*. Script pathology is different than the pathologies we've discussed previously. You'll remember that if one has trouble differentiating the self from the physical world, the result is psychosis. Trouble differentiating the self from the physical body creates either narcissism or borderline disorders, and repression of the body and its impulses creates neurosis.

Trauma involving early roles and scripts (in other words, trauma during the concrete operational stage), though, creates script pathology, where one's script — one's idea of one's role or standing in the group — is dysfunctional (“I'm no good, I'm a bad person, I can't do anything right, no one loves me, I have to remain as invisible as possible, nothing I do ever works out, I'm a loser,” and so forth). Such dysfunctions aren't about the body, or the difference between self and environment.

Instead, they are negative or unresourceful beliefs and ideas about one's social standing or one's self-worth in society.

Therapy involves making the person aware of the dysfunctional myths (scripts), and looking at them in light of more accurate information. Such dysfunctional ideas and beliefs were likely formed during the early concrete operational stage when the person was small and powerless, at an age when the child assumed that the parents' assessment of them was accurate.

You'll remember that during the preop stage the child learned to use images and symbols (i.e., pictorial and nonpictorial representations) and concepts (ideas representing entire classes of things). Now (in addition to shifting to a role perspective), the conop child learns to work with mental *rules*, a more cognitively advanced way of accomplishing tasks in the world. These rules generally involve grasping the *relationships between things* — for instance, relationships between numbers in arithmetic, or the relationship between items or ideas when placing them in hierarchical order. This is the first realization that everything is simultaneously *a whole* (with some number of parts) and at the same time also *a part* (in a larger whole).

This whole/part realization (Ken Wilber uses Arthur Koestler's term for a whole/part: a *holon*) creates a fundamental change in the way the child sees the world. The black and white, either/or view (I like it, I don't like it) common to the preoperational stage changes to an ability to see a continuum of preferences (bad, not so bad, good, better, best). This is a result of the new ability to 1) take different perspectives and 2) relate those

How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

perspectives to one another. Remember that, throughout the developmental process, the key to each shift is the ability to take a broader and more inclusive perspective — to see something that one was previously immersed in and therefore unaware of. The new ability to see the relationship between wholes and parts (holons) is a big step in this developmental progression.

Ken Wilber refers to the concrete operational stage as “rule/role mind,” and notes that it involves a greater transcendence, a greater autonomy, a higher and wider identity, and a greater consciousness. At the same time, as with all of these stages/perspectives,

the concrete operational person is still immersed in something — in this case, roles, social rules, myths, and dogmas. (When I spoke of dogmatic religion previously, I was talking about this level of development.) At this level, one becomes a part of the culture, and does so *by adopting the prevailing mythology of that culture.*

In such a mythic society, then, people are united not by blood or kinship, as in the preoperational (preconventional/magical) stage, but rather *by their agreement about a certain idea or myth* (as, for instance, when the twelve Tribes of Israel united around a common belief in Yahweh). At this stage the only way to have anything remotely

like a “global culture” is to forcefully impose the group’s mythology or dogma on others. This is called *mythic-imperialism*, and is seen in the empires of ancient peoples: Greeks, Romans, Aztecs, Persians, etc., and also in some more contemporary societies, such as European Colonial regimes and Nazi Germany.

“

Such dysfunctions aren’t about the body, or the difference between self and environment. Instead, they are negative or unresourceful beliefs and ideas about one’s social standing or one’s self-worth in society.

”

For a large number of people, development stops at the concrete operational stage. A few, however, develop further, to Piaget’s highest stage, formal operational, and an even smaller number continue to stages beyond that (identified by other researchers), all

of which we will visit at a later time. Up through concrete operational, the child has used concepts, symbols, and mental rules to operate on concrete things and events. At formal operational, the child learns to apply his logical abilities to abstract ideas, and we’ll visit what all of that means in the next installment.

Before I let you go, however, I want to add one more nuance to this discussion. In talking about developing from sensorimotor to preoperational to concrete operational, and beyond, we’re talking about *vertical development*. There is, however, within each stage, another type of development called *horizontal development*. The

How you make sense of your world, or, more secrets about life, part 2. Continued...

greater the degree of horizontal development, the greater the amount of mastery of the skills of that level.

A newborn is at the sensorimotor stage, but so is a child quite a few months older who is just learning to speak. During that period of time, the child has considerably increased his ability to navigate the world using his sensorimotor skills, learning to walk, manipulate objects, and so forth. Once he moves into the preoperational stage, he also goes through a period of learning the skills of that stage, followed by a similar period at the concrete operational stage, where he learns the skills of that level of development. In fact, humans at any stage can reach what could be called genius-level skills — at that level.

A person, then, reaches a given level (vertical development), then develops a set of skills at that level (horizontal development). If circumstances require development to a higher developmental level, the person makes another vertical leap. If not, they stay where they are. Whenever a person reaches a higher level, though, they spend a certain amount of time developing horizontally — mastering, to some degree, the skills of that level. And, again, if their circumstances change and they need to develop to an even higher level in order to navigate life in those changed circumstances, they move vertically once again.

For instance, when a child goes off to school he enters a new and quite different environment, and in order to deal with it, he must develop a new perspective. He has to deal with being part of a group, with learning new things, with a new authority figure that isn't a parent, with taking

turns, with being away from mother, and so forth. Dealing with this new environment requires a new and bigger perspective.

When a child goes off to college, he has to deal with several new things: paying his own bills, managing his time in a new and more independent way, being totally away from his family, and managing many aspects of life that he had help with before college (laundry, meals, transportation, managing money, and so on). To deal with this, he has to develop new skills, and (hopefully) he moves to a new developmental level.

It's not necessary to become a complete master of any given level in order to develop to the next higher level, but it is necessary to achieve a certain minimum degree of mastery, a certain minimum degree of integration. A baby could develop the minimum degree of sensorimotor mastery before moving on to preconventional operations, or he could become a master of his sensorimotor skills.

Similarly, a child could have a minimum degree of mastery of preconventional skills before moving to concrete operational, or could develop a full mastery of that level before moving on. And, a person could have a minimum mastery of concrete operations--or complete mastery--before moving on to formal operations. And so on. As I mentioned, some people at concrete operational develop incredible skills at that level.

Next, we'll look at formal operations, Piaget's highest level, and then move on to what are called *post-rational*, or *trans-rational* levels of cognitive development.

HOW YOU MAKE SENSE OF YOUR WORLD... MORE SECRETS OF LIVING, PART 3

This is the third in a series about cognitive development based primarily on the work of the legendary Jean Piaget, but also drawing on other developmental theorists.

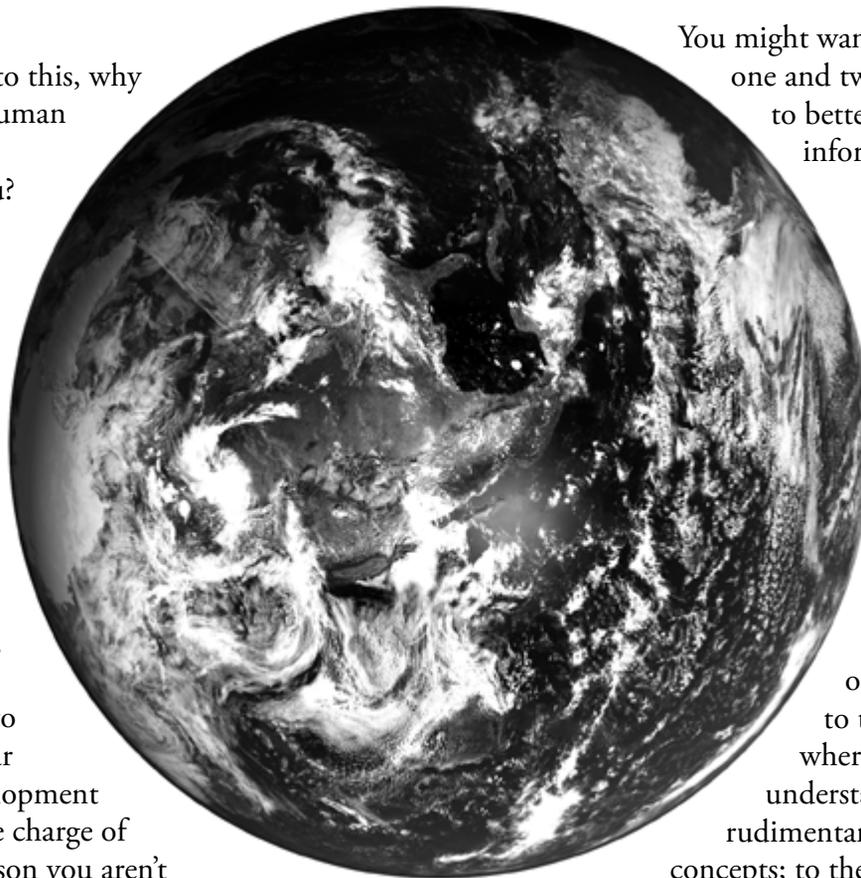
First, before we jump into this, why should you care about human development? How will knowing this benefit you?

First, cognitive development underlies development in nearly every other area of your life. And, since where you are in the developmental process has a huge effect on the way you make sense of the world, and to a great degree determines your ability to successfully navigate your life, understanding development can greatly help you take charge of your life. If for some reason you aren't creating what you want in life — enough money, enough friends, enough peace of mind, enough fulfillment — it's very likely that where you are developmentally has something to do with it.

So far we've looked at Piaget's first three levels, sensorimotor, preoperational, and concrete

operational. Now we'll look at Piaget's highest level, formal operational. Then, we'll move on to higher levels as identified by other researchers.

You might want to read parts one and two first in order to better understand this information.



So, we've followed the development of cognitive abilities from the sensorimotor stage, where the world is understood entirely through the senses and through motor functions (without any real emotional involvement or mental involvement); to the preoperational stage, where the child learns to understand the world through a rudimentary use of symbols and concepts; to the concrete operational stage, where the child applies symbols, concepts, and mental rules to concrete (but not abstract) operations in the world.

For most people, development stops at the concrete operational stage. A few, however, develop further, to Piaget's highest stage, formal operational. (And, an

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

even smaller number continue to stages beyond that.)

Up through concrete operational, the person has used concepts, symbols, and mental rules to operate on concrete things and events. Concrete operational is the stage at which we learn to get around in the world by learning through experience how cause and effect works in the world. At formal operational, the child learns to apply his logical abilities to abstract ideas, which opens up a new and much wider perspective on life, and a large number of new life skills.

One of the big differences between concrete operational (conop) and formal operational (formop) is the ability to perform cognitive operations on hypothetical situations. If a mother says to a concrete operational child, “Don’t make fun of that man with a big nose. How would you feel if someone made fun of your nose?” the child may respond, “But I don’t have a big nose!” In a concrete sense, the child doesn’t have a big nose, and therefore cannot put himself in the place of the other person. Doing so is too abstract for the child. It asks him to use “as if” thinking, and to put himself in the role of another. The task is abstract rather than concrete.

Here is another situation requiring formal operational thinking: “If Tom is taller than Sam, and Tom is also shorter than Mike, who is tallest?” To figure out the answer, you have to be able to imagine the situation — it isn’t concrete, but rather hypothetical.

In the first of my three online Life Principles Integration Process courses, I introduce the idea

that what you believe tends to come true in reality — what psychologists call a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. I ask students to examine their beliefs and find those that aren’t working, those that are generating outcomes they don’t want. (Notice that *believing* is concrete operational — it is based on evidence from experiences in the concrete, real world — while *thinking about believing* is formal operational — it’s a type of *thinking about thinking*, an operation performed *on* thinking.)

Once a person identifies a belief that is generating negative results, I ask them to determine what belief, if they adopted it and believed it, would generate the outcome they want. (For instance, someone who believes “I’ll never make any money,” generally figures out a way to make that belief come true. If, on the other hand, they believed, “If I do what those who make money do, I’ll make money, too,” they’ll figure out how to make that belief come true, i.e., they will make money.)

I then ask the student to adopt this new belief — even though they have no real-world evidence that it is true (yet). A concrete operational person believes something because they have concrete evidence for it. They’ve had actual experiences that tell them that what they believe is “true.” Now, I’m asking them to 1) imagine what belief would generate a better result, and 2) believe “as if” that new belief is true, to imagine that it is true — without any concrete evidence (they have to either imagine the evidence, or notice that other people have created evidence, which makes such a belief *possible*).

I’ve noticed that while a lot of students can do this, some students have trouble. This is a sign that

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

they have not fully mastered concrete operational thinking (if they had, their beliefs would be more functional), and are therefore not quite ready to move into formal operational thinking.

Needing *concrete* evidence in order to believe something is *concrete* operational thinking. Being able to *imagine* what it would be like to believe in some other way is *formal* operational. The visionaries of the world use formal operational thinking (and, very likely, cognitive strategies beyond formal operational, which we will look at another time). If you call concrete operational “thinking,” then formal operational could be termed “thinking *about* thinking.” Where concrete operational thinking might be described as *learning the rules for how to do things*, formal operations involves looking at how rules are generated, noticing patterns, and so forth — in other words, *operating on rules and other ways of thinking*, rather than operating merely on concrete things and situations.

