

## Levels of Development

Richard Rohr

“We worshipped Jesus instead of following him on his same path. We made Jesus into a mere religion instead of a journey toward union with God and everything else. This shift had us into a religion of belonging and believing instead of a religion of transformation.” Richard Rohr

Richard Rohr is a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation ([www.cac.org](http://www.cac.org)) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he also serves as Academic Dean of the Living School for Action and Contemplation.

~~~~~

### Growing into Union

Thursday, December 10, 2015

(Thomas Merton Day)

So many of our problems can be resolved if we understand that people are at different levels of emotional, mental, and spiritual maturity. I am told that United States diplomats are given an intense course in Spiral Dynamics before they are sent to other countries because they need to have some empathy for the levels of development they are likely to find there. I remember how horrifying it was for me and a group of missionaries overseas, standing outside a couple's home when I realized that our presence was keeping the man from beating his wife inside. We knew as soon as we walked away he'd continue, and there was little we could do to change the whole culture.

When I later asked the woman, "Why do you let your husband do that?"

She replied, "Because I was bad, Father."

"Who decided you were bad?"

"He did, Father."

I know it blows your mind, but this is early stage consciousness, which is all about power and staying at your proper level. Whoever wields the power is considered to be right. In many if not most cultures, men have had all the power and women submitted to this, because that's the way patriarchal systems function.

But who are we to judge? It was only a little more than a hundred years ago that people in the United

States, people who called themselves Christian (including Jesuits on the East coast), not only tolerated slavery, but had slaves. Even though most Americans have moved beyond considering humans as property, we still have a long way to go in terms of true racial and gender equality. A significant number of Americans are still at the early Purple and Red levels, which we will explore next week. Spiral Dynamics risks appearing to be politically incorrect, but without anger or violence.

I am offering you these levels of development as a tool for understanding yourself, others, and history; but please know that it does not come close to describing the complexity and the subtlety of the human person or the spiritual journey. Also recognize that the ego wants to decide its level, and it's very likely to pick a high one--which is ironic, because at the highest levels of development, the ego is less and less interested in categorizing things up and down. It is in many ways artificial and even unhealthy to talk about higher and lower levels because this will appeal to the small self and lead to assessing ourselves in ways that are fundamentally untrue. Yet, we do need to understand development so we can see where the trajectory of growth is heading--toward union with God, others, creation, and our own mind, heart and body. Otherwise we have no criteria by which to discern maturity from sickness. Without this awareness, many unhealthy people have led both churches and countries. This is the danger and also the need for a developmental theory.

It is also important to distinguish between stages and states. You can have a momentary state of unitive or high level consciousness, where you experience your union with God, with other humans, and with animals, the sun, the moon, and the stars. But a

momentary state doesn't mean you've practiced it and changed your hardwiring so that it has become a lasting stage. A momentary state has to be practiced for years before it can become a genuine new stage of consciousness. And still it's up to God, grace, time, love, and suffering to nudge you forward and to keep you there. Even then, at times--for example, when we're hungry, angry, lonely, tired (H.A.L.T.)--we all backslide. Knowing this will help you understand and forgive yourself and others.

### ***Gateway to Silence***

I am open to change.

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Growing-into-Union.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=ySwOmDs8K9Y>  
12/13/15

### ● ● **Early Lower Levels of Development: Beige/Instinctive and Purple/Magical** Sunday, December 13, 2015

This week I will be describing my understanding of the stages of development outlined by Spiral Dynamics, which were popularized by Don Beck and now taught widely by Ken Wilber and others. As I mentioned last week, we may have momentary states at different levels of consciousness, but it takes practice and life's urging to keep our mind naturally and regularly at more mature stages. Even then we may return to a previous stage in a stressful situation. We can observe these levels not only in personal human development, but in the evolution of history and cultures themselves.

The spiral begins with the lowest tier of subsistence levels. The first of these is called the Beige level, which is the Instinctive/Survivalistic level. Its basic theme is "Do what you must just to stay alive" with a preference for pleasure over pain. Looking backward, we see our species, Homo sapiens, was probably situated at this level of consciousness 100,000 years ago. And this is also where we start as infants. At this primal stage there is no differentiation from your mother or from nature; she is you and you are her. Here there is a sense of absorption and innocence, a naïveté about reality. This is home base, security, and comfort. Life is all about your own bodily pleasure and survival. Thinking at this stage is dualistic and egocentric, as it needs to be. Only 0.1% of adults worldwide remain at this level. Of course, such survival instincts must be activated in any of us for emergency situations.

