

# Unique Self, World Spirituality, And Evolutionary We Space: Wake Up, Grow Up, Lighten Up, Show Up, Open Up

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Your Unique Self is radically singular, gorgeous, and special in the world. But it is even more than that. Your Unique Self is a puzzle piece that is utterly necessary to complete a much larger puzzle. The Unique contours of your puzzle piece are what allow you to connect with and offer your gift to all-that-is. Giving your puzzle piece unto the world adds an irreducible dimension to the completeness of the Kosmos. Paradoxically, uniqueness is the currency of connection. It is the portal to the larger evolutionary context that needs your service.

But it is even more than that. Your Unique Self is evolution waking up as you. Your Unique Self is animated by its puzzle piece nature. As such it is naturally connected to a larger context that it uniquely completes. It is paradoxically through the unique contours of your Unique Self nature that the alienation of separation is overcome. Unique Self is the source code of all authentic relationships; and it is only through a fraternity and sisterhood of Unique Selves that we can begin to bring profound and loving transformation into the world.

As the great connector, Unique Self is the only technology that can create the evolutionary We space necessary to affect the evolution of consciousness. Ego cannot form evolutionary We space. At best, ego can cooperate in limited ways for the greater good. Conscious collaboration, while better than mindless competition, lacks the necessary Eros and imagination to change the world. Unique Self is drenched in Eros and imagination.

One might assume that, in order to foster an authentic We-space, we must simply emerge into our True Selves. This is the teaching of the classical enlightenment traditions. Yet we know that True Selves cannot create a We space. For the total number of True Selves is one. In the grand impersonal realm of True Self, there is only one and not two and therefore not relationship and certainly not evolutionary We space. It is only our Unique Selves that have transcendence and entered the larger field of We as unique emanations of the all-that-is. Only through the profound and dynamic expression of our enlightened Unique Selves can we create the evolutionary we space necessary to heal the planet. Enlightened We space in which individuals and individual systems realize enlightened consciousness beyond ego is the essential technology of transformation for tomorrow.

It is a technology we must master today for enlightened consciousness that is essential if we are to find a way to heal suffering and ameliorate needless brutality and pain. Normal consciousness produces suffering. And if you think this is but a spiritual aphorism then you have only to inquire from the hundred million people brutally tortured and murdered in the last century — all as a direct result of the mad delusions of the grasping ego. The ego of normal consciousness is insane. Enlightenment is simply sanity. In enlightened space you realize that you are part of the one. You realize that you are not alone so there is no reason to desperately grasp. You realize that you are not limited to the power, healing, or fulfillment

available only to your separate self. But rather you know that all of the healing, goodness, power, and depth of all- that- is lives in you, as you and through you.

Not to know this is not to know whom you are. It is to be essentially confused about your identity. The confusion between ego and Unique Self is far more substantive than a person who simply thinks she is someone else. This is a minor confusion of identity and hence a minor insanity when compared with the sheer madness of mistaking your ego for Your Unique Self as your essential identity.

### *Why is Enlightenment Rejected by Mainstream Society?*

Given the power of enlightened consciousness, which I just described, how could it possibly be that mainstream culture, both east and west has rejected the attainment of enlightenment as the essential human goal? Should not this transformation of consciousness — which can do more than any other force to heal our planet — not be the essential and even passionately yearned for goal, of both every individual and every collective. And it is not. Enlightenment is simply not part of the mainstream discourse. Enlightenment is often mocked and at best relegated to the sidelines and not treated as a genuine option for fully normal people. Why not?

The answer is simple. It is woven into the essential teaching of Unique Self enlightenment. And it is as follows. Classical enlightenment says: to attain realization you must overcome your sense of being special and realize your True Identity as part of the one. This instruction is resisted by virtually everyone, for no one wants to give up their specialness. When the price of enlightenment seems to be to give up one's innate sense of being unique and special, enlightenment is rejected by the intelligent mainstream because at his or her core virtually everyone in the world feels special. The reigning assumption is that to be special you must be a separate self, which is the core intuition of the western enlightenment. So, it emerges that the core intuition of western enlightenment — that you are separate and therefore special — contradicts the core intuition of the eastern enlightenment which says you are not separate and therefore not special. For the west the affirmation of the special separate self is seen as the key to healing suffering while for the east overcoming a false sense of separate self and specialness is the key to transcending suffering.

When a person takes their nagging sense of absolute specialness to their spiritual teacher the usual instruction is: you must leave beyond this feeling of being special for the desire and experience of specialness is a function of the unenlightened ego. This instruction — while it speaks a great truth, is at its core not fully true. It is true but partial. For it fails to make two essential discernments. Those are the distinctions between separateness and uniqueness and between Unique Self and ego. At the level of ego, you are separate, and you are not special. This is the core and correct intuition of eastern enlightenment. And for this reason, you must get over your sense of being a special separate self. But at the level of Unique Self — beyond your separateness — as a unique expression of the one you are absolutely and ultimately

special. This affirms the special dignity of the special individual, which is the core intuition of western enlightenment. But it realizes that you are special not at the level of separate self-ego but at a much higher level of consciousness, the level of Unique Self. When you realize your enlightenment you give up the small games of your ego seeking to reify its specialness. You move beyond the alienation of separate self to realize the joy of uniqueness. You give up the small self-sense of being special as you begin playing an infinitely larger game in the widest context, the game of your Unique Perspective, which is ultimately unique and special and has singular gifts to give the world, which can and must be given only by Your Unique Self.