In formal operational thinking, we’ve stepped back a step to observe the thinking process from the outside. The concrete operational person is immersed in their mental processes — they *are* their mental processes. The formal operational person has begun the process of *having* these mental processes instead of just *being* them.

Formal operational thinking — the ability to think about the thinking process — allows a person to investigate a problem in a systematic manner. Let’s say you wanted to determine the rules for making a pendulum swing at a certain speed. To systematically figure this out, you might try various combinations: a long string with a light weight, a long string with a heavy weight, a short string with a light weight, and a short string with a heavy weight.

Formal operational thinking — the ability to think about the thinking process — allows a person to investigate a problem in a systematic manner.

Though the actual experiment is very concrete, the conception of it isn’t. The formal operational person will imagine the possibilities before they begin. They have the cognitive ability to imagine

them all, hold them in awareness, and compare them. The concrete operational person will randomly try different possibilities and eventually will learn how a pendulum works.

The formal operational thinker, however, will create a systematic plan prior to the actual experiment — allowing her to cut right to the chase. In many cases, the formal operational person will not only cognize the possibilities and the method of testing them, but also be able to imagine (based on information they have learned during the concrete operational stage) the actual result — before even doing the experiment.

At a more technical level, cognitive psychologists have identified eight different cognitive skills used

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

to solve this problem (though you don't need to know that these categories exist to use them). The first four have to do with the ability to group possibilities in four different ways:

1) Conjunction: "It's possible that both A *and* B make a difference." This expresses the possibility that the length of the string and the weight of the pendulum both make a difference.

2) Disjunction: "It's possible that it's *either* this or that." Another possibility is that it might be *either* the length or the weight.

3) Implication: "It's possible that *if* it's this, *then* that will happen." This is the formation of hypothesis by noticing any possible if/then causative connection.

4) Incompatibility: "It's possible that when this happens, that doesn't." This is the converse of *implication* (#3 above), and is a way to eliminate (disprove) a hypothesis.

The second four are called "operating on operations" — what I meant above by "thinking about thinking." The concrete operational thinker has learned to use various cognitive operations in order to make things happen in the world. The formal operational thinker can think about these operations and see (and use) patterns and principles.

If for instance your hypothesis is that it could be the string, or the weight, there are four operations you could use to test it:

1) Identity: "It could be the string *or* the weight."

2) Negation: "It might *not* be the string *and* it might *not* be the weight." (Negate each component and replace "or" with "and.")

3) Reciprocity: "It could either not be the weight or not be the string." (Negate the components but keep the and's and or's.)

4) Correlativity: "It's the weight *and* the string." (Keep the components as they are, but replace or's with and's.)

If you are a reasonably good formal operational thinker, you probably use the above in your thinking, even if you've never heard of, or even thought about, these categories. But you can probably see why not everyone develops this type of cognitive ability — it can be complicated.

The more difficult questions on IQ tests can only be answered using formal operational thinking, for instance. Formal operational thinking allows one to think logically *and* abstractly, to use imaginative "as if" thinking, to "think about thinking," to understand shades of gray, and, additionally, to understand abstract concepts such as love, integrity, or freedom.

Only about 30% of adults develop formal operational cognitive abilities.

Part of the shift to formal operational thinking involves a significant *identity change*: a mature

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

ego begins to emerge. German philosopher and sociologist Jergen Habermas spoke of the transition from concrete operational to formal operational as a transformation from a *role* identity to an *ego* identity.

A *role identity* (the type of identity of a person at the concrete operational stage) is defined by one's place and function in the group. An *ego identity*, on the other hand — contrary to the common use of the term as a type of selfishness — is defined by a wider perspective that, among other things, considers what would be fair for all people, not just one's group.

This more *world centric* perspective is possible because one has, for the first time, a true independent identity, based on a more expanded ability to take the role of other. When Piaget speaks of his earlier stages as being egocentric, he doesn't mean that a clearly differentiated self or ego exists. He means just the opposite — that the self is *not* differentiated from the world, or even from the group.

It's only at the formal operational level that a true, integrated self emerges from it's immersion (in the sensorimotor stage) in the total environment, then (in the late sensorimotor and early preoperational stage) in bodily impulses, then (in late preoperational) in emotions, and finally (in concrete operational) in social roles. Counter-intuitively, then, the development of a strong ego is actually a move *away* from egocentricity.

In the sensorimotor and preoperational stages the child does not have a strong or separate ego. The child assumes that the world feels whatever he

feels and wants whatever he wants. He cannot clearly separate self and other and, as a result, treats others as extensions of himself (which leads to magical thinking — if something is an extension of me, I can magically affect it, or some powerful other can affect it for me). Later, at the concrete operational stage, the child cannot separate herself from the view of her group — the group's mythology or world view. At formal operational, however, a true, independent self — a differentiated ego — emerges.

Let's take a quick detour, then, and look at the concept of the ego (for which I will rely heavily upon the remarks of Ken Wilber). The ego is the bad guy in mystical, New Age circles, but what New Agers mean by "ego" is a bit fuzzy. Most postmodern New Agers take it to mean the sense of being a separate self, a self isolated from others and from Spirit — a not unreasonable definition.

But since ego is the bad guy, New Age thinking often equates everything that is non-rational, every perspective not associated with ego, as being good. In doing so, they make no distinction between narcissistic, *pre-egoic* states, where a true ego is as yet undeveloped, and *trans-egoic* states, where the ego has been transcended (an ego is available to be used as a tool but the self is no longer identified *as* it).

As opposed to the New Age definition of ego, academic psychoanalytic circles often define ego as *the process of organizing the psyche*, often referring to this organizing principle as the *self*, that which gives unity to the mind. Many of these theorists don't relate to the idea of going beyond the ego — or get why anyone would even want to.

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

Finally, in contemporary philosophy, a distinction is made between what could be called *the empirical ego*, the self that can be an object of awareness, and the *Pure Ego* or *transcendental ego*, that aspect of us that is pure subjectivity and therefore can never be seen or experienced as an object. This is what I (and others) have often referred to as *the witness*, and what the Hindus call *Atman*, the pure witness that itself can never be witnessed. This definition of ego confuses New Agers, because it equates the “bad” ego with Spirit.

When Piaget speaks of his earlier stages as being egocentric, he doesn't mean that there is a clearly differentiated ego or self, able to distinguish itself from the world. In fact, he means the opposite — that the self is *not* differentiated from the world, that there is no strong ego. This is why the person at these early stages treats the world as an extension of the self. Only when a true, differentiated ego emerges (at formal operational) does egocentrism diminish.

Until that point, the self is immersed in bodily impulses (sensorimotor and preoperational) and pre-given social roles (concrete operational). Finally, however, at the formal operational stage, a fully separate and fully individuated sense of self emerges. This emerging ego begins to form during concrete operational, as a persona or role, and then more fully develops during the formal operational stage. Further development (past formal operational) continues into the more spiritual (*transegoic*) realms.

Pre-egoic (i.e., sensorimotor and preoperational), egoic (concrete operational and formal operational), and transegoic (beyond formal operational) stages could also be described as being

subconscious, self-conscious, and superconscious, respectively; or as prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal; or as prerational, rational, and transrational. And, you could also equate these stages with egocentrism, ethnocentrism (or group-centrism), and worldcentrism.

I mentioned decentering earlier as a new and significant ability of the formal operational person, where there is an ability to hold in awareness more than one type of relationship or one way of categorizing things or situations. Decentering could be thought of as an increased ability to take and hold in awareness multiple perspectives — a hallmark of world-centrism.

In this progression, each stage transcends the stage before it, becoming less egocentric. In each case, the new perspective is wider. Cognitively, the person is increasingly able to see (and take) progressively larger perspectives. Ultimately this will culminate in an ability to see one's self as the entire going on of it all (as Spirit, or the Divine).

Formal operational thinking and awareness, then, transcends but also includes concrete operational thinking and awareness. As such, it can *operate upon* the skills and perspectives of the concrete operational stage. What the child was immersed in during concrete operational (what was subject) can now be observed, as an object — and therefore manipulated and operated upon. While concrete operational uses rules of thought to operate upon the concrete world, formal operational operates upon the rules themselves.

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

The ability to do this opens one to a new world — the world of *possibilities*. This is why the adolescent, as he develops formal operational abilities, enters into a world of new feelings, new dreams, new possibilities, new idealistic strivings. Reason (the main tool of formal operations) is the main driving force for this new space of possibilities. While the concrete operational child can operate on the concrete world, he is still tied to the obvious and the given. The formal operational adolescent, however, can mentally see new and different arrangements and possibilities.

A classic experiment from Piaget illustrates this. Piaget presented a child with five glasses of colorless liquids, three of which, when mixed, will produce a yellow liquid, and asked the child to combine the liquids to produce such a liquid.

Each stage approaches the problem in a different way. The preop child randomly mixes a few different liquids, and then gives up. If he stumbles upon the correct combination, he assigns his success to magic: “The sun made it happen,” or, “I wished that it would happen.” The conop child begins combining the liquids, three at a time, concretely mixing until he finds the right three to produce a yellow color.

But the formop adolescent begins by announcing that all possible combinations of three liquids must be tried. In other words, he has a mental plan (a formal operation) that allows him to see, in his mind’s eye, that all possible combinations must be tried. This is a type of *relational awareness*, where all possibilities are mentally held in awareness — something entirely new.

This isn’t a magical view of how things relate, as in preoperational thinking, or a randomized but concrete way of seeing how things relate, as in concrete operational thinking, but rather a new type of thinking in which both discrete differences *and* interactive relationships are perceived and taken into consideration.

The preop child, and to a lesser extent the conop child, thinks that yellow is a property of the liquids. The formop adolescent, however, understands that the yellow color is created by a *relationship* between the various liquids. This ability to see relationship between items is a new and significant skill. At concrete operational, the concrete items are what is important. At formal operational, while the items themselves are still important, what is most important are the relationships between the items.

Wilber points out three important qualities of formal operational. It is the first stage that is *ecological*, in the sense that it can see and hold in awareness the *possible consequences* of the *relationships* involved in a situation. Second, formal operational involves an understanding of *relativity*. In being able to hold in mind different perspectives, it sees in what way they operate relative to each other.

(In one experiment Piaget allowed a snail to move along a board while at the same time the board is moved along a table. Only those at formal operational could understand the distance the snail travels relative to both the board *and* the table. The formal operational thinker understands that the time something takes, or the distance it travels, must be measured *relative to* some arbitrary point.)

How you make sense of your world...more secrets of living, part 3. Continued...

Finally, formal operational thinking is *non-anthropocentric* (it doesn't interpret the world solely in terms of human values and experiences). Formop sees a bigger picture, a larger perspective, in which humans are a part of a larger whole that includes the entire planet and other living things.

In a similar way, rules and societal norms are reflected upon and evaluated by reference to universal principles that transcend those of any particular culture or group. "My country right or wrong" becomes "Is my country actually right?" Concrete rules such as the Ten

Commandments are supplanted by more universal principles such as justice, mercy, compassion, respect for all individuals, human rights — and the connection between rights and responsibilities.

During this developmental process we've seen morality move from a preconventional, narcissistic perspective, centered around the child's body-centered feelings and impulses; to a conventional, ethnocentric, group-centric perspective centered around one's tribe, society, race, or social group; to a postconventional or worldcentric perspective, oriented to "all of us."

At formal operational, one's role no longer determines one's identity. Though still influenced by society, identity at the formal operational stage is individually determined. The question of "who am I?" must, for the first time,

be answered not by society but by the individual. Until this point true self-esteem does not exist, because prior to this stage one's esteem is defined by the group. Now, for the first time — with the arising of a separate, individuated self — self-esteem is possible.

“

At formal operational, one's role no longer determines one's identity. Though still influenced by society, identity at the formal operational stage is individually determined.

”

In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one has moved from *belongingness needs* to *self-esteem needs*. A failure to successfully negotiate this shift results in the pathology of this stage, the identity crisis. At concrete operational one might fail to find an

appropriate or healthy role in society, resulting in a script pathology. At formal operational the person is faced with finding an individual self that may or may not fit with society at all (think of Henry David Thoreau).

In addition to being ecological, relational, and non-anthropocentric, formal operational thinking is also introspective and experimental. It also relies on evidence to settle issues, and can understand and use "what if" or "as if" statements to make sense of the world. In many ways, it is a stage about *what could be*. Modern technology, modern medicine, and many other human comforts and discoveries are the result of formal operational thinking.

Next, we'll look at stages beyond formal operational, what is often called *the transpersonal*.

IT'S HARD BEING HERE, ISN'T IT?

Everyone is doing their best to make sense of and deal with the challenges of being a human being. In the broadest sense, what “develops” is your perspective about what it means to be here, what the challenges are, and your ability to deal with them.

Let's face it, as my friend Sanieel Bonder says, *“It's hard being here.”* Some people think it's only hard for some people, and that for others it's easy. Others think it's hard because they're doing something wrong, or there's some secret they haven't found yet, or because they're broken in some way.

