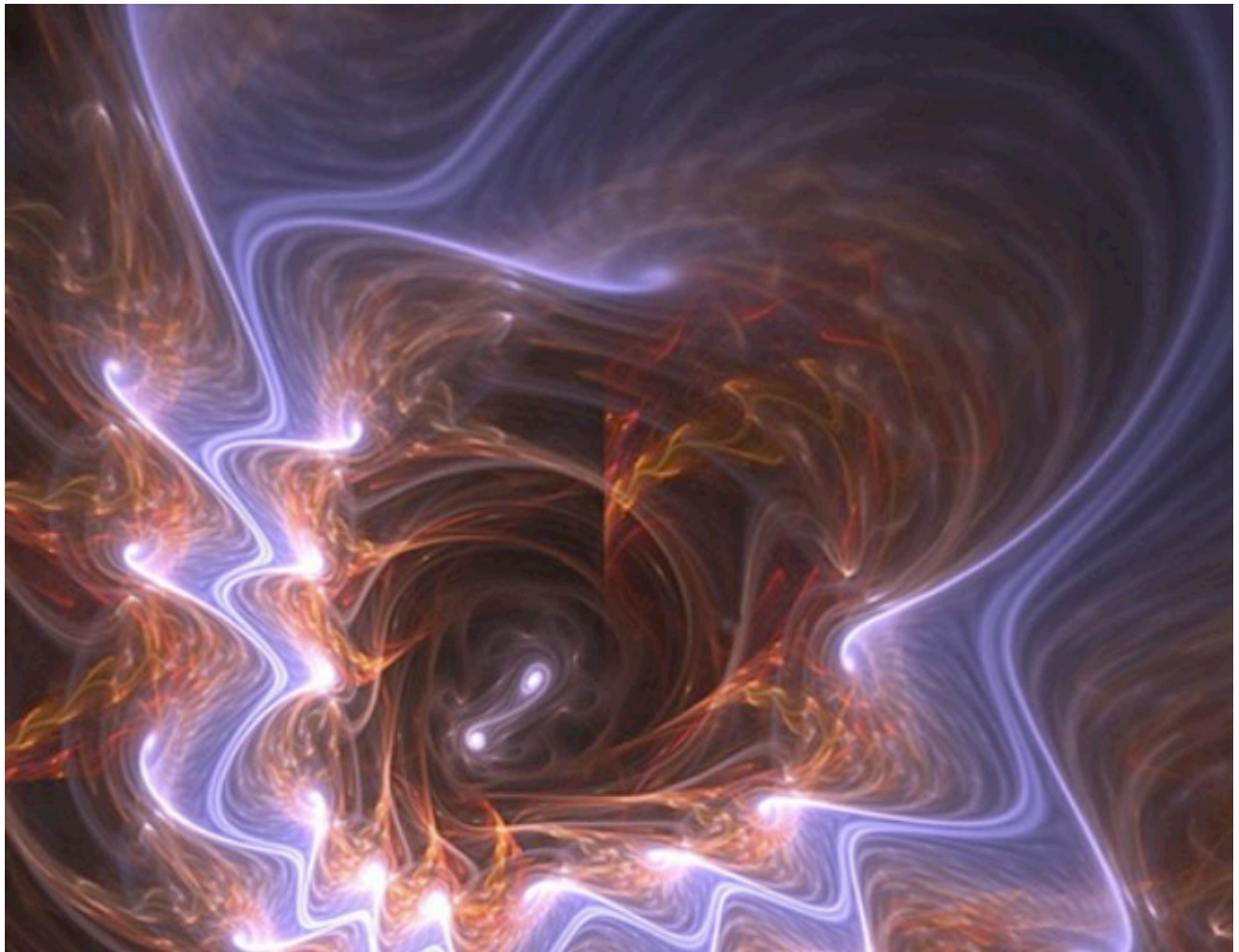


# THE ALCHEMY OF AWARENESS

The Transmutation of Ignorance Into Wisdom



by  
Terry Findlay

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[www.alchemyofawareness.net](http://www.alchemyofawareness.net)

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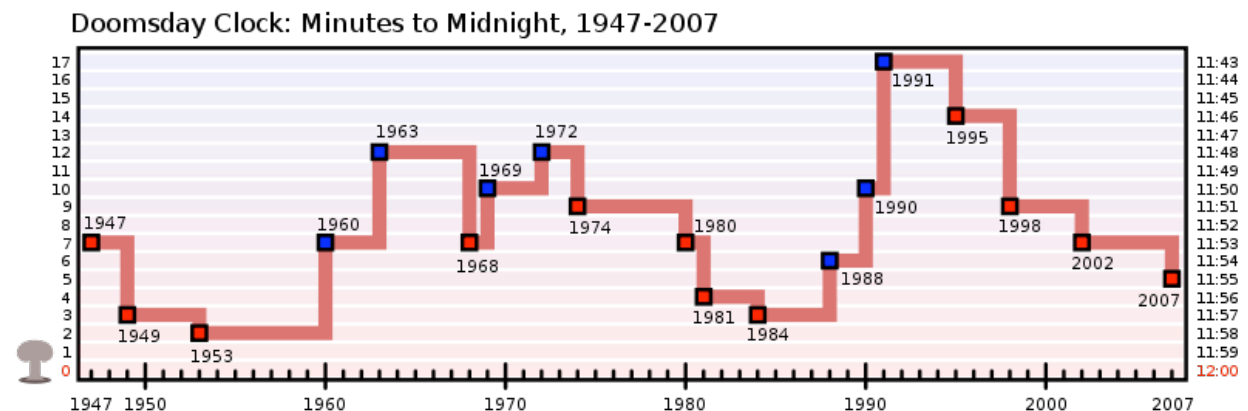
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## Prologue

“With the help of favorable measures great individuals might be reared who would be both different from and higher than those who heretofore have owed their existence to mere chance. Here we may still be hopeful: in the rearing of exceptional men.”

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

In 1947 the board of directors of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists at the University of Chicago began maintaining the Doomsday Clock. This clock was created to symbolically represent the world’s condition relative to “catastrophic destruction” that could occur should the clock ever reach midnight. At the time of its creation the world was in the midst of the U.S. - U.S.S.R. cold war. Nuclear devastation was an all-too-real scenario at the time. The Doomsday Clock was initially set at 7 minutes to midnight. Since its original inception the Doomsday Clock has come to represent a measure of the severity of nuclear, environmental, and technological threats existing in the world at any given time. The most recent setting of the clock occurred on January 17, 2007. At that time the clock was set to 5 minutes to midnight. This was a move of two minutes closer to midnight than the previous setting made in 2002.



In a statement supporting the decision to move the hand of the Doomsday Clock, the Bulletin Board focused on two major sources of catastrophe: the perils of 27,000 nuclear weapons, 2,000 of them ready to launch within minutes; and the destruction of human habitats from climate change.

*Bulletin of Atomic Sciences website* <http://www.thebulletin.org/content/doomsday-clock/overview>

### The Problem

“Over billions of years on a unique sphere chance has painted a thin covering of life, complex, improbable, wonderful and fragile. Suddenly, we humans, a recently arrived species, no longer subject to the checks and balances inherent in nature have grown in population, technology, and intelligence to a position of terrible power. We now wield the paint brush.”

*Paul McCready*

A look at the graph above makes it painfully clear that, according to the scientists responsible for setting the Doomsday Clock, the current world situation is far from desirable. According to some contemporary experts our species may not survive the 21st century. These experts put our chances of failing to survive this century as follows:

1. John Leslie (author and philosopher) puts the chances of our failure to survive at around 50%
2. Sir Martin Rees (author and astrophysicist) agrees that our chances of failing to survive are around 50%
3. Richard Posner (author and U.S. Court of Appeals Judge) says that the chances of our failure to survive is a “significant probability”.
4. Nick Bostrom (philosopher and founder of the World Transhumanist Assoc.) maintains that the chances of our failure to survive are “not less 20%”.

Clearly, there are those who don't hold out much hope for humanity and there is much in our world today to support such pessimism. Everywhere we look we find evidence of global unrest. We turn on the evening news and are subjected to the latest report of a suicide bomber, a recent gang related murder, violence in faraway places or in the streets of our own cities. Newspaper headlines cry out about hatred, racism, a rise in crime, terrorism, and a plethora of injustices.

If only we could get at the root of these problems we might be able to do something about them. In this book I will attempt to tease out some of the common root causes and to suggest some rather unique solutions. I will attempt to show that a root cause of many of our problems is a deficiency in our personal and collective levels of awareness. As we will discover, what we experience is largely a product of the choices we make and the choices we make are limited to the contents of our awareness. You cannot choose that of which you are unaware. Our ignorance limits us and it is ignorance that provides the fertile ground in which intolerance, indifference, and other troubling human attributes can flourish and from which they can spread their insidious tendrils. If we can dispel some measure of ignorance we might just succeed in eradicating a corresponding measure of suffering.

This book examines the possibility of ameliorating ignorance and, therefore, of encouraging wider perspectives through coming to understand six levels of awareness. Each of the levels of awareness that will be presented offers greater choice and, therefore, greater freedom which, in turn, affords us the possibility of greater hope.

The *alchemy of awareness* described in this book is a naturally occurring process. Individuals can and do move from one level of awareness to another without any idea that various levels of awareness exist or of the dynamics involved in making a transition from one level to the next. But, in light of our present world situation, it seems imprudent to leave the important business of expanding our collective awareness up to chance. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that, left to their own devices, few people ever

reach the level of awareness required to deal with our pressing local and/or global challenges.

It is my hope that this book may facilitate and encourage the movement of individuals through the levels of awareness to a point where they are able to live more liberated lives and, in the process, learn to be more compassionate and to contribute to a more welcoming world.

Fundamentally, this is a book of hope. We will see the reasons for this when we look at the evidence suggesting that groups and individuals are, even now, seeking ways to improve and expand their levels of awareness, of transmuting ignorance into the wisdom required to face the problems we all share.

## **The Alchemy of Awareness**

The Alchemy of Awareness is the story of an alchemy that our brains perform in making a series of life-changing transitions. These transitions are universal throughout the people of the world. The alchemy involved in these transitions occurs naturally and involves none of the supernatural trappings historically associated with the term 'alchemy'. However, there are a number of parallel concepts that exist between the ancient understanding of the word and the form of alchemy that we will be exploring in this book.