The second level of Spiral Dynamics is the Purple or Magical/Animistic level. Here, life is a world of magical good and bad forces. Your goal at this level is to align with the right forces, to have the right gods on your side. You want to have the power and to be on the side of good and defeat evil. We often see little boys at this level who want to be superheroes and little girls who want to be princesses. The basic idea is to "Keep the gods happy and the tribe's nest warm and safe." The individual is not as important as the group; belonging to the group gives the individual a sense of identity and safety.

The Purple, Magical/Animistic level began about 50,000 years ago. Don Beck says that at this point in human evolution, "a mutation occurred to awaken in the brain the first real ability to assign cause and effect. This was the first sense of the metaphysical." It became important to honor and obey the spirit-being and the group's leaders, rituals, and customs. Sacred objects, symbols, places, rituals, and stories must be preserved. The Magical/Animistic level appeared in popular Catholicism throughout the Middle Ages. Approximately 10% of the world's population and 1% of the world's power is still at this Purple level.

Every level has a good and appropriate value and a negative quality. We must learn to transcend the negative part--moving on to the next higher stage, the bigger field--while including the good part of the previous stage. But we can really only do this consciously once we've reached second tier, non-dualistic thinking, beginning at the seventh level. Up until that point, we tend to especially over-react against the stage we just completed--as does history itself.

When you move beyond the Purple level, hopefully you transcend the idea of God as a spirit you can coax and control by magic and superstition. An enlightened person at the higher levels also realizes that you don't have to react against that idea or put people down who are still at that level. Most people see their own level as the only way and previous levels as totally wrong. This is our foundational narcissism. Yet higher level, non-dualistic thinkers can still include parts of the Purple level. For example, perhaps wearing a cross or a medal of a saint can help your focus, attention, and identity, and does not have to be a magical totem; rituals can help heal the psyche and form community; and, as we

explored earlier this year, myths can hold great archetypal meaning. Sophisticated later stages need to stop over-reacting against the good and appropriate values of the purple level. Wilber's phrase "transcend and include" is the ongoing principle

### ***Gateway to Silence***

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Early-Levels--Instinctive-and-Magical.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=kK6xtA6Fn7c>  
12/13/15

### ● **Red Level: The Impulsive Hero**

Monday, December 14, 2015

The third level of development in Spiral Dynamics is the Red or Impulsive/Egocentric level. This is where the individual first realizes that he or she is distinct from the tribe and breaks free from group constraints. This level first emerged 10,000 years ago. The basic theme of the Red level is to "Be what you are and do what you want, regardless." People at the Red level enjoy themselves to the fullest, without feeling guilty. The individual feels "I have the ability to control and manipulate the good and bad forces." He or she conquers and dominates other aggressors.

At the Red level, powerful, impulsive, egocentric, heroic individuals emerge. This was the basis of feudal empires in the West, where "Feudal lords protect underlings in exchange for obedience and labor." We see examples of the Red level in "the 'terrible twos,' rebellious youth, . . . James Bond villains, soldiers of fortune, wild rock stars, Attila the Hun, Lord of the Flies." Twenty percent of the world's adult population and 5% of world power are still at the Red level.

As I mentioned before, each movement forward tends to throw out the previous stages, and the immediately preceding stage it throws out with a vengeance! This has been the way with most revolutions and reformations up to now. The Red level, early Protestant Reformation reacted against the Purple level of popular Catholicism--to create the modern individual--and threw out things like icons, statues, the rosary, and what they saw as the "magical" transubstantiation of the bread and the wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Individual reformers were seen as heroes, rescuing the people from tribal belonging systems and forced membership. This had

to happen to move forward. The movement had to "protest" against the previous level.

According to Don Beck, what is good about the Red level, which will hopefully be included at the higher stages, are "wonderful spurts of creativity, heroic acts, and the ability to break from tradition and chart a whole new pathway." We need to go through and integrate some good Red level characteristics to grow up!