I'd be willing to bet that most people who come to Centerpointe do so because they're experiencing how hard it is to be a person. They want help, and they've heard that Holosync, along with what I teach, really does help. And, though it does help--in fact, quite a bit--the truth is that *it's hard being here for EVERYONE*--whether you're

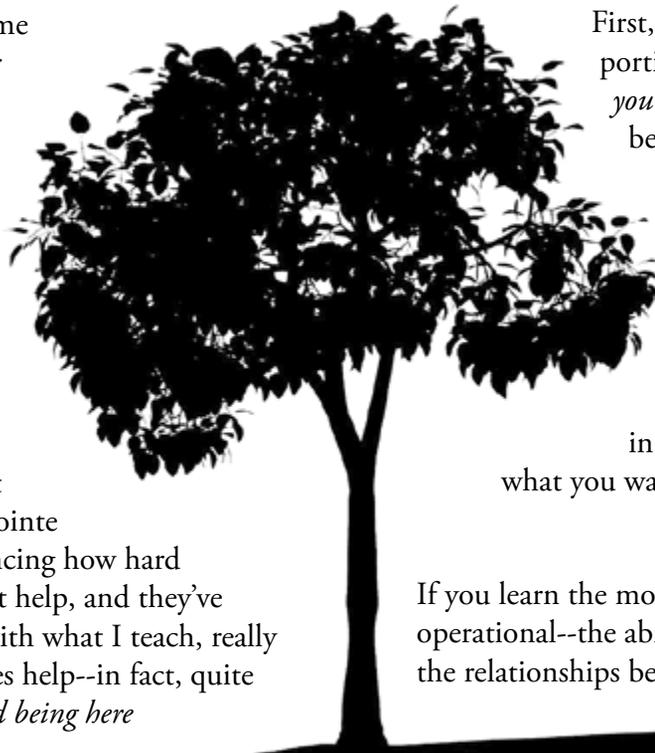
rich or poor, adored or have no friends, enlightened or completely unaware, famous or obscure, or anything else, in some ways *it's hard for every human being to be here.*

Let me tell you why.

First, as you've no doubt noticed, some portion of the time, *you don't get what you want.* That, in and of itself, makes being here hard. Right?

Now, as you learn some of the skills of the concrete operational level of development (the rules of cause and effect, and how to use them to successfully do things in the world), it becomes easier to get what you want *more often.*

If you learn the more advanced skills of formal operational--the ability to use abstract thought, to see the relationships between people, things, situations,



It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

ideas, and so forth, and to take the perspective of others, see the total ecology of a situation, and so forth--you can get what you want more often still.

And, if you develop further (into levels I haven't talked about yet), you'll very likely improve your odds even more.

Still, there will *always* be times when you don't get what you want.

Second, there are times when you get what you *don't* want. And, again, the more skills you have at each developmental level, and the higher the level you attain, the less often you'll get what you don't want. You might even learn how to make the times when you get what you don't want into opportunities.

And, at higher developmental levels, the tendency is for your sense of well-being to become increasingly *independent* of whatever you do or don't get, but I'll get into that when I talk about the levels beyond formal operational.

[Shameless commercial message: FYI: Though I don't mention these terms, my Life Principles Integration Process online courses are designed to take you through a step-by-step process through concrete operational (increasing those skills), into formal operational (increasing those skills), and beyond, to the even higher developmental levels. You can listen to a free preview lesson, if you're interested, at www.centerpointe.com/life/preview, or read all about it at www.centerpoint.com/life]

Besides the inevitability of sometimes not getting what you want and sometimes getting what you don't want, there's a third reason why it's hard to be here:

Everything in the universe exists "in time"--it comes into being, and eventually it passes away. You're employee of the month, and you feel good about it, but next month someone else is employee of the month and your award-winning glow is in the past.

You enjoy being young and vibrant, but then you get old.

You feel good, but then you get sick.

You have a beautiful meal in front of you, and then it's gone, consumed.

You enjoy your children, and then they grow up.

You love your dog, but it grows old and dies.

You get a new car, but it gradually becomes "just transportation."

And, the biggie: you're born, but eventually you fall apart and die. Like everything else, you, too, come into being and eventually pass away.

That's the way it is. All things eventually pass away, including you and me, and it makes it hard to be here. And every person, even if they're really good

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

at distracting themselves from these “problems” *feels them* lurking in the background of their consciousness.

What's more, because we're sensitive and have sensitive bodies we can enjoy all kinds of things about life--sights, sounds, touches, smells, tastes, and other sensory delights--but this sensitivity also makes us subject to pain, injury, and disease.

Every human being, then, is doing his or her best to make sense of being human in light of these “drawbacks” to being human.

At the sensorimotor stage, where you make sense of the world entirely through senses and movement (after all, you're a baby), you don't have many ways to deal with these drawbacks, but you probably do notice (or at least suffer in some way) when you don't have enough of what you want, or when things pass away (Mom is there holding you and feeding you, and then, after a while, it's over and she puts you in your crib). At this stage, you're totally dependent upon others, and if you're reasonably well cared for, you make sense of being alive in that way.

At the preoperational stage (also called preconventional, prerational, and several other names) you learn to talk and begin to use symbols, but you don't yet understand cause and effect or the general rules (especially cause and effect) regarding how the world works. For this reason, you tend to use magical thinking to make sense of the world and your place in it. And, for a while, this works, which is why some people stay at this stage, sometimes for life. In the modern world most people at this stage are protected by their parents

(unless they grow up stuck at this stage, which puts them at a severe disadvantage).

If an entire society is at this stage--a tribal society, for instance, with no understanding of modern science--the entire group makes sense of the world by looking to mysterious spirits, keeping the traditions of the tribe, and obeying the elders.

Let me make one thing clear: any way of making sense of the world works *as long as it works*. When it doesn't work any longer, the person (or society) using it will develop a new way of making sense of things. For some reason, these ways of making sense of things, regardless of culture or historical era, follow a certain progression.

The scientists and researchers who have studied such things are not pushing a certain point of view when they say this. They are just looking at the evidence and sharing what they see. If other researchers disagree, the questions are sorted through using a peer-review process where eventually an agreement is reached--which is pretty much always overturned when new information comes to light later.

So, I'm not being negative about preconventional thinking as some of you have accused me. I'm pointing out that this way of making sense of life has, first of all, been improved upon in later stages. In fact, the fact that there are later stages shows that earlier stages didn't work for someone at some point. Otherwise, how (or why) would the later stages develop? Why would an individual or a society leave behind a certain way of making sense of the world for another if the original way was still working?

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

And, as long as a certain way of making sense of things IS working, there's no reason to change it. A way of making sense of who you are and why you're here and why it's often so hard to be a person will work *until it doesn't*. When it doesn't, you go through a period where you feel confused, adrift, chaotic, until you come up with a new way of making sense of things--one that explains the new conditions the old way couldn't deal with.

As we gain more experience in life (also assuming that our brain develops properly, so we can process what we experience and learn to use symbols and concepts in a more accomplished manner) we begin to see, *through our day to day experiences in the world*, how the laws of nature (including the process of cause and effect) work to generate what happens. This everyday experience exposes the strategies used at the preoperational stage as inferior, and as we see better ways of making sense of things we move into the concrete operational stage.

At concrete operational, we make sense of the world in a new way. But in addition to developing skills that allow us to get around in the world, accomplish the daily tasks of life and, in general, manage concrete things and situations, another key shift takes place: we begin to learn to take the role of other.

This new perspective allows us to notice others who share our perspective, which allows us to become part of a group. We trade magical, egocentric thinking for groupcentric thinking and the security of being a member of the group. Being a part of a group gives us a new way to deal with the fact that "it's hard to be here": the "truth" (the particular myths) of our group gives us a ready-made way to make sense of the world, and having other people

who believe as we do gives us a sense of security (it also blinds us to the fact that there are other groups and that they think they are just as right as we do--and that we are just as wrong as we think they are).

If, for instance, you're a concrete operational (conventional) Christian (there are Christians at every developmental level past sensorimotor, but the majority of Christians are at concrete operational) you very likely see the world in terms of good and evil, and your group tells you how to be on the side of "good" and avoid "evil." In the Christian world, at this level, you go to heaven if you do certain things and believe certain things, and go to hell if you do or believe other things.

This simple rule, "everything goes into two piles, the good, or appropriate, and the bad, or inappropriate"--and knowing the consequences of each--makes it easier to make sense of the world. Every decision, every idea, every person, every action, fits in one pile or the other. There are few, if any, shades of gray, no paradoxes, and no intangibles.

You see this in George Bush, for instance. He's sure of what he does because he's sure that he knows what the rules are (everyone at concrete operational is sure of what the rules are, though these rules might change from group to group--look at concrete operational-level Muslims for instance). These rules tell President Bush and others like him what is right and what is wrong. Then, the only thing necessary is to act consistently with those rules. You may disagree, but personally I don't think George Bush is dishonest, as many on the left say. I think he's simply acting consistent with his beliefs. He is acting honorably and normally *for someone who sees morality from a concrete operational*

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

point of view.

If you are at the concrete operational level you might have different rules, but you, too, will act in keeping with your rules, whatever they are, because rules are a key part of making sense of the world at this stage.

If you are a Christian at this developmental level all those other people who aren't part of your in-group (Muslims, for instance, or Buddhists, or atheists, or pro-abortion people, or whatever) are in trouble, because they don't know the truth that you've found. And, as long as you stick to the rules of your group, you're fine.

For some people, though, at some point, the whole black and white, rule-oriented way of deciding what is right and wrong, and what to do about it, stops working. It no longer keeps away those feelings of uncertainty about life. Some people begin to notice that no set of rules covers all the nuances of life, all the different *possibilities*, all the possible situations, and this is the beginning of the transition into formal operational (postconventional) thinking.

If you develop a larger perspective than that of concrete operational, you begin to see that everything really doesn't fit neatly into two piles. There are multiple "truths" and there's no easy way to tell which dogma is THE dogma--or if any of them are really "true." You go beyond

merely noticing and manipulating concrete things, events, people, situations. You also begin to notice and focus on the *relationships* between these things.

“

If you develop a larger perspective than that of concrete operational, you begin to see that everything really doesn't fit neatly into two piles.

”

You also learn to think in a more abstract way, to think ABOUT thinking, to see possibilities, to think “as if.” You begin to see that the world is full of uncertainty, paradox, unknowns, even though you might not feel all that comfortable about it. Principles, rather than rules, become a new and additional tool

to use in making sense of being a human.

(Notice that you don't totally abandon the tools of the previous level. “Law and Order,” for instance, is a big part of conventional thinking. When you move past conventional thinking, however, that doesn't mean that you are now in favor of chaos and anarchy. Laws and order in society are still good things, but how they are determined and enforced may change.)

At formal operational you also begin to adopt a more individualized way of functioning because *an individual sense of self is developing*. You still are likely to be a group member (another example of the fact that you don't get rid of everything from the previous level), but now you don't derive your identity solely from your role in the group. And, you can be part of several groups and handle the fact that each group may have a different set of beliefs.

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

All of this is part of a growing ability to handle the fact that life is uncertain and paradoxical, and that there are many different approaches and points of view. Seeing this, you can be more flexible about things. Before, you needed to have things be either this or that, good or evil, us or them, liked or disliked. You now begin to see that there are many shades of gray in the world, something that would have been disconcerting at the concrete operational stage. In the levels beyond formal operational this ability to see and be okay with paradox and uncertainty will increase.

With this new point of view, your identity is no longer determined by your role in the group and the group's ideas, but rather by your own individual sense of who you are and your own individual principles--something you have to figure out for yourself, and try out in the world.

In some cases, you may feel at odds with the world. Conventional strategies that used to make sense may not appeal to you any more. You may also feel frustrated that others (those still at concrete operational) can't see what you see. Most of the insoluble disputes in the world are between people at different developmental levels. Hoping that a person at one level will see things from the point of view of another level is futile. People see and make sense of the world from their level of development, and other levels will look wrong, or incomprehensible. (At the highest levels this begins to change, something we will look at another time.)

Once a person develops a few levels past formal operational (something we'll get to later), they reach what some researchers call the "second tier" of development. At this point, a person has the ability to look at the preceding levels and see and

appreciate the value and point of view of each. Such a person's perspective has grown to the point where they can view the entire developmental spiral without being immersed in their own point of view, as if it was the only "correct" point of view.

Up to this point, one's developmental level has been *subject*, but now it (and, in fact, the entire sequences of levels) becomes *object*. Until that point, each level sees their own point of view as the only point of view that makes sense, while the others are seen as mistaken--or worse.

In writing this, I'm trying to give you this perspective. Some of you are able to look from this perspective and appreciate all of the levels, while others are still stuck in your own individual perspective--which is, ironically, as it should be.

But let's return to the idea of making sense of being a human being, and the fact that it's hard to be here. If you develop past formal operational (to levels of meaning-making we haven't looked at yet), you will develop additional strategies for making sense of being human and dealing with the fact that it's hard to be here. At these transpersonal, transrational stages, something really amazing begins to happen: you stop organizing your experience of life around what you always thought was "you"--the separate ego, the separate self.

There are several levels of doing this, culminating in what is generally referred to as enlightenment. All of these perspectives, however, are ways of dealing with, of coping with, of making sense of the fact that it's hard to be here, it's hard to be a person, it's hard to exist in a universe where things come into being and eventually pass away, and where you

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

sometimes don't get what you want and sometimes get what you don't want.

