

## What are **States** and **Stages** of consciousness... *and why might it matter to me?*

People involved with researching human development have been faced with a riddle over the last 30 years or so. Ken Wilber uses a book called *Zen at War* to detail this conundrum. The book describes the behavior of very advanced Japanese Zen meditation practitioners in the Second World War. Their behavior would be described as ethnocentric and nationalistic.. i.e. focused upon taking sides with **their** perceived group against another group they did not identify with – something that today may well be described as racist. It brought the question of how people who held disciplined and dedicated meditation practices could exhibit such behavior?

The answer to this riddle has come from people bringing together the study of developmental psychology and the great spiritual traditions. What it shows is that spiritual development has **two** components of awareness – **states** of consciousness (with development methods such as meditation and contemplation from Eastern traditions) and **stages** of consciousness (the lens of the mind through which ALL states are interpreted). People can be directly aware of the experience of their states, without any awareness at all that these are being interpreted through their stage lens.

For over 100 years developmental psychologists have been focusing upon studying how human beings 'grow up' through these stages. People such as Jean Piaget, Jean Gebser, Clare Graves, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Jane Loevinger, Carol Gilligan, James Fowler and Robert Kegan have conducted very extensive research on people, enquiring into human qualities such as cognition, self-identity, morality, values and faith. All of them found the same pattern - that these qualities (sometimes called lines of development) grow in distinct stages that have a direction of growth. As these lines grow they give a centre of gravity to human consciousness known as their vertical **stage** of consciousness. To use a musical analogy, the stage of consciousness is therefore like a collection of strings being plucked by life - more of a chord than a note.

A stage **centre of gravity** will be made up from the development of a number of different lines (some of which can be at stages ahead and some stages behind). The main lines of development are often referred to as cognitive, logical, emotional, interpersonal, intrapersonal, moral, spiritual and will. Different life conditions encourage the growth or suppression of different lines. These life conditions (nature) and the stages of consciousness are therefore **co-creative**. The overall stage of consciousness is always led by the growth of the cognitive line which itself has to be empowered by focused will. The cognitive line is the ability to take and include more and more perspectives – **to open more doors within**.

Don Beck used research into the development of human values conducted by Professor Clare Graves to form the spiral dynamics model that is used as a tool to describe this vertical stage development – how humans **grow up**. This discovery was made using the predominantly Western scientific method of question, observation and recording over time. These stages could not be discovered by the spiritual traditions as they were on the inside looking out, rather than the scientific method of being on the outside, looking in. Bringing them together brings more wholeness through synthesis.

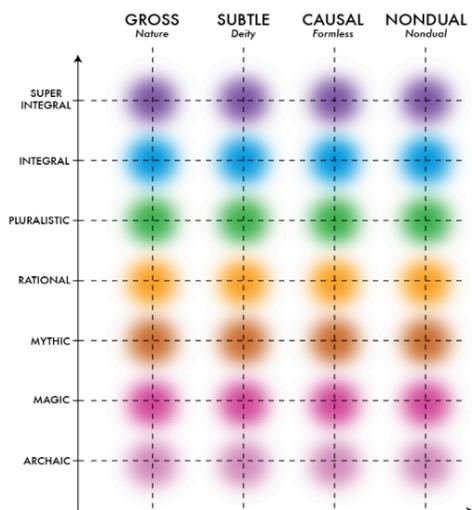
Over a much longer period, spiritual traditions have been mapping human **states** of consciousness achieved through such practices as meditation. This is the pathway of '**waking up**'. Ken Wilber shows that most spiritual traditions identify 4 or 5 distinct states of consciousness. States are exclusive in the same way as you can't be drunk and sober at the same time. States are also fully available at any stage of consciousness. For example, a person at spiral dynamics orange (worldcentric achievement / business) or blue (ethnocentric religion / rules and order) can still have a state experience that could

be defined as non-dual. Hence why Japanese Zen Masters during World War Two could still exhibit ethnocentric behavior. Their highly advanced states of consciousness were being interpreted through their still ethnocentric stage of consciousness. All thoughts and feelings are filtered through the stage as all language is a learnt structure and so is of the mind. As stages emerge, the lenses gets progressively clearer and clearer, reducing the fragmentation of perception. Regular state practice is said to be very supportive to the emergence of clearer lenses.

Recognising that all state experiences and processes are being filtered through a stage lens is very relevant if groups of people are experiencing challenging life conditions. People with the same stages of consciousness tend to group together strongly, particularly with the **green** (care and community) stage. Over time, the lesser developed or repressed lines of development will also manifest into external life conditions as **love is brought into action**. These challenges can only be solved with a clearer lens that allows deeper perception. As Einstein said, “We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”. Meditation, attunement or process towards vertical movement may still be coloured by the very lens that is creating the challenging life conditions. However, the lens can be reprogrammed with new cognitive information from the awareness of the next stage view to encourage a new cognitive space to open. However, this can be challenging as stage lenses tend to reject the view of most other stage lenses, even those that are from the next step on the pathway.

Some traditions such as Integral Mondo Zen have incorporated this new awareness. They still hold the vital state meditation practice to connect with the heart – to wake up, but also hold the view that lenses have been programmed and therefore can be deprogrammed and reprogrammed. A practice of waking up, growing up and cleaning up the shadow is advocated. Integral Mondo Zen has a full traceable lineage back to the Buddha and this subtle shift has sometimes been termed the fourth great turning of Buddhism (see the Integral Life website for more details).

The discovery that there are both states and stages involved with spiritual development was brought together by consciousness researcher Allan Combs and Ken Wilber in a simple diagram called the Wilber-Combs lattice, as shown below. For further information see the book Integral Spirituality by Ken Wilber.



If you are interested in integral ideas for people living on communities, there is a Facebook page you are welcome to join called 'Centres Integral'. Many thanks, Jonathan Dover. [www.integralview.co.uk](http://www.integralview.co.uk)