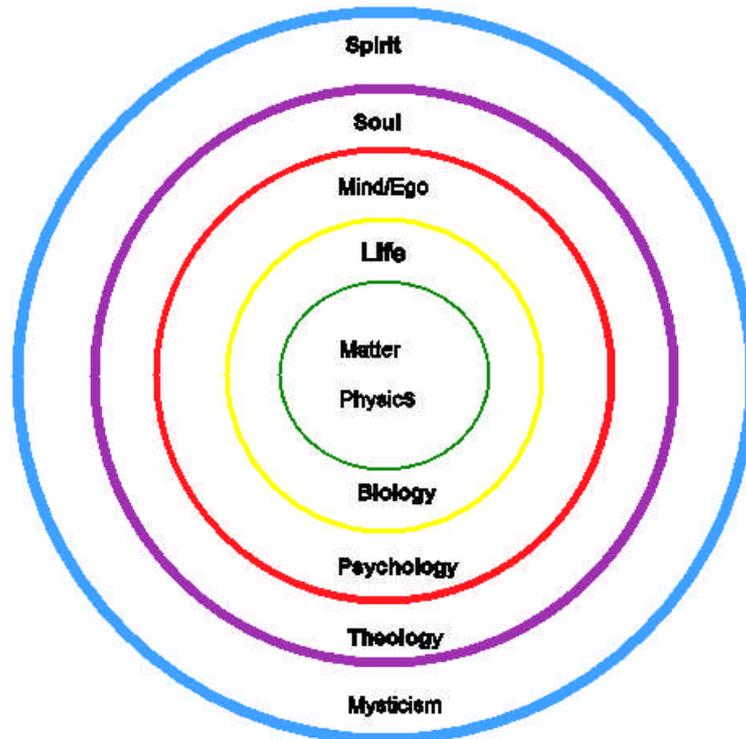


In Search of Spirit

By
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The Great Chain (Nest) Of Being



Over the last fifteen to twenty years, many Americans have embraced the idea of conscious spiritual growth as a process distinct from anything offered by organized religion. In their landmark book, *The Cultural Creatives*, sociologist Paul Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson identify these people as part of a new sub-culture of 50 million Americans who have evolved beyond the existing tradition-religious and modern-scientific population groups. The “Cultural Creatives” care deeply about the environment, about relationships, peace and social justice, about self-expression, self-actualization, and a new spirituality, and are interested in holistic health and whole systems

thinking. Most readers of this paper would be considered part of this sub-culture.

Those of us engaged in a quest for spiritual growth beyond the traditional religious structure are faced by a bewildering array of choices: New Age Churches, books, tapes and workshops on new paradigms, new thought, channeled teachings, bodywork, subtle energy healing, and many others – most promising to transform your life in a weekend or two. Many of these workshops do help, up to a point. We often experience a shift in perspective, change some beliefs and behaviors, become more successful, and even a little happier. After some time, though, the euphoria wears off, the next crisis occurs, and the new you still needs

to grow more to handle this fresh challenge. You are left with a gnawing inner feeling that nothing fundamental has changed.

Ken Wilber, America's pre-eminent spiritual philosopher, distinguishes authentic spiritual transformation from spiritual translation. He is using the word "translation" to refer to the work of "self-improvement." Essentially, these books and workshops offer techniques to restructure the ego by changing your perspectives and hence your behavior. This is important work and helps people to feel better about themselves, make more sense of a chaotic world, and function more effectively. However, for many Cultural Creatives this is not quite enough. Something is still missing.

To understand what might be missing, we refer to the figure above, entitled "The Great Chain of Being" from Ken Wilber's *Marriage of Sense and Soul*. This diagram represents the structure of human consciousness. We exist as all of these levels, simultaneously. It also represents the path of spiritual evolution. Our sense of identity evolves from body to mind to soul to spirit. Soul is defined as individual spiritual consciousness; spirit as the One Being we are all a part of. Most of us function as egos, at the mind level, even if we "believe" we are souls or spirit. Cognitive belief does not result in an authentic, vertical transformation to the next evolutionary step. The ego is a set of beliefs that define our identities, our experience of others, and the nature of our reality. Most of the self-improvement work we do restructures these beliefs into a more effective and cohesive pattern, but does not move our center of being to a higher level of consciousness.

True transformational work transcends mind-ego consciousness into a deep experience of soul or spirit levels of being. While many of us have glimpsed these levels of our beingness in "peak experiences", these have been transient and unstable states. The objective of transformative practice is to stabilize one's consciousness at these higher and deeper levels. Meditation is the time-honored way of experiencing and living in the field of spirit. In concept, how meditation works is simple. The dimensions of soul and spirit are always present now and not in some far off place to be found. The ultimate truth is that there is

only spirit. So what stops us from seeing it? It's really a question of attention. Our attention is completely wrapped up in the outside world, and our mind flips from one thought to the next. Meditation works by quieting the mind, and freeing enough attention to look within, and experience one's own soul and spirit, our natural ground of being. This process can take a while, at least five years according to Wilber, and requires rigorous, sustained and committed practice.

Most of us, in the middle of our hectic and demanding 21st century lives, find it impossible to maintain such discipline. An alternative way to free your attention is to remove the objects that grab it. Our attention is held, not by the objects, people, or events themselves, but by our mental representations of them, and more specifically, by our attachments to and identification with these representations. The attachments are caused by our judgments, positive or negative. If we can remove our judgments, we can release these mental creations and free our attention. This process can be used to "discreate" a layer of fundamental mental representations that we all hold. As we "disidentify" ourselves with our ego structures, our freed attention naturally finds itself in a field of pure awareness, experiencing our spiritual ground of being. We now know who we truly are, with no remaining doubt. Compared to the years required in meditation practice, this process can be taught and used to experience our source awareness in a matter of days.

Why is it important to reach this spiritual evolutionary level? Once you experience your true Self, you know why nothing was really completely fulfilling before. You were looking for this experience, this knowledge in all your relationships, in your career, in all the things you wanted. Even after you achieved what you wanted, the satisfaction was fleeting. Now, true happiness, inner peace, and an ability to create what you want to experience is your natural state of being. You look at the world with different eyes, and you see the love that surrounds you, the beauty in everything, and the possibility in each human being. Most of all, you are aware of your power as spirit to not only fulfill your own desires, but to express your unique gifts in service to the unity we all are.