Wherever you are in the developmental spiral, you'll stay there until that particular way of making sense of the world doesn't work for you any more. At that point, if a transition to a higher stage is to happen, you experience a crisis of sorts, sometimes intense, other times easier (it often depends on whether or not you have someone to help you through it or not).

In this "change crisis," you notice that the old way doesn't work very well any more, which creates uneasiness, discomfort. The world doesn't make sense anymore, which can be a quite disconcerting feeling. The problems of being human I listed at the beginning of this section become more obvious because your old ways of keeping them at bay don't work as well. You go through a period of chaos, where things temporarily don't make sense. Finally, hopefully, your view of yourself, the world, and life reorganizes at a new and higher level, one where you have a larger and wider perspective. Then, once again, things "make sense."

I have written quite a bit about this process of chaos and reorganization and how humans respond to it. I'll write something about this at some point, since this process is one of the most interesting things I've ever noticed about how the universe works.

But I digress (again). As we develop, each new and broader view sees with more clarity the reality of the problem of being a human being. At the same time, the wider perspective of these higher stages better equips you to deal with these challenges. At the highest levels, it becomes clear that these problems

really aren't problems after all. They exist, but you begin to see that making them into a "problem" is a choice. You develop the ability to "let whatever happens be okay." And, at the highest levels you no longer identify yourself as a center of action and thought (a separate self). You have a "self" but this self isn't who you are, any more than any other idea about something is the same as the thing it represents. At this point, the "problems of life" aren't really problems. They are conditions, perhaps, but not problems.

Let's look at a few change points between developmental levels, to see how an old way of seeing things and operating in the world can stop making sense, requiring a new way of seeing and being.

When you went off to school for the first time, you entered a new world. At that time of life you were very likely, in a developmental sense, pre-rational, preoperational, and narcissistic. You were pretty good at making sense of your world at home, centered around mom, dad, the rest of the family, and your immediate neighborhood. What's more, how well you made sense of it wasn't that crucial, because other people were taking care of you.

This new situation, however, was quite different. You were with an adult not from that small circle, and that adult had a definite agenda for what was going to happen. There were a lot of other kids, but it wasn't a play situation. There were rules, and a new kind of order and structure. You were expected to learn many new things, take your turn, and keep to a schedule. You had to get up in the morning at a certain time, leave for school at a certain time, go home at a certain time, eat lunch at a certain time. While you were at school, someone else decided

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

what you were going to do, when you were going to do it, and for how long.

To deal with all of this, you had to develop a new set of skills and a new, more group-oriented perspective. For most children, this kicks off the beginning of conventional, concrete operational thinking. And, in developing that new way of seeing things, you had to transcend your old way of making sense of the world, and at the same time include parts of it in your new view. For a while, you were a bit unsteady on your feet, but after a while you mastered this new way of understanding things and being in the world.

It's very likely that another developmental shift happened when you went off to high school (or even middle school). Now you were expected to get yourself from one room to another, and do so on a tight schedule. You had to keep track of your assignments and books and get quite a number of tasks completed on time, which meant you had to learn to manage your time (something you were learning in grade school, but were now much more on your own in doing so). There were many other things you had to learn: new ways of being a part of a group, new ways of thinking and using your mind, plus dealing with a new interest in the opposite sex (or, perhaps, the same sex), new kinds of social events--and a lot more.

Again, your old way of making sense of things was not adequate, and new skills and perspectives had to be mastered. Some mastered them better than others. Generally those who stayed at concrete operational were at a disadvantage over those who began the transition to formal operational. Many high schools (for better or worse) divide students into at least two tracks, consisting of the formal

operational college-bound kids, and the concrete operational kids who may not go to college. Do you remember those standardized tests you took way back then? Many of them were designed to determine if you were concrete operational, or formal operational college material.

Another transition happens when a person goes off to college. Now, in addition to everything else, you have to manage many tasks you previously had help with, or which someone else took care of: keeping track of your own checkbook, paying your bills, finding a place to live, buying your own food and preparing it, being the sole caretaker of your car, and so on. Plus, once you're in college it's less likely that anyone will check up on you if you don't go to class or turn in your homework. To a much greater degree you're on your own.

Again, in order to deal with all these new things, you must develop new skills and new perspectives. If you do, you make it. If you don't, life is more difficult. It's almost a cliché that college freshmen come home for Thanksgiving not so sure they like college, but usually by Christmas break they've learned how to deal with the demands of their new life.

There are other transitions, of course, including entering the job market (this time not for pocket money, but because you have to pay your rent), and getting married and starting a family. As before, these new situations require new skills and new perspectives. Those who develop these new perspective are more successful in these situations; those who don't struggle. My point is that all through life, as our situation changes, our old way of making sense of things may need to change, and that change involves seeing things from a wider

It's hard being here, isn't it? Continued...

perspective, which involves a developmental leap.

Some people have trouble making these transitions, which means they are “in over their heads” in their new situation, as Harvard developmental theorist Robert Kegan has put it. My role, in many ways, is to help those who are in this situation to learn better ways to deal with life (and, to help those who have these skills and larger perspectives to go even further).

Holosync, by the way, very powerfully helps a person make these shifts. I've noticed this over the past 22 years, and Ken Wilber has noted that he sees it, too. Holosync moves people more quickly through these developmental levels.

Why does this happen? Remember that in each level we are at first immersed in something to such a degree that we *are* it (it is *subject*, who we are). In shifting to the new perspective, we must step out of this immersion. As this happens what we were unconsciously immersed in becomes *object*, something we *have*. We move from being unconscious of it to being aware of it. Instead of unconsciously *being it*, we can now do something with it, have some choice about it, “operate” on it. Because Holosync powerfully expands awareness, it makes the process of seeing and adopting a new and wider perspective (becoming aware of what you have been immersed in) MUCH easier, which tends to move you much more quickly to a new and higher level.

In a tangible sense, what does this mean? If you are struggling with some part of your life, there is a very high probability that your way of making sense of life, the world, and who you are, isn't

quite up to the challenge. You just might be “in over your head.” To resolve this, one of two things needs to happen: either you need more horizontal development--more and better skills and perspectives at your current level of development. Or, if you have adequate skills at your current level of development, it might be time for a vertical shift, a move to a higher, wider, more inclusive perspective.

Holosync helps with both. In addition, I also suggest that you take my Life Principles Integration Process online courses. As I said above, the first of these courses is specifically designed to increase concrete operational skills and abilities, then transition to a formal operational perspective, and then--in the second course--to move to the transpersonal levels beyond. (The third course is about how to apply all of this to accomplishing what you want in the world.)

So if you aren't yet using Holosync, I hope you'll start. Those who wait generally look back once they've used Holosync for a while and wish they'd started sooner. If you are using Holosync, I hope you'll be regular in your use and continue to move to the deeper levels of the program as you become ready for them. The further you go in the program, the more profound the results become.

And, please, register for the Life Principles courses, or at least check them out. You can listen to a free preview Life Principles lesson at www.centerpointe.com/life/preview, or read about them at www.centerpointe.com/life.

MAKING SENSE OF WHO YOU ARE...

I promised that we would next look at the developmental levels beyond those described by Piaget. In doing so, I'm going to rely heavily on the work of Susanne Cook-Greuter, who studied under Harvard's Robert Kegan, one of the superstars in the world of human development. At Harvard, she became involved with the most highly regarded testing instrument for determining stages of human development, Jane Loevinger's sentence completion test, and became a certified scorer for the test.

In the Loevinger test a person completes 36 sentence fragments, and from the responses the person's developmental level is ascertained. This test has been used since the 1950s, and has been found to be VERY accurate. A huge amount of data has been compiled over the last 50 or so years, and the test is the most highly respected instrument in the field.

In scoring the test Cook-Greuter (who, by the way, I know personally, and have studied with) began to notice responses that did not fit any of the stages identified by Loevinger (though these stages



in many ways mirror Piaget's levels, Loevinger was focusing on the development of one's sense of self rather than on merely cognitive development). Eventually, after a great deal of research, Cook-Greuter compiled enough data to add two additional levels to Loevinger's model and is now considered to be one of the world's top experts in human development, and THE expert in the higher developmental stages.

Before discussing the postconventional stages, though, I want to give you a quick "cook's tour" of the Loevinger levels corresponding to those we've already looked at. This will serve as a quick review, and will also highlight the fact that there is more to development than just the cognitive line.

Though there are many naming conventions, the general developmental categories I described previously might best be described as *archaic* (or sensorimotor in Piaget's terminology), *preconventional* or magic (Piaget's preoperational), *conventional* or mythic (Piaget's concrete operational), and *rational* or modern (Piaget's formal operational).

There are also various names for the levels that come after these. The next couple of levels are variously described as postmodern, postconventional, postrational, or postformal (and by a few other names). After that we have unitive or transcendent stages.

Making sense of who you are... Continued...

Yes, I know. The names can be confusing. I would suggest thinking of them, in general, as archaic (essentially, babies and people who are completely dependent), pre-conventional (those who don't yet understand the laws of cause and effect and the general "ways of the world"--children), followed by conventional, post-conventional, and unitive.

In the Loevinger/Cook-Greuter developmental levels the archaic/sensorimotor level is called Symbiotic, because the infant is in a symbiotic relationship with the mother. After that, there are two pre-conventional stages, Impulsive and Opportunistic. Then, there are three conventional stages, Diplomat, Expert, and Achiever, with Achiever corresponding to Piaget's formal operational level.

Then, there are the post-conventional stages: Individualist and Strategist, followed by two Unitive (or transcendent) stages, Magician and Unitive. Cook-Greuter acknowledges that eventually Unitive may be subdivided into more stages, but there are so few people who score at Magician or Unitive that there isn't enough data (yet) to do so.

Let's quickly summarize the pre-conventional and conventional levels according to the Loevinger/Cook-Greuter scale, and then I'll discuss the post-conventional stages. Then, finally, in one last segment on development, I'll describe the unitive

levels.

The early Symbiotic stage is one where the infant constructs a stable world of objects, cognitively separating himself from the world. This stage is pre-egoic and pre-verbal. The child essentially has no perspective and is an undifferentiated self. The main accomplishment of this stage is the separation of self from the world--the ability to know what is "me" and what is "not me."

"The early Symbiotic stage is one where the infant constructs a stable world of objects, cognitively separating himself from the world."

In the next stage, Impulsive, one begins to use language, and begins to experience a first-person perspective, reflected in statements such as "I want" and "mine." The main concern of this stage is impulse gratification. This stage is one of magical thinking, with a sense of power curbed only by punishment (which is seen as random or retaliatory and unrelated to behavior). Other people are simply a source of need gratification: good ones give, mean ones don't. At this stage the child learns to recognize simple dichotomies.

The next pre-conventional stage is called Opportunistic, a stage I characterized as narcissistic in previous sections. The Opportunist has an "I win, you lose" mentality. Though he knows that others have a perspective, he doesn't have the ability to take that perspective. The Opportunist sees the world only in terms of his own needs or wants, and is quite willing to control or manipulate others to get what he wants.

Making sense of who you are... Continued...

Adult Opportunists are often self-protective in order to maintain their fragile self, which is centered around their own will, ideas, and wishes. They have a beginning awareness of others as separate people or objects, but use that awareness only to understand what others are after so they can better manipulate them in order to get what they want.

Opportunists try to avoid trouble but since their awareness is limited to their own needs and desires they often get into trouble by crossing boundaries. They then blame others for the consequences. Rules are followed only to gain immediate advantage or avoid punishment. Any sense of self respect result comes from achieving control over situations or people. Actions are bad only if one is caught (getting caught is bad, not the action itself). Opportunists do not understand the relationship between actions and consequences, which is one reason why they blame others for consequences they have created. This inability to understand cause and effect also leads them to believe in luck and magic. Often grandiosely fearless (another symptom on not understanding cause and effect), they sometimes choose dangerous and demanding jobs that represent the daring side of this stage.

As you would imagine, Opportunist relationships are volatile. Their feelings (especially negative feelings) are projected onto others. Opportunists have little insight into themselves and are almost entirely unable to reflect upon their own emotions. Negative feelings are always the fault of others.

Opportunists can come from one of two basic approaches: they can be aggressive in going after what they want and trying to dominate others, or they can be self-protective, fearing that others will dominate, control, or deceive them. Often what

looks like aggression or attempts to dominate is also a form of self-protection.

The next stage (the first conventional stage) is the Diplomat. Most people have reached this stage by age 12, though some adults remain at the Opportunist stage. The three conventional stages (Diplomat, Expert, and Achiever) make up about 80% of people in Western countries.

In terms of Piaget's stages, Diplomats correspond to concrete operational thinking--they use a growing knowledge of cause and effect to deal with daily events and tasks. Experts add the ability to think in abstract terms, and Achievers use formal operational thinking, the highest level of rational thought. Achiever is seen as *the* adult stage in most of Western culture.

In healthy development, Diplomat is the stage of early adolescence, though many people remain in this stage throughout life. A Diplomat's sense of self is defined by his role in his group, and he sees the world in terms of in-group and out-group. Instead of "me against the world" (the view of the Opportunist) his point of view is "our group against others" or "our group is better than other groups."