### ***Gateway to Silence***

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Red--The-Impulsive-Hero.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=i5Ges3wOtIQ>  
12/16/15

### ● **Blue Level: Our Mythic Truth**

Tuesday, December 15, 2015

The fourth level of Spiral Dynamics is the Blue or Purposeful/Authoritarian level, which began approximately 5,000 years ago. I like to call it Our Mythic Truth. Here one discovers a deeper source of meaning, direction, and purpose that holds us together: creeds, codes, and cults. The Blue world is a secure existence of unquestioned truth "with outcomes determined by an all-powerful Other or Order." These are the "true believers," the concrete-literal fundamentalists who love certitude and knowing who is right and who is wrong. Of course, they know they are right and will be rewarded for being right. However, as Pope Francis said while traveling in Africa recently, "Fundamentalism is always a tragedy. It is not religious, it lacks God, it is idolatrous . . . Such people think they know absolute truth and thus they corrupt religion." This is the world of flags and unquestioned group believing. There is only one right way to think in the Blue level. It is very tribal.

The Blue existence is structured by laws, regulations, and discipline. Violating the rules has serious repercussions, both now and forever. Guilt is used to keep everyone in line. People at the Blue level are comfortable with rigid social hierarchies. These people are loyalists, for good and for ill. They are willing to sacrifice for the transcendent cause. It creates religious fundamentalists, joiners, and patriots. Blue makes up 40% of the world's population and 30% of world power.

People who grow beyond this level hopefully let go of the idea that religion and security imply doggedly holding out and holding on to unquestionable beliefs. Yet the patience, perseverance, loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice found at the Blue level are well worth keeping.

In order to get beyond this level, people must undergo some sort of minor death to their egocentricity. Unfortunately, many do not undergo this necessary small death, leaving many narcissistic personalities inside Christianity who buy the Christian myth as a highly egocentric form of delayed gratification, so they can win in the end and "go to heaven." There is no love required for this; it's simply another way of winning and being in control, yet it has passed for "faith" for centuries because almost all of us were at the Blue level until the 1960's.

If you allow life to help you die to your egocentricity, you can move beyond the egocentric levels into the sociocentric levels of development. The most common life circumstance that offers death to the ego is marriage. If you marry with any sincerity and are honest about relationship, you are giving up half of your egocentricity. If marriage doesn't convert you, these wonderful little beings called children often come along and take away your egocentricity for at least the next twenty years! That's why I think most people are called to marriage and child rearing. It's the surest path to death of the ego, if you really allow your partner and children to mirror you, revealing your ordinary and weak self, and also helping you to experience unconditional love. Life has a way of revealing that you are not the center of anything and forcing you to give up control. We must keep growing--and that always implies death to the previous level--which many just will not do. Again and again we must move beyond our narcissism.

### ***Gateway to Silence***

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Blue--Our-Mythic-Truth.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=IG8J09loPtA>  
12/19/15

### **● Orange Level: Rational Organization**

Wednesday, December 16, 2015

The fifth level of development, what Spiral Dynamics calls the Orange or Achievist/Strategic

level, began about 300 years ago. You can also call it the Rational/Organizational level. Ken Wilber writes, "At this wave, the self 'escapes' from the 'herd mentality' of blue, and seeks truth and meaning in individualistic terms-- . . . experimental, objective, mechanistic, operational--'scientific' in the typical sense." (Perhaps you have noticed that the levels keep moving from individualistic to group oriented and back again.) Society as a whole decided that if we became rational, organizational, effective, intelligent, and educated that would do it. That's the myth of modernism. Most of corporate America is at the Orange level. This strategic approach is needed in order to be effective in business, engineering, and medicine.

The basic theme of the Orange level is to "Act in your own self-interest by playing the game to win." At this stage, it is believed that people who are self-reliant, educated, and willing to take risks will "win." Societies will prosper through competitiveness and technology. Earth is a machine with natural laws that can be mastered. The Orange level "Manipulates Earth's resources to create and spread the abundant good life." America largely built itself with this mentality.

The Orange level was the basis of the historical period called the Enlightenment, but it was not full enlightenment at all. The Rational/Organizational level is also seen in Vatican II Catholicism and mainline Protestantism today. These people are smart, informed, and think they are at the head of the pack! Boston, New York, and Silicone Valley come to mind. People at the Achievist/Strategic level make up 30% of the population and 50% of those in power.

At every stage (until you get to the higher, enlightened stages) you think you are at the final stage. The Orange stage thought it was the summit. It substituted correct, rational, scientific process for Truth. Orange-consciousness has essentially ruled Western culture since the 1960's and is still widespread. Yet it so overstated its case that in recent years many, particularly the Millennial Generation, have turned to "postmodernism." Only being rational does not solve the human problem; just being scientific and logical does not make people whole, happy, or satisfied at any deep level.