### *The Democratization of Enlightenment*

This evolution of the enlightenment teaching paves the way for the democratization of enlightenment. As long as enlightenment seems to demand abandoning the essential specialness of every human being and of every human collective of persons or system of knowing, it will intuitively be rejected by the masses. This is not because the masses are merely clinging to ego as enlightenment teachers often suggest, but because they have an intuition — even if inarticulate — of Unique Self. Once this essential flaw in the dharma is healed and evolved — with distinctions drawn between separateness and uniqueness, ego and Unique Self, the road is open for the democratization of enlightenment. Every human being is in essence not apart and not separate. Rather the human being is both part of the great collective consciousness, the creative force of evolutionary Eros that animates and drives all that is — even as she is also a unique incarnation of evolutionary creativity and Eros. Each human being is an irreducible personal expression of the process incarnating infinite dignity and adequacy as well as a being a singular expression of creativity and Unique Gift. Since every human being is unique every human being is an irreplaceable and ultimately necessary expression of the enlightened consciousness.

And it is only through communities built on this We space, which emerge from the democratization of enlightenment generated by the Unique Self teaching, that we can foster the genuine global commons that is the next necessary and glorious step in our evolution. It is our very uniqueness that is the key to our communion with the world as a whole. Each individual and each unique collective expressed in any religion or great body of knowledge is a puzzle piece in the emergent wholeness that is waiting to be evolved by us. Spirit waits our unpacking. This is the evolutionary impulse manifesting as Spirit-in-Action.

Each and every tradition functions as a sort of macro-Unique Self holding a particular medicine that is crucial to the health of the whole. And that is one of the essential reasons that as we are being called to become our Unique Selves, we are also being called to a World Spirituality that speaks compellingly to the hundreds of millions of people who have moved beyond the religions or beyond exclusive identification with any one tradition. World Spirituality is nothing less than the grand

and dynamic gathering of micro- and macro-Unique Selves who gift the world with their Unique Perspectives, their Unique Gifts, in a way that evolves the one and the whole. It is only from this kind of communion, in which all gifts from all traditions are taken into account and woven into a higher integral evolutionary embrace, that we have the ability to heal our world.

### *The Why of World Spirituality*

Below are a few preliminary thoughts I would like to share in regard to why evolving World Spirituality is an urgent need and great adventure of our time. This is not a finished essay; it is rather a set of framing insights, which have emerged through my own process of thought and in deep conversation with Ken Wilber and other leading partners. All of us are working together closely in catalyzing, articulating, and serving the emergence of an authentic World Spirituality based on integral principles that has the potential to provide a context of meaning for hundreds of millions of people.

Let me begin with a bold and audacious statement: not merely a personal statement but on behalf of this an incredible group of committed leaders from around the world who are coming together to catalyze and incarnate a new movement of spirit: World Spirituality. We believe that we are being called to articulate a vision of World Spirituality that speaks compellingly to the hundreds of millions of people who have moved beyond the religions or beyond exclusive identification with any one tradition. We believe that this may be one of the vital next moves in the evolution of consciousness.

We believe that World Spirituality is a desperately needed integral framework in the source code of the next millennium. Before we go any further, let us state clearly and unequivocally that World Spirituality is emphatically not, in any sense or form, a totalizing or homogenizing World Religion. But it is a World Religion in the sense that it is a shared grammar of universal value that serves as a context for our diversity.

World Spirituality is more like a symphony. In the symphony there are many instruments. Each one is sacred. Each one has its unique music. Each contributes a particular texture and depth of sound to the symphony. But all of the instruments are playing music. No instrument can claim to be the music itself. Each one bows before the lord of music. Each instrument plays a unique and gorgeous sound. Each often has a unique medicine or insight.

World Spirituality engages all the instruments of knowing including the ancient traditions of pre-modernity, as well as modern and post-modern wisdom streams.

By ancient traditions I refer primarily to the great systems of religion and philosophy. By modern traditions I might refer, for example, to neuroscience, or to the various schools of psychology. By post-modern traditions I refer to the insights of deconstructionist writers, phenomenology, historical criticism, structuralism, ethnography and more. Each great tradition has insights in a particular area.

Each has a particular medicine that we need. Each also sometimes overreaches in its claim that its particular insight is the whole story. The part pretends to be a whole and needs to be rightly critiqued for its overreach. World Spirituality seeks to be in dialogue with all of the great traditions and articulate a framework in which all of the traditions have an honored place at the table and can benefit from the insights of each other woven together in a higher integral embrace. The job of World Spirituality is to try and cogently articulate a Big Picture in which a person might be able to locate himself or herself in a context of meaning and purpose.

### *The Who of World Spirituality*

In the current situation, many people at the leading edge of culture and creativity who are born into the post-modern world, unconsciously assimilate its critiques of the great religious traditions. As a result, religion and sometimes spirit itself never becomes a genuine option in their lives. If they remain at all with the wish to engage spirit they often meander along, trying to find their way. They are confused and unable to orient themselves to a genuine worldview of meaning that compels, delights, and infuses their everyday life with meaning and direction.