Diplomats are conformists. They want to be liked, so they do their best to develop a pleasing personality, to be well-groomed, to be pleasant, to avoid the negative. They divide the world into simple categories and types of people. They accept rules, roles, and norms without questioning them. They live based on rules and "shoulds," and identify with those who share their tastes and perspectives. The Diplomat does not yet have a true self in the sense of having an individual and separate adult

Making sense of who you are... Continued...

identity. Instead, his self is defined by others. Self/other boundaries are blurry, and relationships are of the I-need-you variety.

The next stage is the Expert. Experts are still tied to the group, but are able to step back and look at themselves--a rudimentary type of self-reflection (what is called a third-person perspective). This new and wider perspective gives them a certain distance from the group. They are still tied to the group, but see themselves as more distinct, even special. They see more individual differences, whereas the Diplomat looks for sameness. Seeing differences and alternatives, Experts are good at offering many solutions for every problem. They are, however, still unable to prioritize these solutions, something that will come at the next stage.

Again because they are able to see differences, Experts have a beginning ability to notice the distinct traits and patterns of the behavior in others, and in themselves. Needs and wants, suppressed at the Diplomat stage as a way of fitting in, begin to be expressed. Experts want to be accepted for how they are different from other group members, for their specialness, rather than for conforming. They often feel that they "have it all figured out." They know the right way, what to believe, how to do things, and have a strong sense of the way things should be. They frequently cite "experts" to back their opinions, and in conversation often respond to others with, "Yes, but..."

While Diplomats repress aggression in order to get along, Experts are willing to express aggressive feelings, through a hostile sense of humor, through ridicule, and through defensiveness. They enjoy oppositional battles and live in a world where things are sure and clear and they feel entitled to impose their views on others.

Experts often become engineers, technocrats, bureaucrats, and some types of professionals. Experts run many of the complex but conventional everyday affairs of modern society.

The last conventional stage is the Achiever. The Achiever is a formal operational thinker. He is able to prioritize, see possibilities, look into the future, plan, and think through a course of action before acting--rather than just acting in a random manner, as in the previous stages. Achievers represent the target stage for Western culture, the rationally competent and independent adult. Where the Expert had a third-person perspective (he could stand back and observe himself and his interactions with others), the Achiever adds an additional ability to observe his past and future selves and his past and future interactions with others.

Achievers are more comfortable in diverse groups and situations than are Diplomats and Experts. They can be a part of diverse groups with different ideals, goals, and points of view without feeling torn between them or confused about who they are. They also have a greatly expanded ability for introspection, and have a much greater understanding of and insight into their own feelings, motives, personal dreams, and goals. In fact, self-analysis is a favorite pastime.

Achievers believe in the scientific method and rationality, and that this form of thought can improve the world. Achievers are busy helping to make the world a better place for everyone (another example of an expanded perspective--Diplomats and Experts are mostly concerned with themselves and their group). Having a longer and broader view, they can handle a longer delay between action and results, realizing that some of what they do might not bear fruit until well into the future.

Making sense of who you are... Continued...

Achievers are interested in getting things done, and may feel driven to accomplish something in the world. They are often entrepreneurs. They have strong convictions, and an idealistic enthusiasm. They convince others with rational arguments and evidence rather than by putting them down, as do Experts. They love theories, and the hypothetical. They are skeptical searchers for the truth, and trust that it eventually can be found.

This review brings us to the postconventional stages, which I will address in the next section. Let's step back for a moment and look at the big picture. At the preconventional and conventional stages we're concerned with gaining more and more knowledge about how to operate effectively in the world. Progress is defined by noticing increasingly more pieces of the puzzle; discovering patterns, rules, and laws that govern how things work; learning to better predict, measure, and explain the world; seeing and taking into account an increasingly larger time span; and, in general, being able to know and do more and be more in charge of one's life.

At these preconventional and conventional stages (which together include over 90% of people in Western nations) we are for the most part socially programmed, we use conventional linear thinking, and seek increased differentiation--in other words, we create an increasingly solid individual and independent sense of self.

When (or if) we enter the postconventional stages, we begin to move away from increased differentiation and toward greater integration. We more and more see how things go together and how we are connected to others rather than individually

distinct, and begin to deal with the world from this perspective, and move away from the individualistic perspective we've been developing so far. Our sense of self becomes more about connection than agency. And, we begin to recognize and question the fundamental assumptions of the

previous stages--even including the reality of our sense of being a separate self.

At the postconventional and unitive stages we increasingly see the world as a giant, dynamic, interconnected system rather than a random assortment of individual units and events. We began our life embedded in the world in a completely undifferentiated way, unable to tell the difference between me and not-me. From that point, we have gradually differentiated into an independent and separate self. Now, as we move into the postconventional stages and beyond, we move the other way, toward seeing and experiencing what many describe as an ultimate "oneness with everything."

“ At the postconventional and unitive stages we increasingly see the world as one big, dynamic, interconnected system rather than a random assortment of individual things and events. ”

EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE... RIGHT?

Well, it sure looks that way if you're at one of the postconventional developmental levels, those beyond the rational, conventional levels. In this section we'll look at the first of those levels, the Individualist.

In my opinion, these postconventional levels are where it REALLY DOES get interesting.

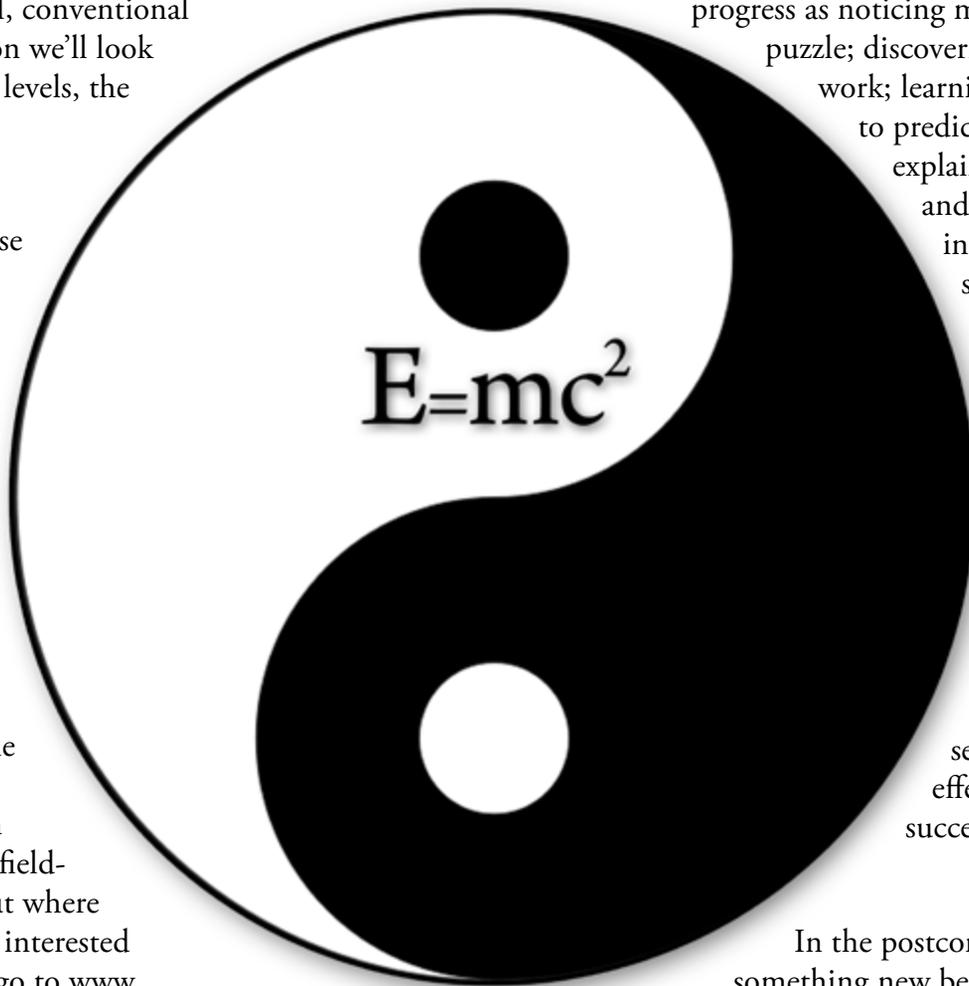
[NOTE: Several people have asked me how they can take Susanne Cook-Greuter's sentence completion test--the most sophisticated and accurate test in the developmental field--in order to find out where you score. If you're interested in taking this test, go to www.cook-greuter.com and click on the "SCTi assessment" link at the top of the page.]

I mentioned in my last post that in moving through the preconventional and conventional stages--those we've looked at so far--our goal is to

gain more knowledge about how we can effectively operate in the world. During these stages we define progress as noticing more pieces of the puzzle; discovering how things work; learning more about how to predict, measure, and explain the world; seeing and taking into account increasingly larger spans of time; and, in general, being more in charge of our lives.

These stages are about increased differentiation--in other words, the creation of an increasingly solid sense of self who can effectively operate and succeed in the world.

In the postconventional stages, something new begins to happen. Differentiation is no longer the end-game. Instead, we begin to move toward greater integration. While the previous stages were more about turning outward to master the world, the postconventional stages (and the unitive stages that follow) are more about turning inward. One's perspective begins to shift to a greater



Everything is relative...right? Continued...

recognition of how things go together, and how we're connected to others rather than being individually distinct.

This doesn't mean that we lose our sense of individual agency (in fact, the first postconventional level is called the Individualist), but we do move away from an emphasis on the individualistic perspective we've been developing up to this point, and begin to balance it with a recognition of how things are connected and interrelated. And, finally, we begin to recognize and question many of the fundamental assumptions of the previous stages.

At the postconventional and unitive stages we increasingly see the world as one big, dynamic, interconnected system rather than a random assortment of individual things and events. We began our life embedded in the world in a completely undifferentiated way, unable to tell the difference between me and not-me. From that point, we've gradually differentiated into an independent and separate self. Now, as we move into the postconventional stages and beyond, we move more toward seeing and experiencing what many describe as an ultimate "oneness with everything."

One huge difference in the postconventional stages is a new recognition that nothing is fixed, and that everything exists in relation to everything else. From one spot, things look like *this*, from another spot they look like *that*. Everything is dependent upon context and relationship.

In this section, I want to discuss the stage Susanne Cook-Greuter refers to as the Individualist (also called the Pluralist). The Achiever, the previous stage, was able to take a third person perspective, watching himself as he interacted with the world. The Individualist can take a 4th person perspective--one in which he can actually observe himself observing himself interacting with the world--in other words, watch himself trying to make sense of the world.

Seeing that nothing is fixed, the Individualist deeply questions the rules, social conventions, and assumptions that seemed solid and objectively true at the Achiever stage. Now, it becomes obvious that everything is an interpretation, and which interpretation you choose depends upon where you look from. In one culture certain things seem true, while in another other things are true. Total objectivity is impossible. What conventional society sees as "right" is just one point of view, and from another perspective, things look different. Even within a given culture, each person has their own perspective, their own experience.

Rationality no longer seems to be the pinnacle of human achievement, or the best and only way to solve problems or navigate through life. Intuition and awareness of one's body now become additional sources of information. This heightened self-knowledge allows for more empathy with others. At this stage there is more emphasis on being, and less on doing and thinking.

For the Individualist, one's sense of self becomes,

Everything is relative...right? Continued...

well...very individual. Distrusting conventional wisdom, the Individualist must find his or her own way, and this way of being comes from one's own experience, one's own search--rather from what one's group says, or what society says. There is a new sense of freedom from previous constraints. Everything is open and possible. Imagination and playfulness reemerge. At the same time, the Individualist feels an incredible responsibility since they now must figure out who they are by relying solely upon their own internal resources and point of view. At this level you have to "find yourself."

In seeing how everything is relative to everything else and that no view is fixed and certain, there is a new ability to just "wait and see how things unfold," and to appreciate and allow the contradictions and paradoxes of life to be as they are. Life no longer need to be as predictable and certain, and there is less need for quick closure.

On the other hand, the new relativistic view can be taken too far. Some Individualists throw the baby out with the bathwater, rejecting all rationality, all rules, and all conventionality in favor of one's own, unique experience and point of view. This can lead to rejection of a lot of useful and time-tested information and wisdom.

In the extreme, an Individualist's way of deciding what is right or wrong can lead to living almost without any principles whatsoever. Over-focus on one's relativistic uniqueness can make connecting with others more difficult rather than easier. The shifting sands of relativity can also make "finding oneself" seem more difficult, or almost

impossible. And, keeping one's options open can lead to no decision where one is necessary.

Individualists have a systems view of the world, made possible by their ability to stand back and observe from many perspectives, and even to stand outside and watch their own perspective and actions. This allows the Individualist to challenge the assumptions and frameworks underlying his own thinking, as well as those of society. There is a growing realization that the context, structure, or process involved in a situation can reveal more, in some cases, than the content.

The new insight that the interpretation of anything depends on the position of the observer leads to the idea that the observer is more than just an observer--he is a participant who influences what he observes. You may recognize this as a key idea of quantum physics, or at least a key idea of pop writers about quantum physics.