The word 'alchemy' derives from the Old French *alkemie* and from the Arabic *al-kimia* meaning "the art of transformation". It is in the spirit of transformation that the term is relevant to the subject of this book. In *The Alchemy of Awareness* we will be examining the power of awareness to transform our selves and, as a result, our world.

Wikipedia describes alchemy thus: "Alchemy (Arabic: *al-khimia*), a part of the Occult Tradition, is both a philosophy and a practice with an aim of achieving ultimate *wisdom* as well as immortality, involving *the improvement of the alchemist* as well as the making of several substances described as possessing unusual properties."

We will discover that the type of wisdom our world so desperately needs is only to be found through the personal transformation of a critical mass of individuals. As the song says, "We are the world", and if there is to be any lasting change in the world it will only be accomplished through the accumulated efforts of its inhabitants. The transformation through awareness that we will be tracing in this book is, to use the alchemical term, a *transmutation* of ignorance into wisdom. This transmutation involves a change in our individual levels of awareness, much in the manner of the "improvement of the alchemist" mentioned above.

The primary dictum of Alchemy in Latin is: *solve et coagula* which means "separate and join together (literally dissolve and coagulate)". The evolution of wisdom



described in this book, the "alchemical transmutation" of ignorance into wisdom, involves both a separation and a joining together as we will see.

## The Need for The Alchemy of Awareness

“Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing himself.”

*Leo Tolstoy*

Albert Einstein is reported to have observed that we can never solve a problem on the same level of awareness as that at which the problem was created. According to Einstein’s observation, to solve a problem requires us to take a step up to a level of awareness beyond the one at which the problem was created. This seems like good advice but a question immediately arises concerning the nature of the levels of which we speak. What is a level of awareness and what does it look like? And, if we knew a level of awareness when we saw one, how would the movement from one level to another be accomplished? These are just some of the thorny questions we will need to address if we are to establish a strategy for improving our individual and collective awareness levels.

When we attempt to solve any problem we are limited by the extent of our awareness. We cannot entertain solutions of which we are unaware. If, in our search for a solution to a problem, we are somehow able to gain a wider perspective than that which we had when the problem was created we would have options available that were not available to us before. A widening of our field of awareness, a grander perspective, affords us an increase in possibilities from which to select an appropriate solution. This is where *The Alchemy of Awareness* comes in. We will examine what it is exactly that constitutes a level of awareness, familiarize ourselves with six ascending levels of awareness, and look at how the alchemy of awareness that occurs during a transition from one level of awareness to another can result in a broader and wiser perspective.

## Developmental Stages/Levels

Over the years a number of well founded systems have been formulated that identify stages in personal development. The chart below shows how some of the more commonly accepted and well known systems align with one another.

Level / Stage	Maslow Hierarchy of Needs	Kohlberg Moral Stages	Kegan Stages of Self	Levels of Awareness (Findlay)
0			Incorporative	Embedded

Level / Stage	Maslow Hierarchy of Needs	Kohlberg Moral Stages	Kegan Stages of Self	Levels of Awareness (Findlay)
1	Physiological (basic physical needs)	Obedience & Punishment (obedience to authority)	Impulsive	Impulsive Body Self
2	Safety/Security	Individualism & Exchange (scratch each other's backs)	Imperial (needs wishes interests)	Needy Self (desires)
3	Love/Belonging	Interpersonal Relationships	Interpersonal	Member Self (connections)
4	Esteem	Maintaining Social Order*	Institutional	Independent Self
5	Purpose/Meaning	Social Contract & Individual Rights	Inter-individual	Interdependent Self
6	Self Actualization	Universal Principles		Transcendence of Separation

Robert Kegan is the William and Miriam Meehan Professor in Adult Learning and Professional Development at Harvard University. Additionally he is the Educational Chair for the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education and the Co-director for the Change Leadership Group. Kegan is a developmental psychologist and the author of several books on the topic.

Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* discusses five stages of development through which an individual's self may evolve as he or she matures. I say "may evolve through" because it is not guaranteed that we will all progress to the final stages. This has great bearing on the subject of this book because it is asserted herein that the level of practical wisdom needed to address our pressing global concerns exceeds that of today's average individual. Robert Kegan maintains, in a book called *In Over Our Heads*, that our current global problems are largely due to the fact that we have not evolved to a high enough order of

consciousness<sup>1</sup> to contend with the complexities of the issues we now face. The purpose of this book is to address this dangerous and challenging state of affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this statement Kegan's orders of consciousness roughly correspond to the levels of awareness presented in this book.

## Seeking Solutions

If problems are solved at a higher level of awareness than that at which they are created, we need to find ways to gain levels of awareness that transcend the levels at which our current global issues have been created. Solutions attempted without a transition to a sufficiently high level of awareness are likely to be short-sighted and ineffective answers. To have a fighting chance of finding sustainable solutions a movement toward higher levels of awareness is a necessity.

This book will present an overview of six levels of awareness. As we examine the movement involved in making transitions between the levels of awareness we will discover an “alchemy” performed in the process. This alchemy is not magical nor does it require the adoption of any particular belief system. An open mind is the only prerequisite. The alchemy of awareness is a real process that occurs naturally when individuals go through transitions from lower levels of awareness to higher levels of awareness.

The only catch is that, although we are talking about a natural process, going through these transitions is not a slam dunk. We will point out some common factors that can inhibit movement between levels. We will also look at some important factors that can encourage and assist individuals to take on the challenges involved in making a transition.

## Can We Change?

“Man is not imprisoned by habit. Great changes in him can be wrought by crisis--once that crisis can be recognized and understood.”

*Norman Cousins*

We have made a number of references to moving from one level of awareness to another, to making transitions between levels of awareness. We have broached the idea of a transmutation of ignorance into wisdom. But can people change and, if so, how much can they change? In Robert Kegan's research he has observed people developing through five of stages of self. Other researchers have made similar observations so it would seem that people do, in fact, change as they mature. However, these same researchers have observed a tendency in a majority of people, when left to their own resources, to arrive at a personal ceiling of development. Moreover, as Kegan asserts in *In Over Our Heads*, the order of consciousness arrived at in this manner is typically not sufficient to cope effectively with the demands of life in our modern world. We must now ask whether this situation is the end of the story or if there is any way beyond our current inadequacy as a species.

For most of this century science held to the tenet that, after an initial period of development, the nervous systems and brains of human beings remained in a fixed state. Change in “wiring” was thought to be virtually impossible in the adult brain. Moreover, it was thought that once brain cells died they were never replaced so that a decline in brain function was an inevitable consequence of aging. Fortunately, recent developments in the field of neuroscience have put the lie to these long held assumptions.

### **Neuroplasticity**

The old idea of a rigidly wired brain has been completely overthrown by the discovery of neuroplasticity; the capacity of the brain to rewire itself in response to new learning. Old neural patterns fade while new ones are formed and strengthened. The story of the discovery of neuroplasticity and its implications is told in *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph From the Frontiers of Brain Science* by Norman Doidge. As the highly regarded neurologist, Oliver Sacks, referring to Doige's book, says, "Only a few decades ago, scientists considered the brain to be fixed or "hardwired," and considered most forms of brain damage, therefore, to be incurable. Dr. Doidge, an eminent psychiatrist and researcher, was struck by how his patients' own transformations belied this, and set out to explore the new science of neuroplasticity by interviewing both scientific pioneers in neuroscience, and patients who have benefited from neuro-rehabilitation. Here he describes in fascinating personal narratives how the brain, far from being fixed, has remarkable powers of changing its own structure and compensating for even the most challenging neurological conditions. Doidge's book is a remarkable and hopeful portrait of the endless adaptability of the human brain."

In a January, 2007 Time magazine article, Sharon Begley, author of *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, wrote, "... research in the past few years has overthrown the dogma. In its place has come the realization that the adult brain retains impressive powers of "neuroplasticity"--the ability to change its structure and function in response to experience. These aren't minor tweaks either. Something as basic as the function of the visual or auditory cortex can change as a result of a person's experience of becoming deaf or blind at a young age. Even when the brain suffers a trauma late in life, it can rezone itself like a city in a frenzy of urban renewal. If a stroke knocks out, say, the neighborhood of motor cortex that moves the right arm, a new technique called constraint-induced movement therapy can coax next-door regions to take over the function of the damaged area. The brain can be rewired."

A second myth concerning the aging of brains is that when a brain cell dies we are down a brain cell for the rest of our lives. Again, recent discoveries have found this to be just false. There is an area in the brain called the hippocampus which is capable of generating generic neurons. The process is known as *neurogenesis*. These brain cells are produced in response to intense neural activity anywhere in the brain. The new cells migrate to the site of neural activity where they become part of the active neural network. In laboratories the brain masses of mice have been seen to increase as a result of the increase in brain cells produced in this way.

Daniel Tammet, author of *Embracing the Wide Sky: A Tour Across the Horizons of the Mind*, believes these recent discoveries have tremendous implications for us all.

"Neuroscience's breakthrough discovery of the brain's ability to grow and change throughout our lifetime, known as neuroplasticity, contradicts the classical view of the adult brain as inflexible and mechanical, each part having a fixed, specific role, ticking along monotonously, and gradually wearing down with age like a machine. In its place, we find a new model of the adult brain as a supple, dynamic organ capable of responding successfully to injury and even of thinking itself into new synaptic formations. The implications are staggering, not only for patients with neurological injury or disease but for everyone."

Neuroplasticity and brain cell generation (neurogenesis) underlie the brain's ability to evolve over the course of an entire lifetime. These brain properties are fundamental to our capacity to move through the Levels of Awareness and for the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom as we move forward on life's journey.

### **Mindsets**

Whether you think you can change or not you are probably right. Your mindset will determine, to a large extent, the possibilities you are willing to entertain. Some people believe that we are born with certain talents and capacities (such as intelligence) and that we should concentrate our efforts on making the most of the hands we have been dealt rather than beating our heads against the proverbial wall in the vain hope of outsmarting our destinies. On the other hand, there are those who like to think that

nothing is preordained and that anything is possible if we just believe we can make it happen.

Most people probably fall somewhere in between these two extreme positions. However, which side of centre you fall on can make a very significant difference. In her book called *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* Carol S. Dweck discusses two fundamental mindsets that people tend to adopt. One she calls the “fixed” mindset. Those with a fixed mindset subscribe to what, until recently, was the conventional wisdom concerning personal change. They believe that we live lives mainly determined by heredity and that most of our attributes are, if not carved in stone, largely resistant to efforts to modify them.