World Spirituality speaks equally to the hundreds of millions of these leading-edge cultural creatives around the world who feel that they cannot locate themselves in a tradition at all well as to those firmly ensconced in a tradition who might feel that their identify and hunger is not exhausted by that tradition. They experience themselves as dual citizens — deeply involved in their tradition but at the same time feel themselves to be part of the broader global community of spirit.

In World Spirituality one of our key goals is to create a series of writings that might help seekers feel like they have some direction and guidance on the way, which helps them to identify: What are the issues that need addressing? What are the general forms or types of practice that need to be engaged in order to live an integrated life on the spiritual path of life? In a sense, the job of a world spirituality framework is to help people cultivate discernment as they seek to find their way grounded in spirit on a genuine path of obligation and freedom.

### *New World Conditions Catalyze the Evolution of New World Spirituality*

There are seven new conditions, which make World Spirituality both possible and necessary today in way that it was never was before in history:

**1) To begin with, global challenges require a global response.** For the first time in history, the core challenges to survival that we face today are not local to a particular religion, country or region. They are global challenges ranging from the very real threats to the ground we walk on and the air we breathe, to world hunger, to the danger of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of a rogue state, to the most pressing issues of social and economic justice. There is no place left to hide in the world, and the old spiritual truths of the essential oneness of everything, the

interconnectivity of it all, is no longer a hidden teaching but an obvious truth for all to see.

**2) Whenever new life conditions come to pass, a new evolutionary leap in consciousness and culture is required to meet them.** The global challenges WE face require the evolution of a new spiritual consciousness which fosters an evolutionary We space of collective intelligence which has the erotic imagination necessary to chart the paths necessary for the next stage in our evolution.

Whenever there is an evolutionary shift in the nature of the challenge there is a commensurate evolution shift in the level of spirit's response. In a time when the threats are world threats, then the spirituality much be World Spirituality. The world is in turmoil on virtually every level of reality even as it is pregnant with possibility and promise. The world faces world problems. Gone is the era where local kings, seers, and shamans dealt with their local issues. There are no more exclusively local issues. Everything affects everything else. Everything is interconnected and interdependent.

Of course, from a spiritual perspective, viewed through the eye of the heart and the eye of the spirit, this was always the case. However, the essential interconnectedness of all of reality was not apparent. The King of Burma had no felt sense or evidence that his actions and decision would affect the ancient indigenous populations who populated the Americas. Now, however, the underlying wholeness of all of reality, the inextricable interpenetration of all of its parts, is becoming visible to the naked eye. One needs to look only at environmental and ecological issues to realize the essential wholeness, interconnectivity, and indivisibility of it all.

New world conditions are always precisely what catalyze the next evolutionary leap. As we realize that the challenges that confront us are world challenges, we realize that we must evolve World Spirituality to meet those challenges. But not only to meet those challenges.

**3) World spirituality is not just a solution to problems; it is also the delighted expression of the evolving Eros of consciousness realizing its potential to dance in the dialectical tension between unity and diversity.** We are unique and autonomous as people and faith systems. We are also One in communion and even union with each other. Both are true. Autonomy and communion, diversity and plurality, the One and the many dance together in higher integration as World Spirituality begins to emerge.

Paradoxically it is our very uniqueness which is the key to our communion. The realization of World Spirituality is that Uniqueness, not merely sameness, is the currency of connection. Each individual and each unique collective expressed in a religion or great body of knowledge is a puzzle piece in the emergent wholeness that is waiting to be evolved by us. Spirit waits our unpacking. This is the evolutionary



impulse manifesting as Spirit in Action. Each tradition, pre-modern modern and postmodern, has a particular medicine, which is crucial to the health of the whole.

**4) Fourth, we desperately need to recover memory, not only the memory of the past but the memory of the future.** Without that there is little hope for healing and transformation that our individual and collective consciousness so urgently needs. And what is hope but a memory of the future.

What exactly is it that we need to remember? Said simply, we need to re-member and recover the story. Post modernity was built on the rejection of any grand narrative. Metaphysics of any kind was deemed the enemy. Any sense of a canon, a worldview, or big picture was reviled and rejected as a violation of postmodern integrity. Paradoxically however the grand narrative of postmodernity became that there is no grand narrative. All contexts of meaning that could in any sense guide or even obligate were undermined.

World Spirituality accepts in part the rejection of metaphysics and grand narratives. It recognizes and affirms that core intuition of postmodernity that contexts matter enormously, and that no knowledge exists independently of its context. It is furthermore clear to all of us that the grand stories of metaphysics each claiming to hold exclusive truth, which were virtually all hijacked by various religions of both the spiritual and secular variety as tools of domination, need to be re-constructed for the sake of the evolution of love. World Spirituality based on Integral principles is a reconstructive project.

No longer can we allow dominating grand narratives to crush the subject, the personal and the intimate. And yet all of that does not mean there is no story. All of the not knowing does not mean that we do not know. All of the metaphysical uncertainty does not mean that there is not post metaphysical certainty.