The ability to see multiple perspectives is one reason why purely rational, linear thought loses its appeal at this stage, and is replaced by a more holistic, organic approach where intuition, feelings, and context are taken into account. Process becomes as interesting--or even more interesting--than outcome. Logic is increasingly recognized as linear, while the world is multidimensional--and therefore ungraspable by merely linear and logical methods.

From this new perspective there is an appreciation that truth can ultimately never be

Everything is relative...right? Continued...

found. Since everything is relative and context-dependent, there's really nowhere a person can permanently stand. Individualists come to actually enjoy the paradoxes of life, rather than trying to pin things down to a certain "truth."

The Individualist no longer needs to prove something before living by it. The futility of meaning-making becomes more obvious, given that all meanings are now seen as dependent upon the position one takes. The Achiever's need to analyze everything gives way to a willingness to trust and enjoy the subjective moment. There is a new sense of a mind/body connection, and a greater reliance on "bodily wisdom."

Individualists accord so much respect to the views of others that gatherings of Individualists often consist of each person having their say, with all viewpoints seen as equally valid. This often leads to a consensus governance style--a lot of talk with few real decisions made and few actions taken (though participants do feel heard and acknowledged).

Where the Achiever was focused on causality (by looking into the past) and goals (by looking into the future), the Individualist is more fascinated with now, the present. This focus on now is one reason why the Individualist is so interested in process and context rather than outcomes. Where the Achiever was clear about his solid sense of self, the Individualist may see himself as having many voices, acting one way in a certain situation, and in an entirely different way in another. This can create inner conflict, and Individualists may feel anxiety about integrating

these different aspects of themselves.

The Individualist's new ability to introspect and observe leads to a greater empathy, and a greater spontaneity. Others, however, can see them as unpredictable or flaky, as unproductive non-doers, and as someone who can be indefinite and impossible to nail down.

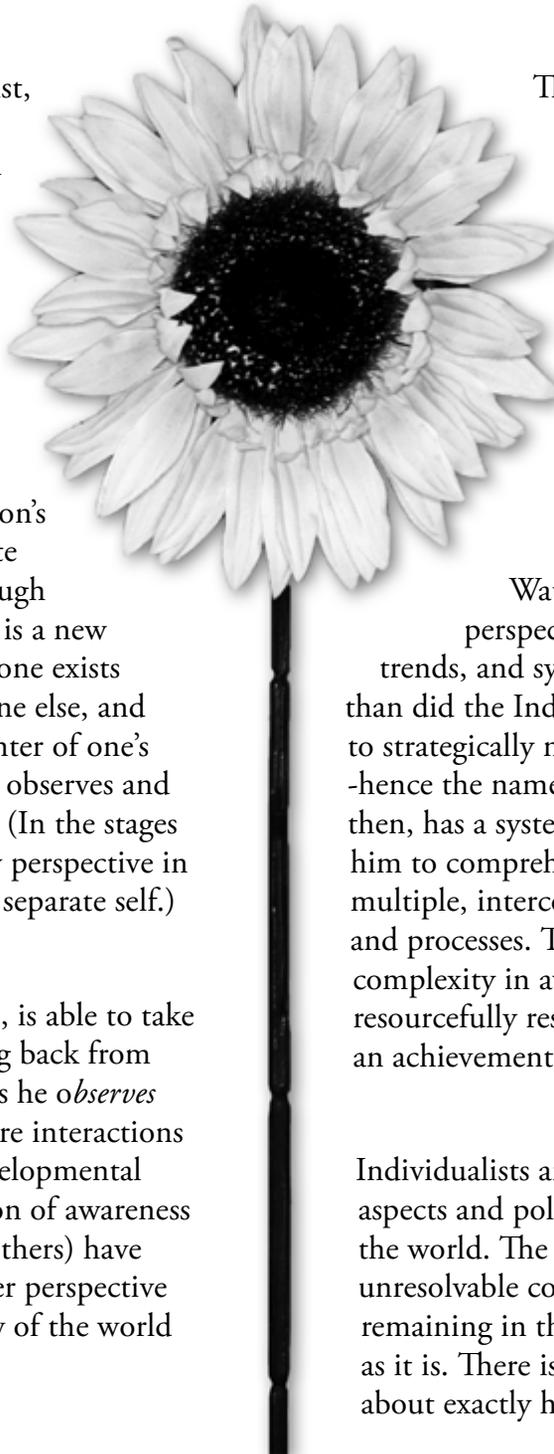
[Again, if you want to take Susanne Cook-Greuter's sentence completion test to determine your developmental level, go to www.cook-greuter.com and click on the "SCTi assessment" link at the top.]

THE STRATEGIST—THE HIGHEST EXPRESSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL ME...

Last time I discussed the Individualist, the first of the postmodern developmental stages as described in the work of developmental expert Susanne Cook-Greuter. Now I'd like to move beyond that to the highest postconventional stage, the Strategist.

The Strategist is the highest developmental stage in which a person's sense of self is built around a separate self, a separate individual "me." Though in the postconventional stages there is a new awareness that everything and everyone exists in relation to everything and everyone else, and that everything is connected, the center of one's experience is still a separate me who observes and experiences this interconnectedness. (In the stages beyond the Strategist we'll see a new perspective in which the self is not centered in the separate self.)

The Individualist, the previous stage, is able to take a fourth person perspective, standing back from his own life and observing himself as he *observes himself* in his past, present, and future interactions with the world. This was a huge developmental achievement in terms of an expansion of awareness and the ability to take what I (and others) have called a *witness perspective*. This wider perspective gives the Individualist a unique view of the world and his place in it.



The Strategist takes this perspective even further. Not only does he see his own past, present, and future and that of his family, he adds an awareness of his own lifespan, the lifetimes of his children, and their children, and that of previous generations, and how all of this fits into the context of the broader society and culture.

Watching from this even wider perspective, the Strategist sees patterns, trends, and systems on an even larger scale than did the Individualist, which he then uses to strategically navigate the world and his life—hence the name of this stage. The Strategist, then, has a systems view of reality, allowing him to comprehend and deal with complex, multiple, interconnected systems of relationships and processes. The ability to hold all of this complexity in awareness, and to effectively and resourcefully respond to it and act from it is quite an achievement.

Individualists are able to see the many conflicting aspects and polarities within themselves and in the world. The Individualist deals with these unresolvable conflicts and paradoxes in part by remaining in the moment and allowing life to be as it is. There is still some confusion, however, about exactly how to navigate "what is" in a take

The Strategist—the highest expression of the individual me... Continued...

charge way. The Individualist sees the paradoxes and contradictions of life, and accepts them, but in a passive, non-agentic way. It's as if the Individualist resigns himself to ever ultimately knowing who he really is. The Individualist says, "I can't control things, so I'll just accept that fact and groove on the moment."

The Strategist, on the other hand, has found a more sophisticated--and more practical--way of dealing with the paradoxes and polarities of life. Instead of merely resigning himself to the way things are, the Strategist is better able to integrate and own many different and conflicting parts of himself and actually work with the ever-shifting contexts of life in a practical way. This is made possible in part by the Strategist's new ability to consciously and intentionally generate his own meanings, to "write his own story." The Individualist sees that all meaning depends upon the context and the relationships involved, but has not yet figured out how to be in charge of this meaning-making in a practical way.

The Strategist is able to take charge of his meaning-making in a way the Individualist could not. As a result, he navigates the constantly shifting contexts he experiences, without being flustered by them. "No story is real," says the Strategist, "but that doesn't matter. I can create a story in this moment in order to create the outcome I want, even if that story doesn't represent ultimate truth."

[As an aside, I want to point out that this ability to "write your own story"--to consciously

and intentionally direct your mind in order to create the reality you want, rather than allowing unconscious programming to automatically write a story you may not like--is one of the main goals of the first of my Life Principles Integration Process online courses (www.centerpointe.com/life/preview). In my first course I take you through what you need to learn, developmentally, in order to master this ability.]

Feeling that he can write his own story, the Strategist feels in charge of his own psychological well-being. He feels--and demonstrates--a new sense of personal responsibility about the creation of his own meaning and his own life. This feeling of being in charge allows Strategists to rediscover, reown, and integrate aspects of themselves that were too confusing or threatening for the Individualist to acknowledge. The result is a new sense of wholeness, and this new *holistic self* is a hallmark of this stage.

It is important to a Strategist to appear to have his act together and to make reasoned and resourceful choices. Persons at stages after the Strategist no longer feel this need, and are more willing to choose what appear to be less mature behavior styles, or be more spontaneously "outrageous" in their behavior. It's still important to the Strategist, however, to avoid appearing foolish, or to avoiding acting in what might appear to be emotionally immature ways. If this happens, however, he can be forgiving and understanding of himself.

With a perspective and a logical system allowing an easier integration of psychologically

The Strategist—the highest expression of the individual me... Continued...

paradoxical elements, the Strategist has less need for defensive strategies, and is therefore capable of greater spontaneity and greater tolerance of the foibles of others. Good and bad traits are seen as part of being human, both in oneself and in others.

His increased awareness of his interconnectedness with others, and his ability to actually interact based on that awareness, allows the Strategist to receive valuable feedback from others and see into parts of himself he might otherwise be blind to. The

Strategist sees his connection with others and the feedback it provides as a necessary part of reaching one's full potential, a key value to Strategists. This appreciation of others can in fact be so strong that at times it becomes a deep, non-possessive love.

Strategists can sometimes fear that they will fail to fulfill their potential or live by and embody their most valued principles, and they can become depressed if they feel they have not lived up to their own high standards.

Strategists are very self-reflective, constantly observing and reappraising themselves, others, and the world. This insightful watching is one

of the Strategist's most satisfying pastimes. Strategists are motivated by their own growth, fulfillment, and self-actualization, but also by that of others. The desire to help others grow can lead them to become therapists, coaches, consultants, teachers, executives, and leaders.

They can become impatient with others who are less motivated to grow—the central flaw of this stage. To a Strategist, higher development is better because it leads to a more objective and realistic identity. Such authenticity is an important Strategist value.

“

His increased awareness of his interconnectedness with others, and his ability to actually interact based on that awareness, allows the Strategist to receive valuable feedback from others and see into parts of himself he might otherwise be blind to.

”

The Strategist sees life as an individual journey, where each person must find his or her own way. There is no “right” path that applies to everyone, and no “right” destination. Human beings are responsible for themselves and their own fulfillment, and each person must come to terms with the internal conflicts of being human in his own way.

Strategists view seeking outside advice and help as a strength rather than a weakness, and feel comfortable with therapy, counseling, and other forms of external advice and counsel. Strategists, however, do not see their answers to life's questions as necessarily fitting others. In their faith that each person can discover his or her own

The Strategist—the highest expression of the individual me... Continued...

path through life, they generally refrain from imposing their solutions or meaning-making on others.

Strategists often find the mundane aspects of making a living a distraction from their real passions. If, however, their passion involves leading others, creating a great organization, or some other form of service to others, their contributions can be world-changing. Strategists can become charismatic leaders, following their convictions regardless of personal consequences. If their convictions lead them in a direction helpful to others the results can be hugely positive. If not, however, the Strategist can be a powerful negative force.

Strategists make use of all modes of information and understanding, including logic, dreams, fantasy, bodily intelligence, intuition, and their highly developed imagination in order to make sense of the world and make their desires happen in reality. Strategists are often intuitive, highly creative, outside-the-box thinkers.

The Strategist represents the highest level of understanding of the human condition *in which the separate self is the central regulator*. Susanne Cook-Greuter describes the Strategist as “able to generate a coherent sense of self as a complex system with a core center.” The Strategist has a type of stability the Individualist did not have, in that he can see the relativity of all positions, but despite the shifting nature of life is still able make choices in the moment that are in tune with the demands of that moment. And, as the epitome of an integrated self, the Strategist can

simultaneously maintain stable and respectful boundaries between self and others while at the same time connect with others as fellow human beings in the journey of life.

In the levels beyond the Strategist we will see a movement away from an self-centric way of being in and making sense of the world and one's place in it. A perspective in which the self is not the center is difficult for most people to imagine, but I will do my best to describe it a bit later, when I will talk about the next stage, the Magician, followed by a final section about the Unitive stage.

THE MAGICIAN—NO LONGER JUST AN EGO IN A BAG OF SKIN...

Last time we looked at the developmental stage called the Strategist in Susanne Cook-Greuter's developmental model. Now we're going to look at the developmental stage after the Strategist, the Magician. The Magician's perspective is significantly different from that of the Strategist. The Strategist is the epitome of the well-organized, complex separate self, the master of his world. He is able to see and understand a complex universe from a perspective centered on, and in, the self.



On the other hand, the Magician, though he has a separate self, begins to see through that self and begins to disidentify with it. His sense of self includes the separate self, but adds to it the infinite number of interconnections he shares with the rest of the universe--not as something he knows about, but rather as something he feels and experiences. As we go further, I'll explain what I mean by that. The view of the Magician, however, is an entirely new way of seeing oneself and the universe.

Let's review the main achievements of the Strategist, so we can more easily see the progression from Strategist to Magician. The Strategist fully sees the self and its complex relationships with the rest of the world. He is able to understand and work with the shifting complexity of the multiple interconnected systems that make up his life. Instead of passively throwing up his hands at the paradoxical and constantly shifting relativity inherent in reality, as did the Individualist, he is able in any given moment to find a small spot on which to stand

temporarily
in order
to take
practical

action in that moment--despite the fact that in the next moment the situation will likely shift.

