

## Chapter 3: Evolution and Beyond

As I pointed out in the two preceding chapters, I am not against hierarchy and either/or logic; I only think that there are still other ways of viewing the Kosmos. Likewise, I am not against evolution—how could I, as a biologist, be against evolution! But I think that, in addition to evolution, there are still other ways of viewing and experiencing existence. And these other ways are highly important for attaining a more deeply fulfilled life.

### Evolution

Wilber's AQAL map is evolutionary: it describes three or four major dimensions of evolution, beginning with the Big Bang in the center of the map (see Figure I–3). The scientific dimension, in the upper right quadrant, represents the evolution from atoms to molecules to cells to organisms with increasingly complex brains. In the lower left quadrant, the corresponding environments for this evolution are enumerated; they begin with galaxies, then planets, then Gaia systems and eventually, after many stages, more and more integrated states culminating in a planetary state. It should be noted that galaxies, including stars, are the environment for the evolution of atoms, planets for molecules, Gaia systems for prokaryotic cells such as bacterial cells, heterotrophic ecosystems for more highly evolved organisms, and so on. The numbers in the map of Figure I–3 indicate which levels correspond with one another in different quadrants. The upper left quadrant describes the evolution of individual consciousness. Thirteen stages are enumerated in Figure I–3, but Wilber emphasizes that there are four additional transpersonal levels: the psychic, subtle, causal (formless) and nondual levels. The nondual level is the level of pure Being, absolute Oneness that transcends the One and the Many, One Taste (Wilber 2000c). It is not a level comparable to the other levels but rather the Ground of all levels (see Introduction). The lower left quadrant illustrates cultural evolution in thirteen stages. The 13th stage corresponds with vision-logic, which is the last stage of personal consciousness before it enters the transpersonal levels.

### Beyond Evolution

In Wilber's evolutionary map personal consciousness evolves from the experience of the Many in the first thirteen stages to mystical stages and absolute Oneness; in short, from the Many to the One. The reverse is called involution. Wilber emphasized the importance of involution in his books, but does not indicate it explicitly in his map. In his

map all the arrows go from the Big Bang to the most highly evolved stages including the causal (formless) level and absolute Oneness.

It is important to distinguish two kinds of involution: 1. involution that, like evolution, occurs in time; and 2. involution beyond time. Thomas J. McFarlane (unpublished manuscript) pointed out that in the Great Chain of Being of the perennial philosophy—which is of central importance to Wilber—evolution is also seen within or beyond time. Thus, McFarlane presented evolution and involution by the following scheme:

	atemporal	temporal
Involution	process of manifestation in the eternal present: One to Many	process of manifestation in time: One to Many
Evolution	process of dissolution in the eternal present: Many to One	process of complexification* in time: Many to One

\* It should be noted that evolution can also be a process of simplification.

Wilber's writings are in agreement with McFarlane's scheme, but Wilber's map is not because it is only evolutionary in time. Let us now examine the other three aspects in the above scheme: involution in time, and involution and evolution in the eternal present.

### Involution in Time

Involution in time is the movement from the One to the Many. Let me illustrate it by two examples. According to Wilber's map, evolution begins with atoms at the lowest level in the upper right quadrant. McFarlane (unpublished manuscript) points out, however, that atoms are formed only after a cosmic process of involution from a primordial One. He claims that according to our current understanding based on general relativity and the standard model of elementary particles and forces, "the cosmos manifested from a unity and an explicit symmetry of forces, and progressed through stages of symmetry breaking that veiled the unity of the forces to leave a universe of apparent multiplicity of forces and types of particles, and only then began an evolutionary process of complexification that produced galaxies, solar systems, life, and so on" (see also McFarlane 1998).