Nor can we allow for the deconstruction of spirit and what the Lewis Mumford called the disqualification of the universe and its reduction to insipid flatland. Even as we bow before the mystery of unknowing and recognize the post-metaphysical evolving nature of our gnosis, we need to “story up” and reclaim our world view. We need to once again begin to engage in meta-theory and big picture thinking. For the truth be told, there is much that we know in every discipline. We do have deep knowledge which have been arrived at through carefully engaging double blind experiments enacted in the realms of the both the physical and spiritual sciences. We do have shared depth structures of knowledge and meaning, which have been arrived at independently and virtually unanimously by the leading research of mind, heart, body and spirit. We have — for the first time in history — been able to gather their data and reveal the profound shared depth structures of knowledge that they all share in common. These sturdy knowings form the basis of a powerfully effective and inspired human user manual.



And when we string together these solid beads of knowledge a truly stunning integral worldview begins to emerge. This is the world view of a World Spirituality. But in the mad rush to deconstruct all knowing, we have forgotten. We have forgotten that we know. But even more than that . . . we have forgotten that we have forgotten. It is precisely a prescient sense of this situation that moved W. B. Yeats in his famous lines:

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The deconstructions of meaning motivated initially by the desire to liberate the human spirit from the shackles of tyranny have run amok and cut the roots of the great universe story that is the eros and ethos of all that is sacred and all that is meaningful. So, a World Spirituality must be bold, audacious, and rigorous as it weaves together the deepest structures of shared meaning upon which the story is based that we must pass on to our children. It is utterly necessary to re-story and re-enchanted the universe in order to create a context for life that is the absolute birthright of billions of people around the globe that have been cut adrift by overzealous waves of deconstruction that sought to de-story the universe.

**5) For the first time in history there is a critical mass of people who have reached World-Centric consciousness.** These people have expanded their circle of caring and concern beyond their ethnocentric affiliations. They are at home in the world and feel responsible for the world as whole and not merely for their country or religion. They cannot be served by ethnocentric religion. For the first time in history there are hundreds of millions of well-educated people who, although they cannot find their homes in the traditional religions, are searching for a compelling universal set of spiritual principles by which they can live their lives. They are only addressed by a world spirituality.

**6) For the first time in history the notion of what we are calling a dual citizen of spirit is readily understood and available.** Not only can one be a dual citizen of two countries, but also it is possible to remain committed to one's native or chosen spiritual tradition while at the same time being a citizen of World Spirituality.

**7) For the first time in history the most profound teachings, as well as living teachers from all the great systems of spirit are readily available in non-coercive and open hearted form,** not only to people of that particular religion, but to all who would come to study and practice.

## *The What of World Spirituality*

At this point it is essential to locate Unique Self in the larger global context in which it lives. Stated simply, Unique Self enlightenment is one of the core principles and practices in the emerging movement for World Spirituality. So at this point it seems imperative to locate Unique Self enlightenment in its proper place, as the lodestone of an emergence World Spirituality. What are the core Practices of a World Spirituality? World Spirituality has five essential practices. All of them are fulfilled in the awakened realization of Unique Self enlightenment.

### *Showing Up: Unique Self*

The core practice of World Spirituality is the Unique Self awakening or enlightenment of every individual. This democratization of enlightenment in turns fosters the evolutionary We space of collective intelligence and creativity which is essential for the healing and transformation of our world. This is the next necessary step in the evolution of consciousness, which is the evolution of love, which is the evolution of God.

This first practice is called in the terminology of World Spirituality, Showing Up. To show up as your Unique Self and give your Unique Gifts is to awaken as evolution — as the personal face of the evolutionary process.

### *Waking Up: States of Consciousness and Unique Self*

Waking up means to move from Separate Self to True Self. To wake up is to awaken to your true nature. To know that you are not merely a skin encapsulated ego but that you are essence. Waking up is the continual movement from ego to essence. In waking up you realize your true identity; you are the indivisible strand of the seamless coat of the Universe.

In the world of the pre-modern classical traditions, it was assumed that the non-dual experience of awakening was that of a True Self which was assumed to be the same for all people. For in the pre-modern world the centrality of perspectives had not yet come online.

In the modern and especially postmodern world in which perspectives are front and center, we begin to understand that enlightenment is not unqualified as the ancients believed. Rather, enlightenment always has a perspective. The perspective of Your Unique Self. Not by accident we find seeds of the new enlightenment model in the western enlightenment tradition, with its profound emphasis on the God voice in sacred text, which reveals its intent through the unique perspective of the reader. This proto post-modern view is fully unpacked in the Unique Self-teaching which instructs us that full awakening does not end with True Self. In postmodernity we realize that everything — including enlightenment — has a perspective. As the last vestiges of sleep are wiped from your eyes you drop in deeper realizing that you are

not only essence but also the personal face of essence. You are part of the seamless coat of the universe, which is seamless but not featureless. In a word you realize that True Self always sees through a unique set of eyes. You awaken to the knowing that enlightenment always has perspective. Your Perspective. To wake up therefore means to awaken to the full realization of Your Unique True Self.

Your Unique Self is the highest expression of your awakened self. Unique Self is not your typology but your fully awake unique expression, which is always formed by your Unique Perspective. True Self + Perspective = Unique Self. Waking up means waking up to your True Nature. Your true nature is that you are not separate but a part of all that is. Moreover, you are an infinitely unique expression of all that is. You wake up, as the personal face of essence whose heart is a unique expression of the infinity of intimacy that is the heart of Kosmos. This democratic realization transcends and includes all of the traditions. It is an essential shared practice of World Spirituality.