The Strategist realizes that there are multiple ways of seeing the world, as did the Individualist, but the Strategist does not see all perspectives as equal. Some are better: they are more practical, more in tune with his values, his integrity, or the demands of the situation--even though what is "better" might

The Magician—no longer just an ego in a bag of skin... Continued...

possibly change in the next moment.

The Strategist, in addition to having mastered logical thinking, rationality, and cause and effect, also utilizes other forms of information, including dreams, the wisdom of his body, and intuition. And though his individual boundaries are solid, he feels deeply connected to the rest of humanity, seeing that beyond the limitless variations we're also alike in fundamental ways.

The Magician shares these achievements, but takes them further, expressing them and utilizing them from a different sort of center. Instead of a separate "me" encapsulated in the body, the Magician's center is larger, more expanded. He still has a sense of an individual self, but has begun to see (and feel) it as more of an abstraction, a construct, an idea, than as solid or intrinsic reality. Though one perspective through which the world can be viewed, the subject/object, "me/not-me" distinction seems confining and no longer represents his full experience of reality.

As Susanne Cook-Greuter puts it, the Magician realizes that

...the "ego" has functioned both as a central processing unit for stimuli and as a central point of reference and self-identity. Once they realize this fundamental ego-centricity, it is felt as a constraint to further growth and understanding. Magicians start to wonder about the meaningfulness of more and more complex thought structures and integrations such as

can be imagined with a fifth or nth person perspective. They start to realize the absurdity or automatic limits of human map making in the representational domain.

In other words, the ego at this stage has become transparent to itself. The final knowledge of the self sought by the Strategist is now seen to be impossible, because the self is now seen for what it is: a construct, an idea, a way of structuring reality, but not as a real "thing"--just as the border between the US and Canada is just a useful, but imaginary, line. Instead of the self being experienced solely in the individual organism, as in the previous developmental stages, there are now moments when it seems to include everything, the entire universe (an experience more fully integrated in the next developmental stage, the Ironist).

This is more than just a new way of thinking. It is, rather, a new *experience* of self that includes the previous experience of a separate self while adding not just a *knowledge* of one's connection to everything else, but the actual *experience* of those connections *as* the self.

Part of this shift is due to the Magician's insight that language, with its bias toward separate "subjects" who then do something to other separate "objects," along with social conditioning and mental map-making, are attempts to freeze or pin down an always-moving, infinitely complex, constantly unfolding multidimensional process into static and enduring things. These conditioned habits are seen for what they are: useful, perhaps, in order to navigate the world,

The Magician—no longer just an ego in a bag of skin... Continued...

but confining and illusion-creating.

The Magician begins to see that all the things humans do to mentally construct an enduring separate self are nothing more than attempts to make sense of the impermanence of human existence and to defend against the fear and self-doubt this creates--a resistance to the reality of the human predicament. On the other hand, he also acknowledges that doing so is a normal reaction to that predicament. The Magician sees the enormity of the existential paradox--and sees that there is no way out of it--but does not judge others for their attempts to come to terms with it.

(Eventually, in the highest developmental stages, in a small number of individuals, there is a complete surrender to this human predicament, to the fact that life is impermanent, and does involve suffering no matter what we do. This surrender is not unlike that of a person with a terminal illness who finally comes to peace with his situation and thereafter radiates an equanimity that dramatically affects all those with whom he comes into contact.)

Being less identified with the separate self, the Magician no longer feels the need to defend it. This gives rise to a new spontaneity and a new sense of freedom. It may also cause others to see him as flaky or ungrounded if they take seriously what the Magician now sees as merely mental constructs. Since they have deconstructed what so many others take as truth and reality and few others see the world as they do, Magicians can often feel isolated from others.

We've noted that the Strategist has reached the highest level of rational meaning-making viewed from the perspective of a separate self. The Magician, having reached this peak, now begins to see through his own meaning-making. He sees the inherent contradictions in rational subject/object-based thought and the construction of more and more complex Maps of Reality. For the Magician, the map clearly is NOT the same as the territory. No map can remotely contain what it seeks to represent, and the Magician's experience of reality has outstripped the ability of any map to contain or even come close to representing it.

The Magician has, for instance, become keenly aware that all rational map-making (including that underlying the mental creation of a separate self) involves the splitting of all processes and ideas into mutually exclusive polar opposites (good/bad, here/there, having/not having, buying/selling, up/down, life/death, etc.). It becomes increasingly obvious that this dualistic way of looking at the world fails to take into account, first of all, the arbitrary nature of all these divisions, and the fact that each pair of opposites arise together and depend upon each other (both sides of the polarity are defined in terms of the other). It becomes clear to the Magician that human unhappiness is largely the result of the tensions created as the world is arbitrarily parsed into appropriate and inappropriate.

Partly for this reason, Magicians seek to undo the tethers they feel to the rational mind, to subject/object thinking, to unconscious conditioned responses, to social conditioning, and to the

The Magician—no longer just an ego in a bag of skin... Continued...

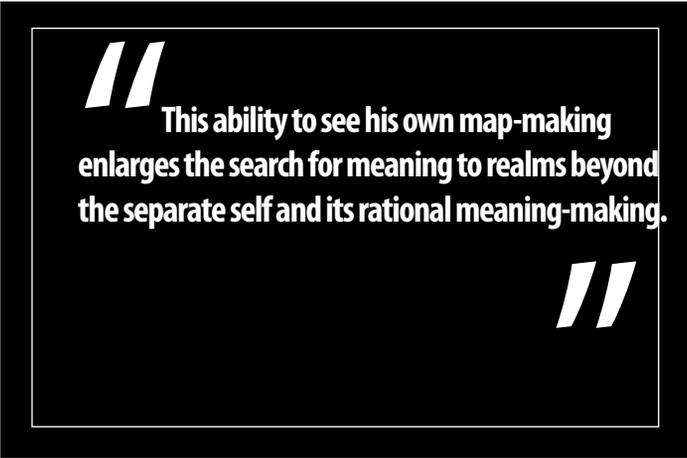
pseudo-reality imposed by language. They create this disidentification through close observation of their own emotional and mental processing. As they watch, they begin to realize that their processing behavior is largely a defense--a futile attempt to permanently pin things down as a way of denying the impermanence of the embodied self.

The Individualist and the Strategist, then, are able to see through social conditioning, while the Magician sees through the predicament of the entire human situation. This is a shocking realization, and Magicians often feel a deep existential angst until (and unless) they surrender--like the terminally ill person above--to what they have discovered. Unfortunately this surrender generally does not happen until the next developmental level.

There are two changes in perspective that contribute to the shift from a locus of control and experience centered in the separate, embodied self, and toward a more expanded self beyond the ego and the body. First, in gaining distance from the internal processes underlying the Magician's personal "story" and his Map of Reality, the Magician sees that what he thought was "reality" is really just one of an infinite number of possible (self-created) realities. If what he always thought was reality *isn't* reality, then what is? This ability to see his own map-making

enlarges the search for meaning to realms beyond the separate self and its rational meaning-making.

Second, this new ability to witness internal processes previously identified as "me" can sometimes lead to spontaneous experiences of the transcendent, where knower and known, subject and object merge, and the personal, limited self disappears.



“ This ability to see his own map-making enlarges the search for meaning to realms beyond the separate self and its rational meaning-making. ”

Watching the ego's stream of thoughts and feelings, but without becoming involved in them or trying to do anything about them ("watching thoughts go by like clouds in the sky") creates freedom from the ego's constant efforts at control and its moment-by-moment creation of a separate self. But once the Magician stops to "admire his work" or evaluate and analyze these experiences, he pops the still-fragile Oneness balloon. One of the characteristics of this stage is an ability to visit the transcendent, but without being able to reside there permanently. Giving up a separate self with which we've identified for so long, and which we've so strongly relied upon to make sense of our life, is difficult, and seeing the Promised Land without being able to move in is frustrating for the Magician.

When a full dis-identification with the illusory separate self does happen to a human being, it isn't the result of intentional actions. Ken Wilber

The Magician—no longer just an ego in a bag of skin... Continued...

has said, with tongue in cheek, that experiences of the transcendent are accidental, but that meditation makes one “more accident prone.” A permanent dropping of the separate self is in the same category--when it happens, it is an accident, but if one develops the expanded perspective that allows deconstruction of the separate self, one becomes more accident prone. Ironically, using the self to try to drop the self just reinforced the very thing we’re trying to get rid of.

Magicians can feel alone in the world, as there are few others like them and few with whom they can share their experience and perspective of life. As a result, Magicians sometimes see themselves as “better” than others. At the same time, they appreciate that others have their own ways of making sense of life, giving them a greater tolerance for the points of view of others even while seeing the limitations of that point of view.

Dealing with so much complexity, and so many paradoxes inherent in life, Magicians can sometimes feel nostalgic for the days when their perspective and their way of understanding life was simpler. If they have trouble coming to terms with the realizations they’ve had about the human condition, Magicians can become depressed.

With a highly developed view of his own past ways of meaning-making, the Magician is the first developmental level with a wide enough perspective to fully see, understand, and empathize with the existential situation of those at previous developmental levels, to appreciate the developmental strategies of others.

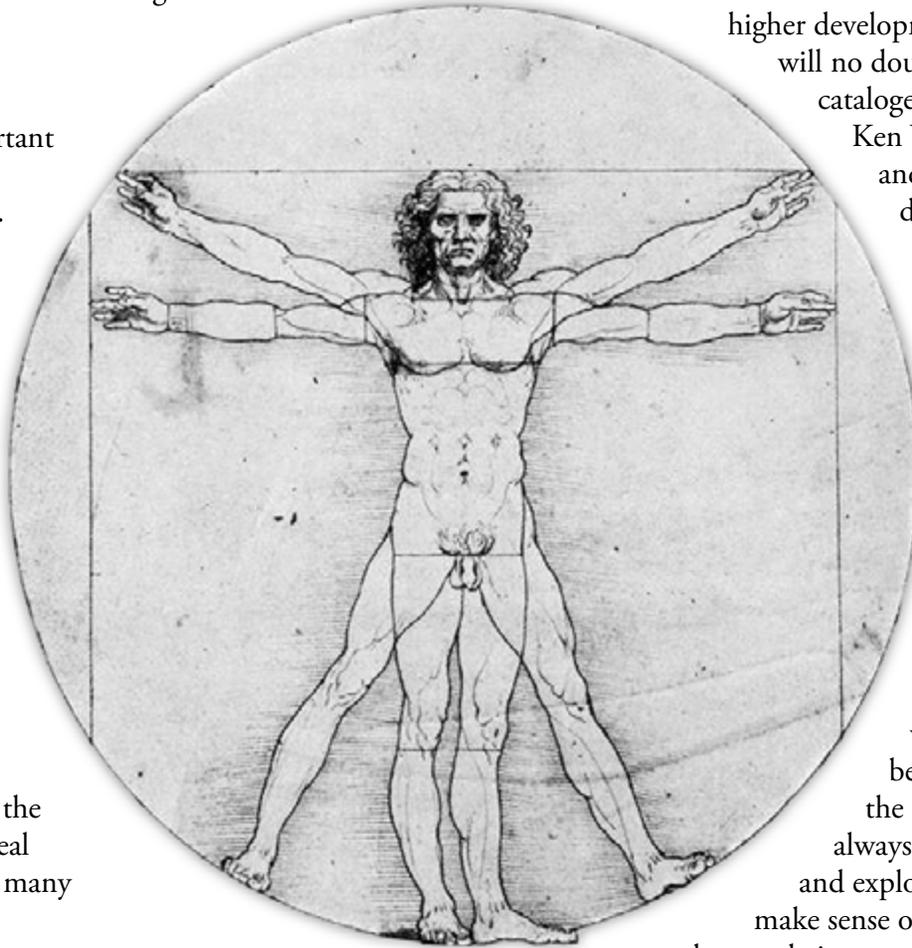
This wider perspective also allows them to adopt strategies from previous levels where such strategies would be resourceful. This puts them in an ideal position to provide skillful and empathetic mentoring or coaching. Magicians are able, for instance, to meet the power plays of Opportunists with their own power in a way that those at previous levels could not. Having a lower need for ego gratification and an ability to put feelings of self-importance aside, they are often more effective in helping others than are Strategists.

BEYOND THE SEPERATE SELF—THE UNITIVE STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT...

Finally we arrive at the highest developmental level described by Susanne Cook-Greuter: the Ironist or Unitive perspective. Susanne really doesn't like the name Ironist (which comes from another researcher), so I will refer to those from this stage as Unitives.

At this point it's important to understand that the stages described by Dr. Cook-Greuter are not theoretical. They are, rather, derived from actual data from real people. This means that the descriptions of the developmental levels I've shared (the different perspectives a person can take as they seek to make sense of who they are and how they fit into the world) come from the analysis of data from real people, compiled over many decades.

In other words, Dr. Cook-Greuter describes a level or perspective only if sufficient data exists and she knows that some number of individuals exist who do see things from that perspective.