The other mindset that Dweck identifies is the “growth” mindset. People with this mindset see themselves and their lives as amenable to choices and effort. They are not wishful thinkers like those I described above who think that simply believing something is possible is enough to make it happen. Growth mindset individuals are willing to make the effort required to bring about their goals and to realize their dreams.

A typical example of a person with a growth mindset is Wayne Gretzky. Known by hockey fans as “The Great One”, Gretzky was the most prolific offensive player in the history of the game. Are his accomplishments the natural consequences of God given talent or a determined effort to develop the skills necessary to succeed in the sport he loved? The truth is probably a combination of the two but if Gretzky had relied solely on his natural talent it is unlikely that he would ever have reached the unusual level of success that he did. The stories of the countless hours he put in practicing as a youngster on a frozen pond in his back yard corroborate the theory that determination and effort played a significant role in his later success.

Interestingly, the mindset you have determines the meaning of both success and failure. To a fixed mindset person a failure is a reinforcement of their “why bother” mentality. A success is just a natural result of an innate talent. In contrast, a failure for a person with a growth mindset is diagnostic. It tells him or her what needs to be worked on and is not seen as the result of some inherent handicap or innate inability to succeed. Success for these people means that they have worked hard and earned their just rewards. They have made something happen through their consistent effort and determination.

### **Two Thinking Systems**

In his book *Kluge* Gary Marcus identifies two types of thinking that we use. One he calls “reflexive” and the other “deliberate”. Reflexive thinking operates at a largely unconscious level and takes place in old brain systems like the cerebellum, basal ganglia (motor control), and amygdala (emotions). Deliberate thinking takes place in the prefrontal cortex. In other words, reflexive thinking is mainly done by the reptilian and early mammalian brain areas while deliberate thinking is the province of the more recently evolved third region of the triune brain. This means that we humans are endowed with a capacity for deliberate thinking that may be unique among all the

species of this planet. Certainly, we are the most generously endowed with this ability meaning we are uniquely advantaged to pursue the benefits of a growth mindset.

A growth mindset provides the setting and conscious thinking provides the tool for personal change but neither provide the means. If we are to truly be capable of change over the course of our lifetimes there must be some capacity by which our brains can restructure themselves in ways that allow our thinking systems, particularly the deliberate thinking system, to improve with time. In other words, it must be possible to physically change the structure and composition of our brains if psychological growth is to occur.

### **The Alchemy of Awareness: A Fundamental Formula**

Historically, one of the concerns of the ancient alchemist was the discovery of the elixir of life. The elixir of life was believed to be a remedy for all illnesses and a potion capable of endowing immortality to individuals. While I make no such grandiose claims for the alchemy of awareness I do believe that achieving higher levels of awareness has universal application in the service of alleviating much of the suffering presently endured in our modern world. Following in the tradition of the alchemists of old the following formula describes the foundation of the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom, the capacity of the brain to physically evolve during our lifetimes.

a = Setting For Change (growth mindset)

b = Tool For Change (deliberate thinking)

c = Capacity For Physical Change In The Brain (neuroplasticity)

$a + b + c = \text{Psychological Growth}$

As we have seen, it was believed, until quite recently, that brains were wired early in life and thereafter remained largely unchanged and unchangeable. In addition, it was held that if a brain cell died it was not replaced. Brains just slowly decayed over a lifetime. Quite simply, variable “c” in the above equation was not believed to exist. However, the ideas of fixed wiring and inevitable brain decay are now known to be mistaken. New brain cells are produced in response to the flexing our neural muscles during focused learning. These cells migrate to areas of elevated brain activity to strengthen and build neural networks as needed. Not only can our brains change, they are constantly changing through the mechanism of neuroplasticity.

Why is it then that developmental psychologists find that most people reach a personal peak in their self development? How is the tendency of the brain to change itself defeated at some point in our maturation? We know that the capacity for neuroplasticity does not just die out. Research shows that this capacity for change endures into old age. According to our formula for psychological growth there are two other major factors influencing the process of growth. Perhaps as we age we lose faith in the growth mindset. This could happen if we are repeatedly thwarted in achieving our goals or if we lack the energy required to pursue our more ambitious outcomes. If our growth mindset is diminished so too might our willingness to engage in deliberate thinking wain. We

may slip into reflexive thought habits if we come to perceive them as a simpler mode of being.

But this pessimistic fate is not inevitable. This book will lay out a path whereby we may overcome such a destiny, a path that can lead us to the promise of practical wisdom as a way to confront our personal and shared challenges. We need only the determination and commitment to pursue increased awareness in our daily lives. This book will set out the roadmap and the obstacles that may be encountered along the way. A measure of increased awareness may be achieved through the simple act of becoming familiar with the material present here.

However, we will see that mere intellectual awareness is not enough. Each level of awareness requires us to experience its truth in a sequence of increasingly meaningful ways. First, we must be aware of a level's properties conceptually (conceptual truth). We need to know it intellectually as a logical and coherent possibility. Second, we must know the truth of the level experientially (experiential truth). We must live it and feel its consequences. Finally, we must know it as truth because our experience has taught us to trust in its validity (existential truth).

*Conceptual Truth:* it is possible that all objects fall at the same rate regardless of their weight (mass)

*Experiential Truth:* objects having various weights are dropped and timed showing that they all fall at the same rate.

*Existential Truth:* trust is established such that there is a firm belief that all objects fall at the same rate regardless of their weights

It should be remembered that even existential truths are not absolute truths. They may be strongly held to be true within the parameters of the experiences that confirmed them but they may not hold true in contexts outside those parameters. In the above example the truth that "all objects fall at the same rate regardless of their weight" holds true in our everyday experiences but, where objects with huge masses are concerned, such as objects of planetary size, there are differences in the rate at which they "fall" toward each other. This is because the force of gravity, which draws things toward large objects, is directly related to the mass of the object. Existential truths are relative to particular situations. Some philosophers argue that there is no such thing as an absolute truth.

Where the truths that are realized at each level of awareness are concerned, we will be relying on existential truths arrived at through persistent and consistent personal experience. After all, if you do not experience these truths as being reliably consistent with your own experience they will have no validity to you and will, therefore, be incapable of contributing to your quest for practical wisdom.



### **A Picture of Hope**

If we are to find solutions to problems created out of an ignorance that exists at one level of awareness we are required to make a transition to a higher level of awareness. An ability to grow and change is essential to making such a transition. Without a capacity to truly change we would be doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past over and over again. Our ignorance would prevent us from ever moving beyond our problems. But we have seen that change, the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom, is possible and that what it requires is available to us. We have the capacities (awareness of mindset, deliberate thinking, and neuroplasticity) necessary to move upward through the levels of awareness and to achieve perspectives broad enough to offer us views of possible solutions to the issues we face both as individuals and as members of a global community. Herein lies the hope of a better world.

“Man’s mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.”

*Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.*

## A Brief History of the Brain

“Evolution is not a force but a process. Not a cause but a law.”

*John Morley*

The human brain is a truly wonderful thing. Most of what it does happens without our knowing so we may not stop often to think about what it means to have a brain. To lay the foundation for our journey through the Levels of Awareness it will be helpful to review the evolution of the nervous system. It will be seen from this evolutionary tour that moving through the Levels of Awareness tends to recapitulate, on a personal level, the evolutionary development of our own nervous systems.

### An Overview of the Evolution of Life on Earth

This timeline is of a 4.6 billion year old Earth, with (very approximately):

- 4 billion years of simple cells (prokaryotes),
- 3 billion years of photosynthesis,
- 2 billion years of complex cells (eukaryotes),
- 1 billion years of multicellular life,
- 600 million years of simple animals,
- 570 million years of arthropods (ancestors of insects, arachnids and crustaceans)
- 550 million years of complex animals
- 500 million years of fish and proto-amphibians,
- 475 million years of land plants,
- 400 million years of insects and seeds,
- 360 million years of amphibians,
- 300 million years of reptiles,
- 200 million years of mammals,
- 150 million years of birds,
- 130 million years of flowers,
- 65 million years since the non-avian dinosaurs died out and
- 200,000 years since humans started looking like they do today.

Our brains and nervous systems have been approximately 4 billion years in the making. This is an unimaginably long time. But then, given the amazing complexity of our brains, it makes sense that it must have taken eons to fashion.

### What Is a Nervous System?

So, what is a nervous system anyway? A nervous system coordinates functions in organisms. It is a system that is capable of conducting electro-chemical messages along chains of nerve cells. Nervous systems also allow organisms to perceive and respond to their environments. A nervous system also makes it possible for

communication and coordination of functions within and between various systems of an organism to occur. Nervous systems developed as organisms increased in complexity and the need for coordination and communication between the parts of the organism became necessary. As organisms evolved and increased in complexity rudimentary precursors of nervous systems evolved with them. Over millions of years simple true nervous systems emerged. In evolutionary terms, the purpose of a nervous system is to provide an organism with a means to respond to its ever changing environment in ways that enhance its chances of survival. This function appears to be working since a multitude of life forms continue to thrive and evolve on planet Earth.

### **Early Nervous Systems**

We will begin our tour of the evolution of nervous systems about 600 million years ago. About this time simple species of worms developed notochords (nerve cords) running along the length of their bodies. In a species called planaria (still in existence today) there is a dual nerve cord. These two cords are connected to each other with other nerve chains forming a structure that resembles a ladder of nerve tissue. This nervous system coordinates the sides of the organism. Planaria also have two clusters of nerve tissue (ganglia) at the head end that function like primitive brains. Photoreceptors on the animal's eyespots provide primitive sensory information on light and dark.

Around 570 million years ago the first arthropods appeared on Earth. These organisms were the ancestors of modern insects, spiders, and crustaceans (crabs and lobsters). The nervous systems of modern arthropods are not much changed from their early ancestors. Arthropod nervous systems are composed of a series of ganglia (clumps of nerve tissue) that are connected to one another by a nerve cord. The head segment of arthropods contains the brain, a large ganglion which is divided into three areas. The brain controls the animal's mouthparts, its salivary glands, and its muscles. Many arthropods have sensory organs such as compound eyes and antennae. The brain processes information received from these sensory organs.