### *Growing up: Levels of Consciousness and Unique Self*

To grow up means to up level your consciousness. You grow up to higher and higher levels of consciousness. Your level of consciousness is the set of implicit organizing principles which create your worldview. These ascending levels or structures of consciousness have been mapped by extensive cross-cultural researches done by leading ego-developmental scientists over the past fifty years. For example, it has been shown that the human beings in healthy development evolve from egocentric to ethnocentric to world-centric to cosmos-centric consciousness. Each level expands your felt sense of love and empathy to wider and wider circles of caring.

At first, your caring and concern is limited to you and your immediate circle. In the second level, ethnocentric, your identity expands to a felt sense of empathy and connections with your larger communal context. In the third level, worldcentric your identity shifts to a felt empathy with all living humanity. In the fourth level you move beyond mere humanity and experience a felt sense of responsibility and empathy for all sentient beings throughout all of time backwards and forwards. This last evolution of consciousness has also been described as the move from first-tier to second-tier consciousness. One of the key findings of developmental research is that as you up-level to ever-higher stages of second-tier consciousness, your Unique Perspective becomes readily available. Said simply according to leading developmental theorists, the more you grow up, the more your Unique Self comes online. Indeed, realizing your Unique Self is what it means to be a grown up.

### *Lighten Up: Unique Self*

Lighten Up is simply a catch phrase for shadow work, which is an essential component of any integral world spirituality. The full recognition of the necessity for formal and ongoing shadow work is a modern and postmodern realization, which is implicit but not fully developed in the great traditions. It remained to Freud and Jung

and their respective students to make shadow work and essential dimension of full human development and health. In Unique Self teaching, the meaning of shadow work is significantly evolved.

Shadow is finally realized to be a Unique Self distortion. Shadow is a function of gifts ungiven and life unlived. To clean up is to identify your Unique Shadow and follow it back to your Unique Self, to your unique wavelength of light. It is only in light of this Unique Self understanding that it makes sense to actually integrate your shadow for you are integrating your own displaced Unique Self. This is the essential World Spirituality process of cleaning up which we call Shadow Integration.

### *Opening Up: Unique Self and Love*

Opening up means opening up to and incarnating love. From the perspective of Unique Self teaching love has three essential components. Love is at its base not an emotion but a Unique Self perception. To love is recognize other. The lover has eyes to see the personal essence of the beloved and to identify him or her with that essence.

Love is a Unique Self perception. More succinctly love is a Unique Self perception-identification process. To love is not only to perceive the uniquely beautiful essence of the beloved but to identify them with that essence.

Second, to love is to stay open through the pain. To love is to open up to the full depth of life despite hurt, which seduces us to close and contract. You can only stay open as your Unique Self. The ego can never stay open when it feels under attack.

Third, to love is to give. To love is to be committed to suspend your ego and give deeply to another for the sake of their higher good whatever that may be. Once again you can only stop using another to support your existence and truly give to other, after you have evolved beyond identification with your ego and realized your Unique Self.

### *Showing Up: Unique Self and Unique Gift*

It is the matrix of waking up, growing up, cleaning up and opening up that allows you to show up as Your Unique Self. It your Unique Self that gives birth to Unique Gift. As mentioned earlier in the book, Your Unique Gifts are what enable you to address a Unique Need that needs to be filled.

The core realization of a world spirituality is that every human being is both part of the whole and at the same time a high priest or priestess in their religion of one. The core obligation, joy, and responsibility of the Unique Self is to give its Unique Gift which fills a unique need in the kosmos that can be met by them and them alone.

### *World Spirituality is not the shared Truth of Premodern Religions*

As we have already alluded to, it is not only the premodern religions that we turn to create world spirituality. Each great system of knowing, premodern, modern, and postmodern, participates in the forging of World Spirituality. The emergence in modernity of science, of the evolution of the social sphere expressed in the rise of democracy, human rights, and the ascension of the feminine, are all key components in the formation of a World Spirituality.

Can you imagine today a serious World Spirituality without taking into account the implications of neuroscience, what I call Neuro-dharma, on our understandings of ritual and spiritual practice? Can you imagine today a World Spirituality without the emergent insights of postmodernity with its manifestations as multiculturalism and pluralism, without its profound understanding of the distinction between surface structures and depth structures and the role of interpretation and hermeneutics in creating all forms of spiritual and social culture?

Particularly can one imagine World Spirituality without the evolutions that have taken place in our understanding of Evolution? More important than anything, can one imagine a World Spirituality without a profound embrace of the evolutionary context within which we live and which depends on us? The evolutionary context—the realization that consciousness is evolving, and that every generation is responsible for giving its own unique gift to the evolution of consciousness — is the animating Eros in our attempt to give voice and language to the emergence of a World Spirituality that is already happening all over the globe.