Another example of involution in time is given by Wilber (1998: 156-161) with regard to the waking state, dreams, and dreamless deep sleep. Evolution from the Many to the

One occurs as we fall asleep. First the body goes to sleep, but the mind and soul remain active in dreams. Then the mind and soul fall asleep resulting in dreamless sleep and that leaves only the formless which is also called the witness that is beyond form, beyond the Many. Now, as we return from the oneness of dreamless sleep to the waking state, involution occurs: the soul and mind awaken from their sleep in the formless, and dreaming can begin again; finally the body wakes up. Thus, involution has occurred from the formless in dreamless sleep to the many manifestations of the soul, the mind, and finally the body. Note that this is exactly the reverse of the sequence of stages of body, mind, soul, and spirit (the formless) in one of the many versions of Wilber's map.

Wilber (1998: 157) also pointed out that according to the "Tibetan Book of the Dead" death and rebirth involve the same sequences of evolution and involution that occur when we go into deep dreamless sleep and wake up again: during the process of death, the body dissolves into mind/soul which dissolves into the formless, and, if karma is present, it leads to rebirth in which the formless gives rise to soul/mind and that to the body. As one passes through these sequences one usually forgets the preceding states. Thus, mind/soul does not remember the formless and the body forgets the formless and perhaps even mind/soul. This forgetting happens not only in rebirth, but also when we wake up from deep sleep. As we return to the soul and mind in dreams, we may have already forgotten the formless, and thus identify with the soul and mind because we think that is all there is. And as we wake up, we may not even remember our dreams or only fragments of them and thus identify with our body, falsely assuming that the body and the material world are the ultimate reality. However, Wilber points out that as we advance in meditation we will be able to retain awareness of the formless, the witness, while awake and even in dreams which he calls pellucid dreaming ("in lucid dreaming, there is usually a tendency to play out egoic impulses in the dream: you imagine orgies, fame, food, flying, whatever turns your ego on" [Wilber 1998: 158]).

Because of the parallels between the waking-dreaming-deep sleep cycle and death-rebirth, it has been said that if we can remain conscious during dreaming and deep sleep, we can also remain conscious during death and rebirth and therefore be able to choose our rebirth. But mastering death and rebirth "is, at best, an aid to the ultimate goal: the recognition of One Taste. For only in One Taste does one step off that brutal cycle altogether, there to rest as the All" (Wilber 1998: 158).

According to Wilber, the stages that lead to One Taste are as follows: At first, through meditation, one develops the ability to be mindful, that is, to remain a witness in

large portions of the waking state. Then one can carry this mindfulness into the dream state, which will lead to pellucid dreaming. Eventually awareness will even be possible in deep dreamless sleep. This constant awareness is called Turiya, the fourth state. In it there is still a subtle dualism between the witness and that which is witnessed, or awareness and its contents, emptiness and form. This dualism is only overcome in One Taste, appropriately also called the Nondual or the Turiyatita. In One Taste emptiness of the witness, the formless, is one with the manifold world of form. "Arhats have the Formless, the ordinary have form, Buddhas have both in One Taste" (Wilber 1998: 159). The difference between having the formless, which is witnessing, and One Taste is that in witnessing one is aware of whatever arises, whereas in One Taste one simply *is* all that arises.

To some readers it might have seemed inconsistent that after my criticism of levels and hierarchies in the preceding chapters I described involution in terms of Wilber's stages or levels in his hierarchy. However, I want to emphasize once more that I am not totally against hierarchy. Hierarchy is one way to describe one aspect of manifest reality. But there are also nonhierarchical ways and in the following section on involution and evolution in the eternal present the focus will be on these ways.

### **Involution and Evolution in the Eternal Present**

What is the eternal present? How can the present be eternal? First of all, it has to be understood that eternity does not mean infinity in time or everlasting time. Eternity in this context means beyond time. Thus, when we are totally in the present, instead of thinking of the past or future, we are in eternity, which is beyond thought because thought is in time; and it is beyond ego because ego is in thought and time. Deep meditation can open the door to eternity and even daily experiences like watching a sunset and being totally with it, losing oneself in someone's eyes, or being totally absorbed with a flower can give us glimpses of eternity.