### **Reptilian Nervous Systems**

Approximately 270 million years later (300 million years ago) reptiles made their appearance on our planet. Reptiles have considerably more complex brains than arthropods. The brains of reptiles have developed a cerebrum and cerebellum. The former has the capacity to coordinate functions such as movement, smell, and memory. The latter also plays a role in motor coordination and the integration of sensory perception. All reptiles have advanced visual depth perception compared to other animals with most other sense organs being well developed as well.

So, it has taken evolution around 300 million years to develop in animals a level of awareness that is approximately comparable to Level 1 where the animal experiences itself as a body within a separate environment. Obviously, evolution has a long way to go to achieve the likes of a human brain capable of multiple Levels of Awareness beyond that of a reptile.

## **Mammalian Nervous Systems**

One hundred million years after the advent of reptiles the first mammals appeared (around 200 million years ago). Mammalian brains differ from reptilian brains in one particularly significant way. Mammalian have an added area called the neocortex. As it turns out this neocortex makes all the difference in terms of enabling multiple Levels of Awareness above Level 1.

## **The Triune Brain**

The mammalian brain is often referred to as a triune brain because it is composed of three main regions. These regions have distinct evolutionary histories.

*The R-Complex*, or reptilian brain, is made up of the brain stem and the cerebellum. This region of the brain controls instinctive survival behavior and processing. It is primarily reactive to direct stimuli as are the brains of reptiles. This structure makes possible Level 1 Awareness.

*The Limbic System* is the old mammalian brain. It is the source of emotions and instincts such as feeding, fighting, fleeing, and sexual behavior. The primary processing of the limbic system comes down to the avoidance of disagreeable sensations and the pursuit of agreeable sensations. Level 2 Awareness is enabled by this region of the brain.

*The Neocortex*, also known as the cerebral cortex, is responsible for higher-order thinking and the use of language. In humans, all Levels of Awareness above Level 2 are possible due to this brain region.

In the 400 million years since the early precursors of nervous systems developed to the present time, nervous systems have evolved to include the spectacularly successful brains with which we are now endowed; brains that allow us to experience the world and to reflect on it in ways that no other living things on Earth can, brains that can imagine and build wondrous social structures, fascinating civilizations, beautiful works of art, rich cultures, impressive architectural structures and incredibly complex machines.

As individuals we all go through a similar evolution within our lifetimes. We evolve through levels of awareness that correspond to stages in the evolution of our nervous systems as we make the journey from birth to old age.

## **The Downside of Human Brains**

Autistic savant, Daniel Tammet, is considered one of the brightest minds on the planet. In his book, *Embracing the Wide Sky*, he describes the wonders of the human brain:

“Our minds are miracles--immensely intricate webs of gossamer light inside our heads that shape our very sense of self and our understanding of the world around us. Moment by moment throughout our lifetime, our brains hum with the work of making meaning: weaving together many thousands of threads of information into all manner of thoughts, feelings, memories, and

ideas. It is these processes of thinking, learning, and remembering that make each of us truly human.”

As wonderful as they are, these same brain processes have allowed us to conceive of and create terrible engines of war, to ravage vast tracts of land, to pollute waterways, to change the very climate of the planet that has supported us faithfully for so very long. Our social policies seem to serve the rich better than the needy and our consumer society is driven to demand ever larger infusions of limited resources. There is a kind of madness that drives us and we seem helpless to resist its force. In the coming chapters we will examine the relationships between our actions and our levels of awareness. As our exploration progresses we will encounter the possibility of moving beyond the current collective insanity to a level of awareness where the dream of sustainable solutions becomes a very possible reality. The alchemy of awareness is the key to this hope.

## The Levels of Awareness: An Introduction

“The world is only as deep as we can see.”

*Scott Bakker*

“As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living.”

*Martin Buber*

### **The Levels of Awareness**

The levels of awareness represent stages through which we may pass during the courses of our lives. The importance of the levels of awareness to us, as human beings, is that every aspect of our lives is circumscribed by the level of awareness at which we reside. Important concerns like our behavior, our concepts of truth, our ideas about morality, what motivates us, and even our ideas about the meanings of things depend on the level of awareness that we inhabit. In short, your awareness level is your experience of life.

The levels of awareness include ideas found in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, and Robert Kegan’s stages of self along with ideas derived from other areas of study. A key concept coming from Robert Kegan’s work is the idea of the movement that takes place during transitions between developmental levels whereby that which was unconscious at one level is illuminated in the conscious arena of awareness at the next level. In other words, what was subjective becomes objective.

### **Caveats**

In spite of the fact that the levels of awareness are chronologically arranged there is no reason for being overly concerned with the exact ages corresponding to each level. Individuals develop at different rates and, across cultures, different stages may occur at different times depending on social traditions and cultural beliefs. Whenever we attempt to describe any aspect of human nature things are bound to get a bit messy. We should, therefore, not attempt to create precise pigeon holes into which we might then force the wonderfully complex subjects of our investigation: ourselves. If nothing else, an encounter with the levels of awareness should illuminate the incredible depth and breadth of human diversity. The descriptions of the levels of awareness given in this and later chapters are necessarily stereotypical in that they present the most prominent and distinctive characteristics of the levels. They should not be taken as gospel across all societies and cultures.

### **What Is Awareness?**

To be aware of something we need to be able to perceive it as something other; something objective, observable. For example, a young child (Level 2) can operate on

things in the environment, its body, and other bodies. However, it cannot operate on or consider its desires and drives for security as objects of thought because, at that level, it is not aware of these desires as anything other than its self. The level 2 child *is* its desires. The child is, in a very real way, driven by its drives for security. As we will see, any need of which we are unaware has the power to “drive” our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. When we say things like “He was a driven man.”, “I was driven to distraction.”, “She felt compelled to disagree.” we are admitting to the sense that some unconscious part of ourselves seems to be in control.

## **Ignorance**

A new form of self is created at each level of awareness. This new self has its own unconscious foundation in the form of a drive that is hidden from awareness. This unconscious foundation of the new self is a form of ignorance. As awareness and freedom evolve they are accompanied at each progressive level, by the birth of a new level-specific form of ignorance. The form of a given level’s ignorance determines, among other things, the nature of problems likely to be encountered at that level.

## **Expanding Wisdom**

“Wisdom” is a word often thrown around without much attention to any precise definition. I want to be very clear about what I mean by the term. For the purposes of this book I define wisdom as “knowledge capable of enabling acts of compassionate contribution”. This definition allows wisdom to be recognized by its application in the world. For example, we can say that Mother Teresa demonstrated wisdom when she ministered to the poor in Calcutta. Clearly, she made compassionate contributions to the well being of the people she served. It is this idea of practical wisdom that should be kept in mind whenever you encounter the word “wisdom” in the following pages.

When it is used in the context of religious traditions or the occult the word “wisdom” often carries with it connotations of magic or mysticism . In contrast, our definition of wisdom pertains to what Aristotle called “practical wisdom” and has little in common with the more esoteric uses of the word. According to Aristotle practical wisdom involves a combination of moral will and moral skill. American psychologist Barry Schwartz, the Dorwin Cartwright Professor of Social Theory and social action at Swarthmore College and author of *The Paradox of Choice: Why Less is More*, defines practical wisdom as doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons. Practical wisdom does not require any mystical knowledge. It is not the result of enlightenment and does not require achieving nirvana or some other exalted mental state. It is a wisdom that is within the reach of us all. However, despite this nearly universal accessibility, it is a tragically rare commodity.

It is the rarity of practical wisdom, the reasons for this rarity, and what might be done to encourage an increase in its occurrence that is the subject of this book. It is my position that such an increase is not only desirable but that it is necessary to the resolution of the most pressing issues of our times. One has only to look at the acts of terrorism, the examples of blatant disregard for human rights, increases in violent crimes, and other instances of intolerance to understand that If ever we were in need of practical wisdom it is now.

Despite its rarity and despite the obstacles standing in the way of its realization I believe that it is possible to achieve a level of practical wisdom sufficient to serve as a basis for dealing with our global imperatives. The quest for practical wisdom is both a personal one and one that we must share if we are to meet the challenges facing us in today's world. But while the quest must be a shared initiative it can only be achieved on a person-by-person basis. Practical wisdom is a personal responsibility. We must each seek to achieve it as a personal commitment. Then, if enough individuals succeed in achieving a sufficient level of practical wisdom, their combined efforts may be leveraged in addressing our global problems and finding sustainable solutions to them.

Of course, there are no assurances that we will be successful in overcoming our difficulties but I believe our best hope lies in the pursuit of practical wisdom through what we will come to know as the alchemy of awareness. This process offers a recognizable path that we can, with diligence, follow to arrive at our goal. The alchemy of awareness makes practical wisdom an achievable, if not guaranteed, solution.

At each new level of awareness a previously unconscious drive is brought into the light of awareness and becomes an object available for consideration. This is the process we are referring to as the alchemy of awareness, the transmutation of ignorance into practical wisdom. It exposes a new object in awareness, an object allowing for an increase in the potential for the emergence of practical wisdom.

### Getting Acquainted

Becoming familiar with the levels of awareness is a useful pursuit in its own right. As we are exposed to the framework we gain a wider perspective on our lives and the lives of those with whom we interact.

Level	Form of Self	Awareness
0	Embeddedness (newborn)	no sense of being aware
1	Impulsive/Body Self	awareness of an external world
2	Needy Self	awareness of others, body, and environment
3	Member Self	awareness of desires, others, body, and environment
4	Independent Self	awareness of membership imperatives, desires, others, body, and environment
5	Process Self	awareness of independence imperatives, membership imperatives, desires, others, body, and environment
6	Transcendence	continuity with all existence



By way of getting acquainted with the levels of awareness we will begin with general descriptions of each level.

**0 - Embeddedness (newborn):** At this Level there really isn't any awareness at all since the newborn is embedded in its environment and does not experience anything as distinct from itself. Its experience is an oceanic one with no boundaries separating out independent objects. The newborn experiences no self and no other. This is truly the bliss of total ignorance.

**1 - Impulsive/Body Self:** Before long the baby begins to make distinctions between its own body and the environment in which it has, to this point, been embedded. There is an eventual separation of body and environment. This separation is a psychological activity resulting in a self motivated by impulse. Although we continue to think of ourselves as physically separated from our environment as we progress through the levels of awareness we will eventually discuss the possibility that this is a significant and fundamental error. However, we will also come to see that if this is indeed a mistake it is a *necessary mistake* with a wisdom of its own that paves the way for us to proceed to higher Levels of Awareness and increasing degrees of freedom.