### *World Spirituality is Not Interfaith*

World Spirituality is not interfaith. It is a major step beyond interfaith that transcends and includes the evolutionary strides made and still being made by that great movement of spirit. If one were to map the stages of spirit's evolution from the premodern religions to the contemporary emergence of a World Spirituality in which we are participating, the map might look something like the following:

1. In the first stage, when the classical religions reigned supreme, in the age before the western Enlightenment, each religion believed that it was supreme or, at the very least, superior to all the other religions. Much was beautiful and noble and civilizing in these great traditions. And yet their sense of ethnocentric superiority fostered significant shadow. This superiority created in its wake a sense of entitlement, the rationalization for massive oppression, and more often than not, a license to kill. This stage of religious development has been called mythic religion.
2. The second stage emerged with the advent of modernity. Modernity came along and appropriately weakened the authority of the mythic religions by demanding evidence. Moreover, modernity pointed out that many of the propositions which religions had held to be dogmatic truths were in fact, factually wrong. These ranged

from the view of the universe — that the church held as dogma — which placed the earth at the center of all things (and was later falsified by Galileo's telescope), to a dogmatically held belief regarding the structure of the human body (which was falsified by the dissections and autopsies of renaissance science), to the belief in the divine right of kings (which was undermined by the rise of the western Enlightenment). Mythic conceptions of religion substantively weakened. Secularization began its creeping annexations of the world mind. Within the old mythic religions, more progressive voices emerged. However, those voices often sought to remake the religions in the image of modernity, and generally lost their authentic mooring in the core lineage mind of the religion. At the same time, there were those who both opened to modernity and maintained a strong and authentic connection to their core religion without formally working out the contradiction between the two commitments. This stage in the development of spirit has been called rational religion.

**3. The third stage is perhaps characterized by the interfaith movement and has been called pluralistic religion.** The Interfaith movement made a beautiful contribution to spirit's evolution by getting people talking to each other from the different faith traditions. This movement itself has two distinct expressions. In one expression, what I will call the humanistic expression, the implicit assumption is that the religions cannot be genuinely reconciled at a deep theological level, but if people could just get along at a human level beyond doctrinal difference, this itself would create a mutuality of respect and recognition which would serve to deepen love and lessen religious conflict of all forms.

In a second expression of Interfaith, what I will call the shared truth or perennial expression, the core issues that separated the religions mattered less because the leaders of Interfaith dialogues did not truly take the unique teachings of each of the great traditions, including their own, seriously. In this version of interfaith the Unique Self of the traditions was often effaced and reduced to some very banal expressions of liberal spirit. Someone once said that the early interfaith dialogues was between Jews who did not believe in Judaism and Christians who did not believe in Christianity — who got together and discovered they had a lot in common. However, this search for shared understanding in the Interfaith movement had a more profound expression as well. The crucial developmental insight was that the shared truths in all the religions are their essential teaching. This shared truth in this version of interfaith both overrides and undercuts what are seen to be the far less important doctrinal, theological, and value distinctions between the religions. This understanding made a highly significant contribution to the realization that what we have in common is far greater than that which divides us.

One of the core matrices of this highly intelligent and profound interfaith work are the key insights of perennial philosophy. The perennialists, led by the like of Fritzof Schuon and his circle of students, and championed effectively and eloquently by Huston Smith, pointed to the essential shared depth structures, which existed in all

the traditions. And let it be said clearly. The perennialist camp and its highly critical insights have made a pivotal contribution towards the evolution of consciousness. And let it be said clearly. The perennial insights are an important part of the emergent World Spirituality. However, let it be understood no less clearly that the shared perennial truths found in all or most of the great religions are only the first step in the emergence of World Spirituality. Perennial Philosophy is a part, but in no way the whole, of World Spirituality.

### *The Evolutionary Context of World Spirituality*

Why? Because the Perennialists made one huge mistake. They intentionally ignored the evolutionary context. Schuon and Smith not only ignore it, they identified and rejected evolution as being the enemy of eternity. In their understandable desire to re-locate modern man in the stable ground of eternity, they intuitively viewed the dynamic emergence of evolution as a threat. This was a huge mistake. Evolution and Eternity are not enemies. Rather, Evolution is the nature of Eternity. Or at least evolution, or what Alfred North Whitehead called Becoming, is One taste of Eternity. Evolution is a mechanism of eternity's emergent properties as eternity chooses to manifest in the world of time. Evolution is no less than the chosen mechanism of the mystery. We now realize that everything is evolving, including consciousness itself. In the language of Hebrew mystic Abraham Kuk, heavily influenced by the old evolutionary teachings of Luria and the Zohar:

The theory of evolution, which is presently conquering the world, is aligned with the most profound secrets of Spirit, more than with any other philosophical theory.

Evolution, which proceeds on an ascending trajectory, provides an optimistic base for the world, for how is it possible to despair when one sees that everything is evolving and ascending?

And when I penetrate the very center of the principle of ascending evolution, I discover that it is the divine principle, which is enlightened with absolute clarity. For it is Infinity-in-realization which realized itself through bringing infinity from infinite potentiality to infinite actuality. Evolution enlightens all dimensions of reality, all of God's manifestations.

All of reality evolves and ascends, as is evident in its parts, and this ascension is general as well as particular. It rises to the highest peaks of absolute good.

What we now realize, as Kuk, Bergson, Aurobindo, de Chardin, Gebser, and so many others have shown, is that "all dimensions of reality" are evolving. We realize that consciousness itself is developing. Evolution is not the enemy of the mystery. Evolution is the mechanism of the mystery. This is the great paradox and lived koan of evolution and eternity. The enlightened realization of the Kabbalists, who realized that consciousness itself evolves through us, dramatically influenced Fichte,



Schelling, and the other German Idealists who are the modern founders of Evolutionary Spirituality.