Remember, as we move from each level, we try to transcend the worst of the level and include the best.

We need to transcend the way the Orange level substituted propriety, reason, and correct process for faith and truth and love. We would do well to hold onto a proper use of intelligence and reason even when we move on to the trans-rational or mystical tier of consciousness .

### ***Gateway to Silence***

Transcend and include

[http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Orange-Rational-Organization.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=YEj\\_qGFXD5g](http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Orange-Rational-Organization.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=YEj_qGFXD5g)  
12/16/15

### ● **Green Level: Pluralistic Equality**

Thursday, December 17, 2015

The sixth level of Spiral Dynamics is the Green or Communitarian/Egalitarian level. I call it the level of Pluralistic Equality, seen clearly in postmodernism. It is very politically correct. It was only in the 1960's that we Americans, who said in our Declaration of Independence "all men are created equal," started recognizing that we really didn't mean all humans are created equal. We didn't mean women and we didn't mean black people. We originally just meant land-owning white men! In the 1960s we finally realized that civil rights needed to be applied broadly and equally, regardless of gender, class, or race, and we also began to face the hypocrisy and evil of our warlike mentality. Not surprisingly, there was strong pushback from the Blue, Red, and Purple levels.

Spiral Dynamics describes the basic theme of the Green level as "Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community." The Green level goes beyond the cold rationality of the Orange level and emphasizes feelings, caring, and sensitivity. It tries to free "The human spirit . . . from greed, dogma, and divisiveness" and to share "the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all." Green decision making is done "through reconciliation and consensus processes." This stage is anti-hierarchy and strongly egalitarian. It comprises 10% of the world population and 15% of people in power.

Ken Wilber cleverly calls the dark side of the Green level "Boomeritis." It's the disease that the Baby Boomers like myself are likely to have, but just can't see. A combination of arrogance and individualism keeps people trapped at this "Mean Green" level. It seems we have just enough enlightenment to reject

everybody below us as naïve, and at the same time we can't imagine anyone being smarter than we are. The mystical, non-dual levels look ridiculous to academic and sophisticated Greens. Wilber also calls this "flatland" because it's contemptuous of both higher and lower levels. Mean Green people will not let go of either their separateness or superiority. Their ego is still in charge.

The 1% of people who transcend the Green Level to enter the Second Tier or "Being" levels do so by going through a major death to the ego. It is some kind of "Dark Night" experience beyond their control. Now they know that the Green idea of pluralistic equality is not the highest meaning of enlightenment. Yet they do not throw out the wonderful and needed values of human rights, equality, and human dignity. The Green level is the great advance made in the last fifty years, but we are not done yet!

### ***Gateway to Silence***

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Green-Pluralistic-Equality.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=6Q96vBEL7Wo>  
12/17/15

### ● ● **Yellow & Teal Levels: Non-Dual Consciousness**

Friday, December 18, 2015

People who have moved to second tier consciousness finally have the humility to include the value of every previous stage while also moving beyond its limiting boundaries. Ken Wilber writes, "Using what we would recognize as mature vision-logic, second-tier awareness thinks in terms of the overall spiral of existence, and not merely in terms of any one level." He says only healthy religion is prepared to be the conveyor belt to move you all the way to the top stages, to the mystical level. Education can get you to the Green level, but information of itself cannot get you to the enlightenment stage. That's what the saints meant when they said it is done to you. You can't do it on your own, although you can allow it. Or you may be dragged there, kicking and screaming, through the sufferings and loves of your life which slowly transform you. Only 1% of the world's population and 5% of those in power have grown to the second tier.

Here we can acknowledge that at certain times an earlier level response is required. As Ken Wilber writes, "In emergency situations, we can activate red power drives; in response to chaos, we might need to activate blue order; in looking for a new job, we might need orange achievement drives; in marriage and with friends, close green bonding." Second-tier consciousness sees the full picture of development and knows that each step is necessary to wholeness.

The seventh stage is the Yellow Integrative level. It first became observable around fifty years ago. The basic theme is to "Live fully and responsibly as what you are, and learn to become more" of what you are. At this level, individuals can think both horizontally and vertically. Hierarchies are valued again if they are actualizing people. You stop overreacting to all authority as Orange and Green levels do. When we use the word "hierarchy" here I am not talking about the Catholic hierarchy of roles and power, although there are some overlaps. I am talking about any notion of higher and lower, better and worse. This is what was rejected at the Green level, where you thought no one is better than anyone else. At the wisdom level, you can acknowledge, "She is smarter than I am; he is better educated than I am; she is more enlightened than I am; he has something to teach me." This comes with the overwhelming humility of the enlightened stages. Truly holy people are always humble and never rebellious.