**2 - Needy Self:** At this level a selfish self emerges. The self becomes unconscious desires and is motivated to satisfy its desires, needs, and interests. In the pursuit of satisfying its desires the self can operate on others as objects, its own body, and objects in its environment. Driven by a need for comfort and security a child at level 2 awareness might use a favorite blanket, a stuffed animal, a handy caregiver, or a cookie to satisfy its current need or desire.

**3 - Member Self:** As a child moves up to Level 3 it becomes aware of being a self that *has* desires. It is no longer unconsciously driven by its desires. At Level 3 individuals may occasionally regard others as selves in their own rights but there is still a tendency to use others as things. At this level people are very interested in belonging. Acceptance by ones peers becomes a driving force and membership in a group is very attractive. The self defines itself in terms of relationships within a group or groups.

**4 - Independent Self:** The next level involves recognizing oneself as part of a group in addition to being a self with membership imperatives, desires, needs, and interests. Perhaps the signature characteristic of this level is concern for *relative status* within various groupings. It is no longer enough to belong. You are now compared to others and you are measured by your status. The driving force at this stage is achieving comparative advantages over others. Often the real motive is hidden or disguised, even from the self, but it is, nonetheless, usually in effect. The Independent Self is driven by a need for autonomy.

**5 - Process Self:** Level 5 Awareness is able to operate on the imperatives inherent in the drive for autonomy as well as those involved in the drive for membership. Likewise it is able to consider others as selves, its own desires, its body, and the environment. The critical element here is an awareness of the “self as chooser” that characterized level 4 awareness. This perspective allows an objective look at our conditioning and how it biases everything from the choices we make to the meaning we attribute to our experience.

**6 - Transcendence of Self:** This Level of Awareness is partially speculative in nature. However, it appears to complete certain trajectories established throughout the transitions between the five levels that precede it. At this level the psychological distinction between subject and object would vanish.

### **A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing**

When people first encounter the levels of awareness they have a natural tendency to attempt an estimation of their own level of awareness. Typically this leads to one of two predictable problems. If individuals assess themselves as being at a lower level of awareness than that at which they think they should be they may suffer feelings of inadequacy. On the other hand, if their personal assessment places them at a high level of awareness they may feel an inflated sense of pride and superiority. However, it is important to realize that, *until a person is cognizant of the process by which levels of awareness may be improved, his or her present level of awareness is neither a failure nor an accomplishment.* It is simply a natural result of his or her individual experiential history to date. Without previous knowledge of how transitions between the levels of awareness may be encouraged there is no basis for anyone to take any personal sense of failure or accomplishment for their own current level of awareness regardless of what that level might be.

However, knowledge of the levels of awareness and the mechanisms involved in moving from one level to another may make a difference in at least two important ways.

1. Individuals experiencing disillusionment at their present level might find it helpful to know what the typical issues are at that level. Such knowledge could afford a measure of comfort along with some degree of understanding regarding their present difficulties.
2. Individuals going through a transition might find it helpful to know what approaches may be appropriate to the level-specific problems with which they are struggling. Having knowledge of potentially effective strategies could significantly increase their chances of successfully dealing with their particular challenges.

### **Evolution or Revolution?**

As you encounter the levels of awareness and the transitions between them it will be important to maintain an evolutionary rather than revolutionary mindset. *The alchemy*

*performed by way of a progression through the levels of awareness and the transitions between them is a time consuming process. But wisdom is not a casual achievement.*

As each new level of awareness is reached, time will be required to consolidate and accommodate the wisdom gained in the transition just completed. Over more time a feeling of relative comfort at this new level of awareness may emerge. But, eventually, again after a passage of time, new challenges will likely rear their ugly heads. This, in turn, could herald the need for further progress through the awareness levels. If another period of transition then follows it will progress along its own schedule in playing out the various processes necessary to arrive at the next level of awareness.

Life's transformations are typically hard won. I point all this out not to discourage anyone but to establish a firm and realistic perspective concerning just what will be required should you decide to accept the challenges inherent in the pursuit of practical wisdom. This is a decision you should not take lightly but it is also one you will not likely be able to avoid indefinitely. Whatever level of awareness you currently inhabit it holds within it the seeds of significant challenges that are bound to present themselves sooner or later. And when they do present themselves you would be well advised to steer clear of quick, band-aid fixes and to, instead, undertake the more productive search for long term solutions, solutions to be found by following the path through the levels of awareness toward practical wisdom.

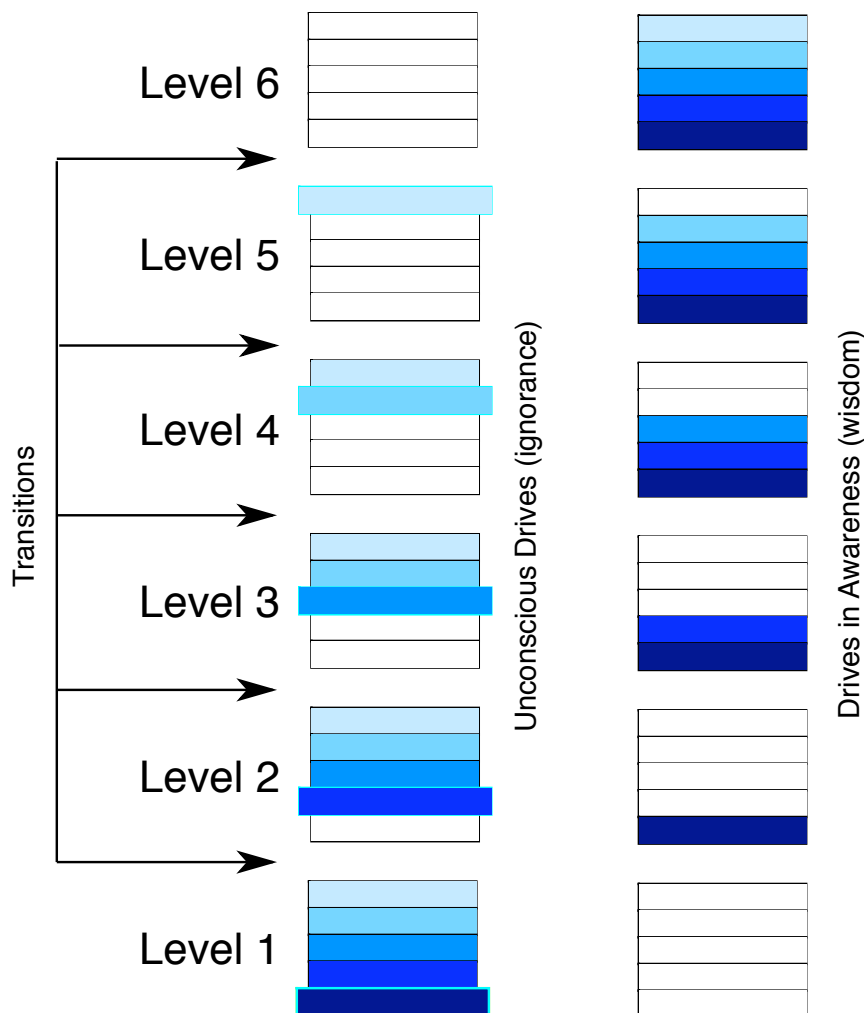
## Transitions As Transmutation

Transitions between the levels of awareness result in the unconscious drive of the current level becoming an object in awareness at the next level.

At each level a different drive dominates the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

### Drives/Ignorance

	Meaning & Purpose
	Individuality & Recognition
	Membership & Belonging
	Security & Safety
	Physical Needs



As we explore the levels of awareness and the transitions between them, we will follow an important trend that can be traced from each level of awareness to the next. This trajectory has significant relevance to our examination of ways in which progress through the levels of awareness can reveal a wider array of possibilities in the

increasingly necessary quest for sustainable solutions to our personal and shared challenges. During each transition between levels of awareness a kind of *alchemy* takes place. This alchemy transmutes a form of *ignorance* found at a given level of awareness into a type of *wisdom* available upon completion of a transition to the next level of awareness.

“Deep within man dwell those slumbering powers; powers that would astonish him, that he never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize his life if aroused and put into action.”

*Orison Swett Marden*

### **Transmutation of Ignorance into Wisdom**

The conversion of unconscious drives (ignorance) at one level of awareness into conscious knowledge (wisdom) at the next constitutes *a transmutation of ignorance into an evolving wisdom* that is heightened with each subsequent transition. Remembering our definition of wisdom as *knowledge enabling the capacity to make compassionate contributions to the world* it becomes self evident that *this capacity is entirely dependent on the level of one’s awareness*. Both the kinds of contributions we are able to make and the degree of compassion with which we make them are reliant on our level of awareness. We cannot contribute that of which we are unaware. Nor can we act with a particular measure of compassion if it is beyond the sphere of our awareness. Hence, the two essential aspects of wisdom increase simultaneously as we move towards higher Levels of Awareness.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Wisdom</b>	<b>Contribution Potential (0 - 6)</b>	<b>Compassion Potential (0 - 6)</b>
0	None	0	0
1	Awareness of body as <b>separate</b> from the environment	1	1
2	Awareness of the need for and importance of <b>physical well-being</b>	2	2
3	Awareness of the need for and importance of <b>security and safety</b>	3	3

Level	Wisdom	Contribution Potential (0 - 6)	Compassion Potential (0 - 6)
4	Awareness of the need for and importance of <b>belonging and appreciation</b>	4	4
5	Awareness of the need for and importance of <b>independence and self respect</b>	5	5
6	Awareness of the need for and importance of <b>purpose and meaning</b>	6	6

It must be recognized that although achieving a particular Level of Awareness affords the capacity for a corresponding level of wisdom (compassionate contribution) there is no guarantee that an individual will exercise this capacity. There may be forces at work in various areas of his or her life that discourage the expression of wisdom.