How are involution and evolution possible in the eternal present? In time, involution moves from the One to the Many and evolution from the Many to the One. Beyond time, that is, in the eternal present, such movement stops because movement can only occur in time. In the eternal present the One *is* the Many and the Many *is* the One. What is meant here by the One is the formless, the witness, emptiness, not the absolute One, One Taste. And the Many is form. Thus, instead of the One and the Many, we could refer to emptiness and form, which leads us to the wisdom of the Heart Sutra:

Form is emptiness  
And emptiness is form

When form *is* emptiness and emptiness *is* form, any dualism of emptiness and form, the One and the Many has been transcended. Now there is just One Taste.

Wilber is very much aware of involution and evolution in the eternal present and writes beautifully about it. Chapter 9 in his “Sex, Ecology, Spirituality” (Wilber 2000a) is entitled “The way up is the way down”, a statement by Heraclitus meaning that evolution is involution. This equation is possible beyond time, in the eternal present.

Wilber (2000a: 337) also points out that the oneness of emptiness and form, the One and the Many, entails the oneness of wisdom and compassion because “wisdom sees that the Many is One, compassion knows that the One is the Many; that the One is expressed *equally* in each and every being, and so each is to be treated with compassion and care” (Wilber 2000a: 337).

Wilber sees the One and the Many in the context of hierarchy, the One being higher than the Many. However, they can also be seen in a nonhierarchical way as polar opposites such as positive and negative. The positive need not have a higher ranking than the negative just as Yang is not considered higher than Yin: they are different and in their difference they complement each other. Yin and Yang are transcended in Dao. This transcendence could be seen as a rudimentary two-level hierarchy. But since it leads into Dao, that which cannot be talked about, we should not call it anything, which means that it neither is nor is it not a hierarchy: it is beyond the namable.

### **Fulfillment and Peace**

Being aware of involution is important because the lower levels find their higher meaning only in reference to the higher levels, especially the highest level which is the One. However, since the lower levels are stepped-down or diluted versions of the higher levels, they tend to forget their origin from the One and this leads to the world of forgetfulness, fragmentation, misery, conflict, and war. Peace and fulfillment can only be attained through the evolution toward the One. “Then that which was dis-membered, fragmented, and forgotten during involution is re-membered, reunited, made whole, and realized during evolution” (Wilber 2006: 218).

Wilber (2005d, Disc 2, 12/13) pointed out that in the world of the Many the finite self is driven by hope and fear—hope to become more complete, and fear to lose even more. In that world there is no lasting peace and no total fulfillment. However, being

aware of and resting in the One creates peace and fulfillment even in the world of the Many because in the vast spaciousness of the infinite One nothing is lacking and thus there is no place and no need for hope and fear. In other words, if we rest in infinity, finite things including the finite self are fine, provided we do not identify with them but simply see them as arising from the infinity. This is the embrace of the One and the Many in the eternal present. It endows us with the "power of now" (Tolle 1997).

### Conclusions

Evolution, if it includes evolution toward transpersonal experience of Oneness, is the movement from the Many to the One, the formless, emptiness in the Buddhist sense. This movement occurs in time. Involution is the opposite of evolution: the movement from the One to the Many as it happens, for example, when we wake up into a world of the Many from deep dreamless sleep in which we reached the One. Although we usually think of evolution and involution (if we consider involution at all) as events in time, both evolution and involution occur also beyond time in the eternal present. When this happens, the way up from the Many to the One *is* the way down from the One to the Many, The One *is* the Many, emptiness *is* form, and all dualism is transcended in One Taste.

Although Wilber recognizes that evolution and involution may occur in time and beyond time in the eternal present, his AQAL map represents only evolution in time. All stages in the four quadrants evolve in time after the Big Bang. All arrows in the four quadrants are arrows of time. Obviously **a more comprehensive map of the Kosmos has to go beyond evolution in time. It has to include both evolution and involution, in time and in the eternal present.**

**Lasting peace and fulfillment can only be attained through a total embrace of the One and the Many in the eternal present. In such an embrace both hope and fear vanish because in the infinite One nothing is lacking.**