But what was an esoteric realization held by an elite few has itself dramatically evolved. We now realize that evolution takes place in the biosphere itself. And the evolution taking place in the biosphere is an expression of the evolution, which is the very nature of all levels of reality. Moreover: What Kuk understood about all levels of reality evolving, we are now able to ground in empirical cross-cultural research — called structuralism — which reveals the unfolding stages of consciousness through human history. I am able today to identify distinct levels in the evolution of Consciousness, as revealed by the cross-cultural research of contemporary developmental theorists including Jean Gebser, Clare Graves, Jean Piaget, Jane Loevinger, Suzanne Cook-Greuter, and many more.

Religion and Spirituality are expressions of consciousness. If consciousness is evolving in distinct stages, then it is obvious and readily apparent that religion must be evolving in those very same stages. So it is clear as day that when I say “religion” I need to identify what kind of religion I am talking about. I am talking about what Jean Gebser called Mythic Religion, or about Rational Religion, Pluralistic Religion, or Integral Religion. Each one of these levels, or stages of development — mythic, rational, pluralistic, and Integral — refracts the core and profound insights of religion through its own particular level of consciousness. Each one transcends and includes the previous level of consciousness. Okay, you ask, what does that mean in practical terms?

Let me give you an example of why this matters so much. For the religions at all of these levels, kindness is a core value. There is a clear spiritual obligation to kindness that is expressed at all four of these evolutionary levels of consciousness. But what kindness means differs substantively at each level. The simplest expression of this distinction is that at the mythic level of religion the primary obligation to kindness is limited to those of one’s own faith community. And while it may be extended to others through this or that method of hermeneutic expansion, the core community of concern to which one is obligated to be kind remains the particular faith community of which one is a part.

A second example: In a wonderfully made home movie on ancient China, which was ruled by mythic religious consciousness, the hero is an enlightened Chinese patriarch who is in a deep love relationship with his consort. At some point in the plot his consort disobeys him. He beats her with a cane, all the while shedding tears but realizing that this is what he must do. When he finishes, she thanks him for his “kindness.” At the mythic level of consciousness, the violation of masculine authority by the feminine was understood to require beating as an appropriate response. And such beating was understood to be an expression of kindness.

At the level of rational religion — when the consciousness of western Enlightenment comes online, kindness extends beyond the particular faith community. And because the first wave of proto-feminism began to show its head as one of the expressions of deepening human rights, the notion that a man would beat his wife for disobedience, as an act of kindness, slowly becomes not only absurd but also abusive, illegal, and actionable. However, at the level of rational religion, sharp distinctions between the genders remain in place, and women are still not equal in any sense. Kindness to the feminine does not include, for example, equal pay for equal time or a host of other basic rights.

At the pluralistic level of religious consciousness, the obligation to personal kindness extends both beyond narrow faith communities and transcends gender distinctions and all sexual orientations. Kindness itself has evolved. However, the pluralistic level of religion, to a large extent, lost the ability to make discernments and penetrating judgments to reflect natural hierarchies between values, lifestyles, moral choices, or forms of government. All forms of rankings are considered, by definition, unkind or worse. This resulted in a liberal abandonment of values. The tragic upshot is that the religious right *per se* hijacked values. Moreover, the sense of spiritual and religious obligation to kindness, and to specific sets of actions that support personal acts of kindness, was undermined initially in rational religion, and most dramatically in pluralistic levels of spirituality and consciousness. The result again is that self-help and community-based welfare organizations, as part and parcel of an organized community, abound on the religious right, which holds a premodern, largely mythic view of religion. These are almost entirely absent in the fragmented and diffuse community structures of the liberal left, which is rooted, if at all, in rational or pluralistic modes of religion.

It is only at the Integral level of consciousness that kindness evolves once again in a way, which transcends both gender discrimination, and all the limitations of ethnocentric mythic religion. Moreover, at the Integral level of consciousness the obligation to kindness, both as a general virtue and as it relates to specific acts of kindness, is reclaimed. Indeed it is only at the Integral level of consciousness that a significant post-mythic and post-rational notion of genuine obligation is reclaimed at all.

### ***World Spirituality Transcends and Includes the Perennial Philosophy***

Said slightly differently, World Spirituality = Perennial Philosophy in an Evolutionary Context, with all that this implies. To spell out all of the implications would take more space than I have available in this communication. But let us at least make some key points on this utterly essential issue.

Now do not misunderstand this point. The premodern traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and other great religions including Islam, are wildly deep on many levels. The premodern traditions are radically profound at a level of interior understanding, which is most likely beyond anything we know today in our

interior reaches. The radical inner focus on spirit in the premodern age, some would say, the receptivity to the graces of revelation, yielded a depth of interior vision and knowing which is virtually beyond imagination. At this same time the mainstream of all these traditions remained premodern in many essential ways which includes ethnocentricity, various forms of the marginalization of the feminine, a lack of historical consciousness, a profound disparity between the elite and the common person, an underdeveloped sense of human rights and much more. Each system at its core believed that its truth was primary, if not exclusive, and that in time history would validate its truth claim as the only authentic truth claim. And it is precisely that form of premodern religion that is once again spreading around the globe with disastrous results, as evidenced in the meteoric rise of fundamentalisms world over. So to develop a World Spirituality, which shares the best of the pre-modern traditions while a correct evolutionary step in the right direction is certainly not the goal of an emergent and evolving world spirituality.