### **The Conversion of Subjective Experience Into Objective Knowledge**

The transmutation of ignorance into wisdom constitutes a movement of content from subject to object. This conversion of subject to object allows that which once was the subjective experience of self to be known as something other than self. For there to be awareness of an object it must be made distinct from the self that has awareness of it.<sup>2</sup> For example, a child is unaware of having desires because she is those desires. As the child moves toward the intermediate level of awareness she eventually becomes conscious of having desires. The desires are moving from subjective experience to objective awareness. This occurs because, from the perspective of a higher level of awareness, it is possible to perceive that which was previously the unconscious essence of the self. What was hidden and unknowable is now illuminated from the wider view of a higher level of awareness.

It is important to note that the conversion of an unconscious drive into an object available to awareness in no way suppresses or eliminates the drive. Our instinct-like drives have evolved to serve the survival of our species. We do not want to compromise the important roles they play in our physical and emotional well-being. We need only to become aware of their existence and influence. Once in the light of awareness, our

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<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is presented and convincingly supported in Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*

instinct-like drives become potential sources of personal power, fulfillment and increased wisdom.

The movement of content from subject to object that occurs during transitions between levels of awareness is essentially a movement from *being* a component of self to *having* an awareness of that component.<sup>3</sup> At Level 3 one's self is primarily experienced as being a member of and belonging to various groups. However, at Level 4 one no longer derives one's identity so exclusively through membership but now sees membership as one part of the new self. The new self is now experienced primarily as an independent self. At level 4 one *has* awareness of the drive for membership but is no longer primarily defined by it and now experiences itself as *being* independent and self directed.

The movement of unconscious subjective content to content of which one is conscious or aware is what we are calling the *transmutation* of ignorance (unconscious drive) into wisdom (object of awareness). This transmutation results in an awareness of that which was previously unavailable to awareness. The consequent increase in awareness provides an increase in the potential for wisdom because it involves both an increase in perspective and an increase in freedom.

### **Increased Perspective**

An important aspect of the Levels of Awareness is that the movement from each level to the next represents a further degree of separation of the individual's self from its original embeddedness in the environment. The first separation is the making of a distinction between the body and its environment. Next the body becomes an object of awareness as a separation is made between the self as desires and the body of which this self is now aware. The self *is* its desires, needs, and interests and it *has* a body in an environment. This distancing of the self from its environment includes a broadening of perspective which, in turn, allows the individual a more complete view of his or her situation.

### **Increased Freedom**

As we move up through the Levels of Awareness we acquire ever-increasing levels of freedom. Newborns (Level 0) have no such freedom. They are completely embedded in and, therefore, dependent upon the environment. Infants at Level 1 have won a level of freedom by virtue of the fact that they no longer consist entirely of being continuous with environment but now have an environment upon which they can operate. At Level 2 children achieve a greater degree of freedom as they are now liberated from their bodies and instead of *being* their bodies they now *have* bodies upon which their selves can operate, along with retaining the awareness to operate on the environment. Increasing freedom is afforded individuals as they move up to Level 3 awareness. No longer driven by unconscious desires and wants,

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<sup>3</sup> To read an article about the subject-object transformation [click here](#).

individuals are aware of having (rather than being) these desires and wants. This makes it possible for them to develop ways of managing these previously unconscious drives. Freedom, then, increases as we travel up the ladder of awareness because, at each higher level, our range of choices increases. We become aware of more options from which to choose appropriate strategies for action.

### **Transitional Realizations**

Central to each transition from one level of awareness to another is a specific *realization*. I am using realization in a very literal way here, in the sense of “making real”. At each transition individuals realize something that has not occurred to them previously. This something concerns the unconscious drive of the level of awareness being transcended in the transition that is underway. For example, in the transition from level 3 awareness to level 4 awareness individuals realize that they have been driven by a need to belong and to be accepted, a need for membership. In this way the drive for membership and its limitations are *made real* for the individual. The drive for membership is now a “thing” that the individual can take into account when a situation warrants it. Being a thing in awareness, it becomes a contribution to the potential for practical wisdom.

### **Transmutation Through the Levels of Awareness**

After each transition a new component is added to the total store of wisdom that has been accumulated in previous transitions. This occurs as a result of the formation of a new self at each level. The new self established at each level is further removed from embeddedness in, and dependence on the environment. In this manner an increased degree of freedom and a broader perspective is achieved following each transition.

Remembering that we are defining wisdom as a capacity that enables acts of compassionate contribution, it seems reasonable to suppose that an increase in the perspective with which one views his or her situation coupled with a richer range of options from which to make choices (increased freedom) could increase the potential for practical wisdom to emerge.

### **The Alchemy of Awareness: The Formula Revisited**

Earlier we expressed the alchemy of awareness with the following formula:

a = Setting For Change (growth mindset)

b = Tool For Change (deliberate thinking)

c = Capacity For Physical Change In The Brain (neuroplasticity)

$a + b + c = \text{Psychological Growth}$

Taking the above discussion of wisdom and transmutation into account we can expand the formula as follows:

$a + b + c \rightarrow w$



In this formula the “w” stands for *wisdom* and the “-->” refers to *the process of transmutation* where transmutation is understood to be the conversion of ignorance (unconscious drive) into wisdom (awareness resulting in more freedom and greater perspective).

Put into words, the formula would sound something like this:

*“If conditions (a + b) are adequately met the brain’s capacity for physical change (c) may result in the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom (w).”*

In the spirit of the alchemical metaphor of we are using in *The Alchemy of Awareness*, instructions for the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom might be stated as follows:

*“Into a crucible, add equal amounts of purified growth mindset, deliberate thinking, and the capacity for change. Stir these purified substances thoroughly into a well blended mixture. Infuse this mixture with copious quantities of sensory and cognitive stimuli. Agitate the crucible until the infusion is fully absorbed by the mixture. Allow the concoction to percolate until no further activity is observed. A distillate of essential wisdom will result.*

### **The Catalyst of Transmutation**

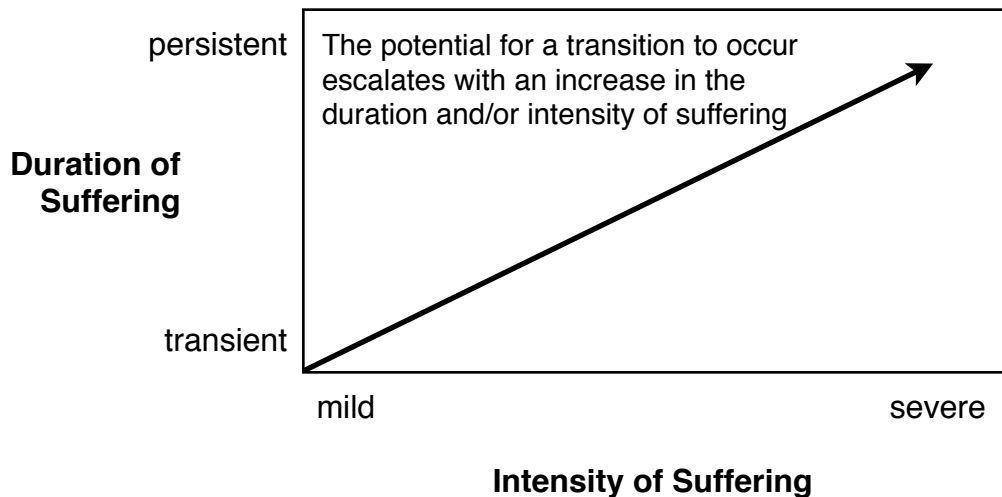
“Man is not imprisoned by habit. Great changes in him can be wrought by crisis--once that crisis can be recognized and understood.”

*Norman Cousins*

While our formula for the alchemy of awareness elucidates a process it does not indicate how that process is set in motion. What is it that initiates the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom? What is the catalyst for this process?

As we have seen there is a kind of ignorance at every level of awareness. A level’s ignorance contains within it the seeds of potential problems that can arise out of that ignorance. When these problems manifest they can be the source of intense suffering. In our efforts to alleviate this suffering we may eventually be driven to seek solutions that lie beyond our present level of awareness. If this occurs a process involving the transmutation our current level-specific ignorance into an object of awareness may ensue resulting in a new object of awareness. This new object of awareness will be available to contribute to our pursuit of wisdom. In this way it may be said that suffering is a catalyst for transmutation. We are not claiming that suffering is the only catalyst for the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom but it is certainly one of the most prevalent in our modern world.

## Potential for Transition



In some cases a relatively low intensity of suffering that persists over an extended period of time may precipitate a transition from a lower level of awareness to higher one. Conversely, highly intense suffering may initiate a transition after persisting over a relatively short period of time. In terms of inducing a transition from one level of awareness to another the optimum condition is a state of intense suffering that persists over a long time. This dynamic serves to give a measure of meaning to suffering. As a catalyst to the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom, suffering has an important role to play in our quest for practical wisdom.

While it describes the means by which transitions are typically initiated in our lives the dynamic as just discussed does not necessarily describe a fate that we must inevitably endure. It may be that the material presented in this book will serve to minimize both the intensity and duration of suffering required to inspire the onset of the transitional process.

### The Ultimate Source of Suffering

The following causal chain shows how suffering arises out of unconscious desires.

Unconscious Drives (ignorance) --> Desires --> Clinging --> Suffering

The “clinging” link refers to the clinging attached to the fulfillment of a desire. Clinging occurs due to a belief that satisfying a drive will bring happiness. For example, if I am at the third level of awareness I may have a desire to be popular among my peer group. Clinging to the belief that becoming popular will make me happy may result in suffering if I fail to achieve this goal. It may even ultimately result in suffering if I succeed in becoming popular. If popularity is found to be ineffective in bringing me lasting happiness another kind of suffering could result. In the end *clinging to any specific outcome is a potential source of suffering.*

It should be kept in mind that suffering occurs in a wide spectrum of intensities, from mild discomfort to intense levels of anguish. In addition, the duration of suffering can vary from transient to persistent. In The Alchemy of Awareness unconscious drives are seen to be the fundamental source of suffering.

<b>Level of Awareness</b>	<b>Unconscious Drive</b>
0	None
1	Basic Needs
2	Security and Safety
3	Belonging and Inclusion
4	Individuality and Recognition
5	Unity
6	None

### **Transition Stages**

Although everyone will go through a transition in a very unique and personal way certain typical stages within transitions can be surmised.

To help us ferret out these stages we will use a fictional account of a problem and go through what might occur as the individual attempts to resolve the issue.