Almost certainly there are a few rare individuals who see things from perspectives even higher and broader than those described by Susanne Cook-Greuter and summarized here. As time goes by, and more information comes to light, even higher developmental perspectives will no doubt be investigated and cataloged. Many theorists--Ken Wilber, for instance, and several others--have described possible ways of slicing the Unitive stage I'll describe into several different stages. As of yet, not enough hard data exists for these levels to be anything but theoretical.

You might say, then, that this is a story without an ending, because those living from the highest perspectives are always breaking new ground and exploring new ways to make sense of what it means to be a human being.

So, with that preamble, let's look at the Unitive perspective, and see how it differs from that of the Magician.

Beyond the separate Self—the Unitive stage of development... Continued...

The Magician is, in a way, a transitional stage in the sense that Magicians have one foot, or at least three or four toes, in the separate self, and the other foot in the transcendent. Or, you could say that the Magician experiences the self partly from the perspective of a separate, individual entity, centered inside (and identified with) the body/mind, and partly as the infinite connections linking that body/mind to the rest of the universe. The Magician has seen his ego for what it is--a mere Map of Reality, a construct, a way of seeing things, rather than something solid--but has not entirely transcended it. The separate self is no longer solidly real for the Magician, but it's still a significant part of the Magician's experience of life.

Unitives, though they still have a sense of being a center of awareness in a body, no longer experience themselves as a separate "me." The separate me isn't just an idea, a construct, a way of looking at things (as it is for the Magician, and to some degree for the Strategist and the Individualist). Now it is also *felt* and *experienced* as such. The Unitive's felt sense has expanded to include the entire matrix of connections connecting everything in the universe in one universal ever-changing flow.

This is, quite obviously, an entirely new and different way of experiencing human existence and consciousness--a more cosmic or universal perspective. All the paradoxical aspects of existence are now integrated. Polar opposites, such as good and evil, being and not being, self and other, subject and object, existence and non-existence, are experienced without the sense of oppositional tension experienced by those at previous developmental perspectives. Instead, these seeming opposites are just part of the flow of how things are. In terms of time and space, the Unitive's scale of perspective is infinite, taking in the passing of ages and, in terms of space and distance, the entire

infinite universe.

The Unitive is able to take any previous developmental perspective or point of view and shift between perspectives and states of awareness effortlessly. *All* experiences--joy, grief, life, death, being, not being, pleasure, pain, having, not having--are seen as natural parts of the flow of existence, to be noticed and experienced as they are. The rational mind is not seen as a limitation (as it was by the Magician) but rather as just another manifestation of being human--sometimes useful and allowed to be more prominent, and at other times not needed and allowed to recede into the background.

The Unitive is able, then, to cherish all humans as part of the grand dance and flow of the universe, not needing others to be different than they are. "Higher" stages of development are no longer seen as "better." Rather, all stages are necessary, interconnected, and always-changing aspects of the human condition.

The Unitive sees himself in similar terms--he has no need to be a certain way and therefore accepts himself in a non-controlling way. Though he may have many achievements, he sees their insignificance in the grand scheme of things. At the same time, he sees that his contribution to the universe is an essential part of the whole--as is the contribution of every other person, animal, plant, rock, or piece of dust. His humility and grace, however, isn't so much the result of a decision to be that way as it is a natural and spontaneous expression of his perspective. The Unitive truly sees the bigger picture, which allows him to "play" full out without attachment to what does or does not happen.

The Unitive's perspective is one of non-ego-involved

Beyond the separate Self—the Unitive stage of development... Continued...

witnessing, moment-by-moment awareness, and resourceful responses to the infinite number of systems and variables swirling around him--including all the conflicting needs, paradoxes, and constantly shifting realities of the situation. He is no longer identified with a certain “me,” a certain role or identity. He spontaneously takes on whatever persona is necessary in order to catalyze others or in some other way be appropriate to the moment. His concern is quite often outside of what most people would consider his own individual interests--a concern often expressed as an unconditional love for humanity.

The Magician has a highly developed ability to “trust the process” of whatever is going on. The Unitive’s low identification with the separate self and his greater identification with the rest of humanity further elevates this trust--of the way things are, where they are going, and what can and “should” be done--to an even higher (and more selfless) level. To the Unitive, there is an awareness that on an ultimate level everything is happening in a perfect way, even including the fact that the world contains much suffering and many problems. These problems, and any addressing of them, are just parts of the dance, parts of the endless going on of it all.

This is reflected in the Buddhist perspective of the bodhisattva--the awakened being who vows to stay in the world until all beings have been similarly liberated.

The Unitive sees happiness *and* unhappiness as part of the necessary, temporary (and endless) fluctuations inherent in the human situation. Instead of seeing life in a dualistic way, where some things are appropriate and desirable while others are inappropriate and undesirable, the Unitive experiences the world as a place where all opposites

“arise together” and “go together”--in any polarity each side implies (and needs) the other. Up needs (and is defined by) down, here needs there, life needs death, good needs evil, and so on. Positive and negative are seen--and experienced--as mental constructs, as ideas, rather than as innate or intrinsic characteristics of things, events, or people. The Unitive watches as positive turns to negative and back to positive, endlessly--and necessarily. This is, indeed, a totally new and different way of experiencing the world.

Because Unitives don’t seem to be as engaged in the goals, pursuits, and concerns of the rest of humanity, some--particularly Experts, Achievers, and even Strategists--may see them as being more distant from the world. This, however, is a mischaracterization. The Unitive merely sees the perfection of all aspects of the universe. This includes his own motivation to intervene in some cases and his contrasting motivation to leave things alone in others.

Unitives serve to catalyze others just by showing up. Their way of being in the world provides a spontaneous challenge to the perspective of others and demonstrates an alternative way of being in the world. Their ability to see others as whole, their tendency to interact in non-demanding ways, and their effortless comfort and inner security about being human often has a subtle but profound effect on others.

Unitives have a completely internalized transpersonal morality, independent of any particular societal standards or rules. Naturally being in the moment, they decide what is right by intuition. Conflicting impulses or external demands are simply part of life and need not be resolved, only witnessed. If a response is needed, it happens.

Beyond the separate Self—the Unitive stage of development... Continued...

The Unitive feels no need to be this or that, to achieve this or that, or to be in this or that state. He may act to be something or achieve something, but this is just “what happens” rather than the result of a need to get somewhere. This seemingly passive attitude, however, in its in-the-moment spontaneity, actually allows the Unitive to take powerful, effective, direct action. It’s as if, in not identifying with a separate self, the universe acts through the Unitive. Buddhists describe this by saying that *doing happens, but there is no doer* (the implication being that there are no separate doers, and that the real doer is the whole).

The Unitive sees all words, mental maps, representations, theories, meanings, divisions, and boundaries as mere constructs--ideas *about* the world, rather than the world itself. Instead, reality is experienced as a living, flowing, interconnected continuum, a unified field of possibilities existing now, and only now. At the same time, though, the Unitive sees that words, maps, representations, theories, meanings, divisions, and boundaries are essential aspects of human meaning-making.

Because the peak experiences so strongly sought after by those at previous developmental levels are readily available to the Unitive, these experiences no longer have the extraordinary and often startling quality they have for those at other perspectives. They are one more part of being human, happening in time and then passing away--another wave rising, then falling.

As you might imagine, the Unitive lives in the now moment. He sees that even planning for the future or learning from the past happens in the present moment. Being in the now moment happens naturally because the Unitive isn’t focused on regrets or hurts from the past, nor is he hoping for something better in the future. Paradoxically, the Unitive looks at the universe from an expanded time frame that includes all past and future time--while never leaving the present moment (from the Unitive’s perspective, that’s really all there is--past and future are ideas, not realities).

“Unitives have a completely internalized transpersonal morality, independent of any particular societal standards or rules.”

The Unitive’s stable awareness of the now allows him to see things as they are, without the added

meanings created by the mind--though when it serves his purpose he can use ideas, concepts, and mental maps as useful tools. He sees these things for what they are--often useful mental constructs *about* reality, but not the reality itself.

Life to the Unitive is a temporary eye-blink of separation from the ground of being from which all things emerge. And, the Unitive is aware that this separation, this taking of a human form, is a choice. (Zen master Genpo Roshi speaks of the awakened person as “the one who *chooses* to be a human being.”) To the Unitive this separation from the ultimate ground of being, and the creation of an enduring separate self, are illusions used to safeguard the ego’s need for permanence and to defend it against the fear of death.

Beyond the separate Self—the Unitive stage of development... Continued...

Unitives have transcended such narrow and limiting ego boundaries. They notice but are not preoccupied with whatever enters their awareness. Their perspective is that of the witness. This is a watching, more effortless than ordinary willed focus, in which there is awareness but not necessarily an awareness *of anything*. This is sometimes referred to as *pure consciousness*, awareness without content. The Unitive notices whatever enters his field of attention, but everything receives equal attention and awareness, and nothing is judged as better or worse, or more or less appropriate. The Unitive, therefore, has an open, non-grasping and non-judging experience of life.

The Unitive sees his life's work as a natural outcome of his participation in the flux and flow of the whole. He cares about the problems of humanity, even while he sees their perfection, and works for fairness, justice, and benevolence toward all. Magicians and Strategists see themselves as masters of their souls, but the Unitive sees this control of life as both illusory and unnecessary. All outcomes, all ways of thinking, feeling, behaving, or being are part of the flow and all are equally valuable. Whatever happens just *is*. Even not-being is valuable. This is a way of looking at life difficult for those from other perspectives to understand.

The full range of beingness is available to the Unitive. In one moment he can be serious and in the next, playful. He can be personal or global, simple or complex, serene or active, rational or transcendent, sublime or silly. He can also be sad or angry, or exhibit any other human expression. As you might imagine, only a small number of people live from this perspective.

With this look at the Unitive developmental stage, we come to the end of our overview of the

various developmental levels. I began this series because, despite its fundamental importance, one's developmental level is rarely taken into account in descriptions of human interaction, values, morality, politics, psychology, or behavior.

Humans interpret and respond to whatever they experience from their particular developmental perspective, yet few who observe humanity are aware of this spectrum of perspectives--much less where they come from, how a person from each thinks and behaves, or how to deal with persons from different perspectives. Expecting a person from one perspective to see the world from another perspective is futile, whether they are a Democrat, a Republican, an Iraqi soldier, a South African tribesman, a 14 year-old high school freshman, or a born-again Christian. You can't argue or reason another person out of their level of development.

As you view and relate to other people, or as you watch the news, I hope you will realize that each person thinks and acts from his particular developmental perspective, and that this is the only way he can make sense of his environment and his life. All perspectives include a certain type of cognition, a way of determining what is right or wrong, a way of relating to spiritual matters, a way of understanding one's sense of self, a way of deciding what is important and what to believe (including a way of determining what is "true" and what criteria are used to determine that truth), certain strategies for navigating the world, and a lot more. Understanding these perspectives allows you to see why people act as they do, and it allows you to better communicate with them (or realize that you probably aren't going to get through to them).

And, of course, understanding these developmental levels also allows you to better understand yourself,

Beyond the separate Self—the Unitive stage of development... Continued...

to understand why you see things the way you do--and to realize that your perspective is just one of many.

As I said toward the beginning of this series, whatever your perspective, you are immersed in something, which means that you are unaware of it. In fact, in being immersed in something, you *are* it.

Your perspective is, in fact, the place where you are stuck, the place where you are unaware. Genpo Roshi once asked me to express to him my current understanding of the way things are. I gave a very Zen-like answer: everything happens by itself, there's no doer other than the universe as a whole, everything is connected, and so forth. He then looked me in the eye and said, "Now *doubt that*." He was really saying, "Your current understanding is where you are stuck."

Keep in mind that each perspective is a way of making sense of being here, one of many possible ways of dealing with the trials, tribulations, and ups and downs of being a human being--which you may have noticed can be quite a challenge. Each of these ways of making sense of things works for as long as it works, which could be a few years, or a lifetime. If your way of making sense of things stops working, it's probably because you acquired more information, had new experiences, or were thrust into a new situation, and in this new situation the old way of making sense of things just doesn't work any longer.

At such times you feel uncomfortable and a bit lost--until you develop a new way of making sense of things, one that transcends and includes the old way, and *can* handle the new situation and take into account the new information.

And, finally, remember that *awareness* drives development. Whatever you are immersed in you are unaware of, like a fish in water. When you do become aware of it (if you do), your perspective changes. It expands. The goal here, if there is one, is to continually enlarge your perspective--until it ultimately includes everything. As that happens, your point of view moves from being me-centered, to group-centered, to world-centered, and finally to cosmos-centered. As this happens, care increases, compassion increases, and love increases.

And, lord knows, that's what the world needs.

So, whatever you're doing, watch. Learn to be the witness. Watch your body. Pay attention to how it feels and how it moves. Notice how those feelings and sensations change. Watch your emotions. Watch your thoughts, your beliefs, your ideas, the meanings you put on things. Watch everything. Be with all of it, right now, in each moment. You can even watch your sense of "I am," your sense of existing. And, since Holosync creates increasingly deeper awareness (you knew I'd end up here eventually) and allows this watching to be more and more effortless, keep meditating with Holosync every day. If you do, you will greatly accelerate your growth.

Thanks for sticking with me through this long journey. I don't know what I'll tackle next, but I hope you'll find it interesting and useful as you do your best to make sense of what it means to be a human being.