Rather, as we have already insisted, we want a world Spirituality that shared the best of premodern, modern, and postmodern insight. That would be an enormous leap in the evolution of consciousness. Let's bring on board in World Spirituality the deepest insights of all the great traditions including all of the great modern and postmodern traditions. This would include the best insights of psychology and psychoanalysis not least of which would recognize and actively engaging what Freud called the unconscious and Jung called the shadow. It would also include fantastic advances in family systems, economics, law, the healing arts, negotiation theory and conflict resolution as well as the best insights of systems and chaos theory. It would naturally embrace all of the best insights of modern science. It would include critical advances in health care, forms of governances, and human rights. It would include the leading-edge understandings in the postmodern disciplines of hermeneutics, phenomenology, metrics and developmental thought. This understanding of World Spirituality as embracing the best of premodern and postmodern traditions brings online the evolutionary emergent of Unique Self as a core element in an emergent World Spirituality.

### ***The Evolutionary Emergence of Unique Self and World Spirituality***

Unique Self, as we have said, is an essential lodestone of World Spirituality. Like World Spirituality, Unique Self is an evolutionary emergent which transcends and includes all that comes before it. Unique Self emerges from an integration of a number of distinct streams of knowing. Unique Self transcends any particular lineage tradition even as it is uniquely anticipated in key lineage and cultural traditions that preceded it. Unique Self emerges from the deepest insights of premodern enlightenment teaching. Unique Self emerges from modern ideas of individuality, the rights of man and the democratization of power and a growing awareness of the centrality of evolutionary idea in all realms of thought. Unique Self emerges as well as from the postmodern notions of context, evolutionary context and Unique Perspective as essential components in the post-metaphysical ontology

of all meaning making. The personal life project of Unique Self which invites and obligates individuals in the name of spirit to live their Unique Story and give their Unique Gifts for the sake of the All. It is an ultimate expression of Spirit, which cuts across lineage and cultural lines. Unique Self offers a simple yet profound shared spiritual language of World Spirituality that is both accessible and compelling. It addresses the deepest yearning of the human being: to live a life that matters.

### ***World Spirituality: An Urgent Need***

World Spirituality of this kind is urgently needed today to heal the fragmentation that lies at the very core of the world's heart. It is only this kind of leading-edge evolutionary emergent which will have a wide enough embrace to catalyze a shared world commons. It is only from the space of shared world commons that we can write a new source code of human culture rooted in ever-higher levels of mutuality, recognition, union and embrace. It is only such a World Spirituality rooted in such a source code, which will be powerful enough to catalyze this urgently vital evolution of love. It is only through the evolution of love, which is the evolution of consciousness, which is the evolution of God that we will be able to inspire and write a new Cosmic Scroll. An evolving great story which will provide a framework of meaning, obligation and joy for hundreds of millions of people who are currently cast adrift on the shores of relativism and the implicitly deconstructions of all worldviews and big pictures.

It is only such a new Cosmic Scroll which allows us a glimpse at the pattern that connects and makes meaning of our lives inviting us to higher joy and responsibility. It is only in a new Cosmic Scroll that all the great religions and all the great systems of knowing and doing will have a place and will therefore no longer seek to usurp the place of an other. It is only in the context of such a Cosmic Scroll that every unique human being will have a dignified, honored, and beloved place. It is only the democratization of enlightenment as the core teaching of that new Scroll which will send ripples of healing presence and peace across the globe.

### ***Evolving World Spirituality is the urgent need and great adventure of our time.***

The yearning to articulate World Spirituality is rippling across the globe in the hearts and minds of tens of millions of people. For some people, the classical religions have lost their power. They seek a path of practice and commitment that transcends the traditions. For others, their intuitive desire is to transcend and include the traditions. They seek to live as dual citizens, rooted in their tradition, even as they locate themselves as citizens in the broader community of World Spirituality.

A World Spirituality based on Integral Evolutionary principles, rooted in the shared truths held to be self-evident by all great systems of spirit and gnosis across historical time, is urgently needed at this moment in history. Evolving an authentic life rooted in commitment and freedom articulated and lived in the principles and practices of World Spirituality is the next great step in spirit's unfolding.

The Center for Integral Wisdom is writing a series of groundbreaking books and creating new templates for spiritual practice, education, and community. The templates are at once rooted in the past, present, and future. Emerging from an integration of the leading-edge emergent evolutionary insights taught by spirituality, psychology, and the sciences, World Spirituality paves the way for the next stage of evolution, seeding the ground of hope that is our collective memory of the future.

In day-to-day practice, the Center for Integral Wisdom functions primarily as an academic and public policy action think-tank. Its aim is to catalyze, host, and evolve the trans-lineage conversation within the Integral, Evolutionary and broader spiritual and cultural communities with the clear intent of humbly and audaciously participating in the evolution of consciousness. I believe World Spirituality is necessary for the next stage of humanity's evolution. Let it be so!

<sup>1</sup> Ken Wilber and I just has an awesome and spirited discussion about this precise point, a few days ago during one of a series of regular private dialogues which humbly and tentatively seek to lay the foundation of an emergent World Spirituality. All of the insights that emerge from these dialogues are evolving a vision of a World Spirituality based on Integral Principles. Ken is both a co-catalyst and active leading intellectual force and inspiration and in the emergence of this movement. We are currently preparing a book to formally outline the theoretical underpinning of a World Spirituality based on Integral principles.