As she gradually claws her way up through a fog of pain killers and sedatives Caroline realizes it has happened again. As consciousness returns so do the aches and pains. She knows where she is now. She is in the hospital and it is not the first time. "This has got to stop," she thinks to herself. But she has said this before, many times. Each time she thinks things will be different. "We will work this out," Caroline thinks. "I know Brad really loves me and he will not do this again when he sees how badly he hurt me this time." Over the years Caroline has tried everything she can think of to improve the situation. She has tried especially hard to avoid making Brad angry. It is only when he is angry that he hits her. If she were a better wife he would not have any reason to lose his temper with her.

But somewhere in the back of her mind Caroline knows that nothing will ever change. No matter how perfect she is, no matter how hard she tries, something always goes wrong. It is all so hopeless. "I'm trapped in this marriage," she tells herself. "But I can't leave. How would I live? And what about the kids? How would I feed my children?" But she has gone through all this before and it has only ever made her feel even more helpless. Better to accept her fate and give it one more try.

The trouble is this time it's different. Every time she even thinks about going back home she begins to shake uncontrollably. Caroline is at the breaking point. She can't go back home and she can't leave home either. As she lies in her hospital bed and weeps a nurse approaches and offers her a tissue. "Thank you," Caroline says quietly as she wipes tears from her eyes.

"I remember you," the nurse says. "You were in here about a year ago."  
"Yes," answers Caroline, her voice trembling slightly.

Neither woman speaks for a moment and then the nurse asks Caroline, "Is there anything I can do to help?" Caroline realizes that, although the woman hasn't spoken of it, the nurse must know something of what she is going through. Fearing Brad's terrible retribution, should he ever find out that Caroline had spoken to anyone, she has always steadfastly refused to talk to anyone about her situation. Until now. With no where to turn and no one else to turn to she breaks down and tells the nurse her sad story.

The nurse listens without interrupting as Caroline's story comes pouring out as if it had been dammed up just waiting to be released. When, at last, Caroline finishes her outpouring the nurse responds, "I'm so sorry." After a few welcome moments of silence she continues, "Would you be willing to accept help with your problem?"

Surprising herself, Caroline answers immediately, "Yes -- please."

Caroline's story illustrates a problem that might occur in the life of a person with level 3 awareness. This is the level of membership and belonging. Marriage is an institution that can satisfy the drive to belong and to be accepted. Family life is a powerful means of fulfillment in our need for membership. The problem for Caroline occurred when her natural desire for acceptance and belonging turned out to involve a toxic relationship. Over the course of her marriage Caroline tried with mounting desperation to solve her problem. However, her attempted solutions were restricted to options allowed by her level 3 awareness. Only when she realized that she had come to the end of her ability to carry on within her existing patterns of behaviour did she finally entertain a course of action that would take her outside her level 3 perspective. For Caroline, reaching beyond the limits of her familial relationships constituted a step beyond her level 3 awareness.

An analysis of the events of this story reveals stages that Caroline progressed through as she began to make the transition from level 3 awareness to level 4 awareness where a drive for independence would eventually take precedence over the drive for belonging. Caroline's drive for belonging would never actually go away. It would simply become subjugated to the level 4 imperatives of independence and recognition once Caroline completed her transition to that level of awareness.

At the point in the story where Caroline despairs that she is trapped in her marriage she is experiencing the first stage of transition: *disillusionment*.

*Disillusionment* - recognition that approaches of the current level of awareness are not only not working but are insufficient to deal with the individual's problems

There is a saying that madness consists of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If this is so then many of us must be a bit mad. We often try to solve problems using the same strategies again and again. Persistence with this kind of folly is likely to result in a general disillusionment with life. We may come to feel that no matter what we do our problems will never go away.

When Caroline reflected on all of the things she had done in attempting to resolve her situation she was going through the second stage of transition: *assessment*.

*Assessment* - identification of what is no longer working

Identifying our ineffective strategies can be a positive step in moving beyond them. Eventually, perhaps suspecting that Einstein might have been onto something when he said that a problem cannot be solved at the same level at which it was created, most of us come to our senses and realize that what is required may be something new, something we have not thus far considered. Reaching this point takes time. It may take years in some cases but if we are persistent in our desire to resolve a problem once and for all we will arrive here sooner or later.

At the end of the story Caroline expresses a willingness to try something different. She is about to enter the third stage of transition: *experimentation*.

Experimentation - trying various alternative approaches to solving the individual's level-related problems

Without a roadmap of the levels of awareness we are pretty much left with the vagaries of trial and error as a means to discover strategies that are beyond our present level of awareness. This stage requires considerable determination if successful approaches to problems are to be uncovered since trial and error is notoriously inefficient.

The final stage of transition is *reconstruction*. This stage involves the rebuilding of the self according to the knowledge gained in the experimentation stage.

Reconstruction - accumulation of successful alternative approaches as they are discovered (usually through trial and error)

As the experimentation stage continues there will likely be an accumulation of strategies that are found to be effective in dealing with the level-specific problem. These strategies will likely involve looking at the problem from the perspective of the next higher level of awareness. If such is the case we have had our first glimpses of the previously hidden drive behind our problem. In this way the unconscious drive (ignorance) is brought into the light of awareness (wisdom).

While these stages of transition are suppositional they present a plausible sequence through which individuals might move when making a transition from one level of awareness to the next. The purpose of presenting them here is to offer a possible line of enquiry for investigation.

## The Early Years: Separation

“The change of mind I am talking about involves not just a change of knowledge, but also a change of attitude toward our essential ignorance, a change in our bearing in the face of mystery. The principle of ecology, if we will take it to heart, should keep us aware that our lives depend on other lives and upon processes and energies in an interlocking system that, though we can destroy it, we can neither fully understand nor fully control. And our great dangerousness is that, locked in our selfish and myopic economies, we have been willing to change or destroy far beyond our power to understand.”

*Wendell Berry*

### The First Transition

Melanie lies on a soft knitted blanket on the floor. She waves her arms aimlessly and kicks her legs sporadically. Little Melanie is only 5 days old. She has no sense of self. Her experience is one of embedded continuity with her environment. Her behavior is not intentional. She acts in response to innate reflexes and intrinsic instincts for survival. However, over time Melanie begins to make a fundamental distinction, a distinction that will change everything. She begins to separate her body from the environment in which it exists. Eventually, those tiny, pink, chubby sausages that come and go in her visual field will become part of her growing awareness of a body that is somehow separate from the womb of the world that surrounds her.

The first transition, from Level 0 to Level 1, occurs soon after birth. With the attainment of Level 1 awareness the infant's primitive behavior is largely motivated according to whether or not it is experiencing pleasure or pain. Pleasure is good. Pain is bad. Behavior is motivated primarily by a desire for fulfillment of basic needs (warmth, food, rest, water). Success for the infant is being comfortable and exercising control of physical reflexes. With the separation of the body from the environment the infant gains a modicum of freedom from and power over the environment and the body's physical reflexes.

## From Level 1 to Level 2

Jordy is having a full-blown tantrum. He is upset because his mother wants him to put on his new blue jacket but Jordy isn't having any of it. He wants to wear the green one. His mother reflects longingly that when he was an infant (level 1 awareness) Jordy didn't fight her on issues of fashion. But those days are gone forever. Jordy has made the transition from level 1 awareness to level 2 awareness and he is now driven by personal wants and desires as well as his basic needs. He is now acquiring his own individual set of preferences that accompany the unconscious drive for security and safety found at the second level of awareness.

The transition from Level 1 to Level 2 typically happens within the first few years of a child's life. As control over the bodily reflexes that drive a level 1 infant increases, the child begins to see things in terms of its internal desires and interests. Its behavior is driven by a need for physical and emotional security experienced as its desires, needs, and wants. Morality is measured in terms of like and dislike. It is attracted to what it desires and repulsed by that which interferes with need fulfillment. A possible problem at this level is the development inordinate selfishness in a child. At this level a self made up of desires for safety is established. This self is experienced as separate from the body. It has dominion over the body, physical impulses and the environment. The body and the environment are available to be used in the fulfillment of the child's wants and needs.

## From Level 2 to Level 3

As recently as a year ago it would have repulsed them both but now Daniel and Jessica are happily holding hands while they wait for the school bus. Feeling only slightly uncomfortable they laugh and joke with the friends that surround them, some of whom are similarly paired up. Clearly, a change has recently come over Jessica and Daniel. Intimate and tight knit relationships with members of their peer group have taken on an unprecedented importance in their lives.

Moving from Level 2 to Level 3 takes longer than the transition from level 1 to level 2 awareness. From the primarily self absorbed point of view of level 2 the individual discovers the need to cooperate and compromise in order to meet an unconscious drive for membership. The drive for membership may partly be born of an unconscious recognition that the self alone cannot adequately satisfy its needs and desires. This



transition involves the emergence of a whole new self once again. This new self is primarily driven by a need to belong, by a drive for membership. New kinds of relationships may be forged and the influence of peer pressure can become a powerful source of motivation.

### **No Guarantees**

Most of us reach at least the third Level of Awareness within our lifetime and most often do so without ever realizing that we have even made the necessary transitions between each level. The transitions, while inevitably uncomfortable, occurred without being recognized for what they were. After Level 3 things are not so automatic. Whether you ever progress beyond this level depends on many factors not the least of which is your individual experiential learning, which in turn is heavily influenced by your family, your culture, your socio-economic standards, your educational opportunities; in short, the world in which you grow up. If some or all of these environmental factors inhibit the development of your awareness you may not evolve beyond the intermediate point of view found at level 3. Whether this is a problem or not will often be determined by your circumstances. If you live in a simple or primitive culture the level 3 imperative for connections and belonging may be very appropriate and sufficient. On the other hand, being prevented from moving beyond level 3 could be a serious drawback when living in a modern cosmopolitan environment.

In addition to the social and cultural factors that may inhibit an individual's passage through the levels of awareness is the built-in resistance to change found in all individuals. We all resist change and for very good reasons. Life would be chaotic and unlivable without a certain degree of psychological stability. Therefore, our evolution has resulted in the creation of certain strategies of resilience that allow us to avoid constant and gratuitous reconfigurations of ourselves. An unfortunate downside of these very necessary strategies is that they may result in resistance to the generally healthy changes involved in progressing from one level of awareness to the next.