At the Yellow level, human lives and society are seen much like vibrant, resilient ecosystems where chaos and fluctuation are expected. People at this level bring to the table flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality. They respect and value differences and find ways to integrate them into interdependent processes.

● The last and highest stage Spiral Dynamics has identified is the **Turquoise or Holistic level**. Its basic theme is to "Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit." Taking the metaphor of ecosystems even further, the Turquoise level understands the entire world as "a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind." I would call it the mind and body of Christ. While people at this stage can recognize their individuality and separateness, they can hold the paradox of also being a part of the whole, connected with everything else in existence. Intuition and cooperation rather than violence are now the primary modes of thinking and

doing. These people can actually live Jesus' command to love their enemies, which is quite unlikely in the first tier where such thinking is both absurd and impossible.

There may be even more stages we have not yet glimpsed or imagined; but the second-tier, Yellow and Turquoise levels help us understand that the trajectory of life is headed somewhere good, toward union. Trust the process and surrender to the urgings of life, gradually growing you up into fullness.

### *Gateway to Silence*

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Non-Dual-Consciousness.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=ZuQktcDUK9812/18/15>

### Summary

Sunday, December 13-Saturday, December 19, 2015

● **Beige:** Instinctive/Survivalistic -- The basic theme is to do what it takes to stay alive, with a preference for pleasure over pain. There is a unitive absorption with one's mother and an original innocence and naïveté.

● **Purple:** Magical/Animistic -- It becomes important to honor and obey the spirit-being presented and the group's leaders, rituals, and customs.

● **Red:** Impulsive/Egocentric -- The individual realizes that he or she can be distinct from the tribe and can break free from group constraints; the heroic self.

● **Blue:** Purposeful/Authoritarian -- The "true believers," the concrete-literal fundamentalists, love certitude and knowing who is right and who is wrong. They presume they are right and will be rewarded.

● **Orange:** Achievist/Strategic -- People who are self-reliant, rational, educated, and willing to take risks will "win." Societies will prosper through competitiveness and technology.

● **Green:** Communitarian/Egalitarian -- "Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community." Political

correctness, human rights, and equality are the highest virtues.

● **Yellow:** Integrative -- Human lives and society are seen much like vibrant, resilient ecosystems where chaos and fluctuation are expected.

● **Turquoise:** Holistic -- The entire world is "a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind."

## **Practice**

### Tracing Your Journey

I encourage you to spend some time looking back over your life through the lens of Spiral Dynamics. With compassion and tenderness, notice how at various stages you were fixated on different priorities, different measures of right and wrong, different sources of meaning and belonging. Give thanks for the lessons you learned at each level that helped you survive, succeed, and become who you are today. Ask yourself what beliefs you may be ready to lay to rest, ways of thinking and acting that no longer serve your maturing awareness of reality.

You may wish to explore your journey in one or more of these ways:

Journal or write a poem.

Draw, paint, sculpt, or create a collage.

Find a piece of music that illustrates changing moods and move to it.

Talk to a friend, spiritual director, or therapist.

### *Gateway to Silence*

Transcend and include

<http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Sabbath---Levels-of-Development--Week-2--Tracing-Your-Journey.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=ZLdVUnR6jeY>

12/19/15

## **References**

- Don Edward Beck in an interview with Jessica Roemischer, "The Never-Ending Upward Quest," *What Is Enlightenment?*, Fall/Winter 2002, [www.mcs-international.org/downloads/046\\_spiraldynamics\\_wie.pdf](http://www.mcs-international.org/downloads/046_spiraldynamics_wie.pdf), 6.
- Ken Wilber, "The Integral Vision at the Millennium," Part I, excerpts from *Introduction to The*

Collected Works of Ken Wilber , Volume 7 (Shambhala: 2000), [www.fudomouth.net/thinktank/now\\_integralvision.htm](http://www.fudomouth.net/thinktank/now_integralvision.htm) .

Richard Rohr, *In the Beginning . . . Six hours with Rob Bell and Richard Rohr on Reclaiming the Original Christian Narrative* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2014), discs 2 and 4, CD, MP3 download.