### **The Separation Mechanism**

Each transition between a lower level of awareness and the next level up involves an increased degree of separation of the self from the organism's initial state of undifferentiated embeddedness in the environment. The mechanism for this separation is most easily understood if we look at the very first separation; the separation from newborn (Level 0) to infant (Level 1). This transition accomplishes the amazing feat of extracting the body from its embedded state in the environment. How is it possible for the undifferentiated newborn to extricate a separate self from the undivided whole that is its original state. What changes take place that allow this to happen?

There is an activity crucial to all psychological development occurring in the newborn's nervous system, and in particular, in its brain. This activity is the process of experience being encoded in memory. Through the repetition of largely random physical reflexes, and the storage of sensations associated with these movements, the infant gradually comes to believe that it interacts with an environment that is other than itself. As this process continues over time a psychological separation of body and environment

eventually occurs. Memory, and the accumulation of knowledge it allows, is the capacity that makes this separation possible. It is also the capacity that makes all learning and, therefore, all subsequent level specific separations possible.

In the chapters that follow we will explore in some detail Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 (and the transitions between them) as these levels are most pertinent to issues we are facing in the world today. Also, importantly, the transitions between them do not often proceed automatically.

As we move through our discussion of the Levels of Awareness it is important to remember that we will be focusing on the aspects of the levels that are most indicative of each level. *The descriptions of each level should not be construed as profiles of real people.* In real life it is highly unlikely that any individuals exist entirely at a single level in all aspects of their lives. However, people do often exhibit the traits of one level or another at any given point in their lives. As long as people continue to grow psychologically there is the possibility that they will progress upwardly through the Levels of Awareness.

## Membership: Level 3 Awareness

“By building relations we create a source of love and personal pride and belonging that makes living in a chaotic world easier.”

*Susan Lieberman*

Amir Javid is turning his life around. Until recently Amir was a member of a gang in Vancouver, British Columbia. Vancouver has become a hotbed of criminal gang activity. So far this year (2009) there have been reports in the news of gang violence in Vancouver on a disturbingly regular basis. Law enforcement agencies and political groups are struggling to come to grips with this untenable situation. While many facets of gang activities are clouded in secrecy the appeal of gang membership is well documented by sociologists and freely admitted to by gang members. Among other considerations such as gaining recognition and the acquisition of wealth, joining a gang addresses key aspects of the drive for membership found at level 3 awareness.

When asked what attracted him to the gang lifestyle Amir mentioned, among other things, brotherhood. Amir wanted to feel like he belonged somewhere. This resonates with the desire of level 3 individuals to pursue identities defined by group relationships. A gang provides a structured and relatively uncomplicated society. According to Amir this society met his needs more immediately and completely than the larger and vastly more complex society in which he had been living. In addition to an identity defined by relationships and values within the gang level 3 individuals can also achieve a sense of recognition through gang membership. As Amir puts it, “I just wanted to be heard. Put a gun in my hand and I got some attention.” It is usually very important to level 3 individuals that they be recognized and respected by their peers.

Amir Javid is no longer in a gang. He now spends his time working to persuade others to break with their gang involvements. This undertaking is not without its own risks. As Katie Mercer says in an article posted on [canada.com](http://canada.com), “Every morning Javid wakes up, straps on his vest and hits the streets in the Downtown Eastside, seeking out gang members who are at their most vulnerable — guys who have just joined, been charged or done time.” Fortunately for him and for those he seeks to help, Amir Javid is making a courageous transition from level 3 to level 4 awareness where the unconscious drives of level 3 are becoming objects in his awareness that he can now take into consideration in his efforts to liberate other gang members from their level 3 imperatives. Amir says he now intends to live a life of contribution to his community.

Watch a video interview with Amir Javid: [CTV Interview](#)

### **Level 3 Awareness**

At level 2 a separate self driven by desires, wants and needs emerged. At Level 3 no longer is a person simply a separate self but now he or she is an individual within a social grouping. The self comes to be defined by relationships to others. No more is there an existence for the self that is completely independent of its relationships with other selves. Even though, at this level, the tendency is often to see others as objects rather than as selves in their own rights, these others cannot be denied their existence. If nothing else others are understood to be resources in the individual's ongoing attempts to satisfy his or her needs, wants and desires. They must be taken into account when making choices and decisions. In closer relationships there is usually an increase in the likelihood that both parties in the relationship will be understood by the other to be actual selves rather than objects.

### **Transmutation at Level 3 Awareness**

The unconscious drive for security of level 2 becomes an object of awareness at level 3 awareness. The self is now removed from embeddedness through awareness of its environment and its drive for security and the desires attendant to this drive. At level 3 there is an increase in the individual's degree of freedom afforded by the additional objects of awareness available at this level. The drive for security along with its related desires are now in awareness and, as such, are available for consideration by the individual when making choices.

### **Components of Level 3 Awareness:**

#### **Form of Wisdom**

Awareness now includes knowledge about the drive for security and safety providing the individual with additional information available for consideration when making choices and decisions.

#### **Unconscious Foundation of Self (Form of ignorance)**

The self that forms at Level 3 is primarily consumed by a need for membership. Peer pressure becomes a powerful force as does concern for popularity and the opinions of others. Popularity is often an end in itself at this level.

#### **Truth**

Truth at Level 3 is determined by consensus within the individual's group. If "everyone" thinks it's true then it is. With a deep concern for belonging comes a tendency to defer to the group so as not to be ostracized.

#### **Drive**

With the onset of puberty that is commensurate with level 3 awareness the powerful drive for procreation comes into play. In addition, strong desires for belonging and connection drive the level 3 individual. Choices are often made on the basis of their potential to promote inclusion and popularity or to avoid exclusion.

### **Meaning**

Individuals at level 3 find meaning in relationships and in forming bonds with others. Situations and actions that enhance the formation and strengthening of relationships and group membership are meaningful. Situations that are perceived to have the potential to threaten relationships also are laden with meaning.

### **Morality**

For an individual at level 3 equality based on comparison with others is an overriding concern. The clarion cry of individuals at this level is, "It's not fair!" when what they may really mean is that it's not equal or the same. Relevant situational variations may be ignored in favor of focusing on what individuals believe should be the same.

### **Success**

Success at level 3 awareness is measured in terms of acceptance and popularity.

### **Problems**

The drive to belong has several possible problem areas. If people at this level cannot find satisfying membership in mainstream groupings they may be drawn to groups with questionable social values such as gangs and cults.

Also, in their need to form strong bonds with others groups of individuals at this level of awareness may attempt to make their groups exclusive by imposing rigid membership restrictions. They may even institute demeaning membership or hazing rituals. Excessive people pleasing may lead individuals into dangerous or overly dependent relationships. Pathological rivalries may form between groups. On a global scale level 3 awareness can manifest itself in conflicts that are waged over conflicting nationalist or ideological interests.

## **Level 3 In The World**

The research shows that level 3 awareness is the level where a large proportion of the population of the world resides. When we look at the world for evidence of this we find it everywhere.

### **Level 3 Awareness In Pop Culture**

The communicative power of modern technology has a strong appeal to the level 3 drive to connect. Devices like computers, mp3 players, game consoles, and cell phones are ubiquitous in today's world and have been wholeheartedly embraced by the young people who make up a large portion of the world's population of level 3 individuals.

The recent explosive growth of the internet and the formation of social networks is an indication of a widespread presence of level 3 imperatives in our world. Social networks allow people to connect in ways previously not

available. Users create an account in a network and can then create a profile that includes personal information such as favorite movies, music, books, activities, and so on. Depending on the network, they can then connect with other users of the same network based on various criteria. Most networks allow users to connect and share ideas around common interests. Others focus on such things as photo sharing, reconnecting with school acquaintances, business, sports, religion, sharing video clips, etc.. Wikipedia (itself a specialized kind of social network) lists over 100 social networks with a wide variety of interest areas.

One of the most popular social networks is Facebook. This network, created by Marc Zuckerberg while still a student at Harvard University, appeared on the scene in 2004 and was at first restricted to university students. Now, anyone over the age of 13 can join and it is estimated there are more than 64 million users worldwide. One of the features of Facebook that appeals to many people is that you can control who connects with you. Potential contacts must send you a request and you must then grant them the privilege of becoming your “friend” before they can access any information about yourself that you have posted in your personal profile. This contrasts with the more open access to information posted on MySpace, another popular social networking system.

The appeal of such networking to individuals at level 3 awareness is obvious. The social opportunities available for connecting with others have become virtually (pun intended) limitless. Now the world is literally at your fingertips and the possible connections are practically infinite. Even people previously marginalized, whether due to a lack of popularity, geographic isolation, physical impairment, or some other limiting factor, can now hook up with a nearly unlimited variety of groups and individuals.

Of course, the dangers of getting involved with groups or individuals of questionable character are just as much a concern in the virtual world as in the real one. However, a recent report entitled "Online 'Predators' and Their Victims: Myths, Realities and Implications for Prevention," published in the February/March 2008 issue of *American Psychologist*, concluded that both the frequency and the severity of incidents involving online predators were much less than generally perceived by the public. In particular, cases of online stalking or abductions were found to be “extremely rare”.

### **Level 3 Awareness In Entertainment**

The hugely popular online game, *World of Warcraft*, has more than 11.5 million monthly subscribers making it the worlds largest Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) in the world. In spite of the fact that they take place in virtual worlds, MMORPGs have attracted the attention of sociologists and psychologist because the interactions between players of these games are real. Consequently, research into these games provides

some interesting insights into the millions of people who participate in MMORP games. An activity of this sort is a prime of example of the type of recreational activity in which one would expect individuals of level 3 awareness to engage. Such engagement provides many opportunities for players to make connections with others, both directly between the players themselves and indirectly through their game characters. One of the attractions of MMORPGs seems to be the opportunity they provide for players to try out alternative characters that can have personalities and characteristics not possessed by their creators. Research shows that as many as 57% of gamers have created a character of the opposite gender.

Studies have shown that slightly more than one fifth of those who play MMORPGs prefer socializing online to doing so in real life. Males in particular reported finding it easier to converse online than offline. For individuals at level 3 awareness online socializing can provide much desired opportunities to make connections in addition to those found in their offline lives. Of course, there is always the danger of becoming too dependent on virtual socializing to the detriment of making a sufficient effort to establish, what may be perceived to be, somewhat more intimidating relationships in real life. The drive for membership of level 3 awareness will not be denied whether it is satisfied through healthy relationships or in some alternative form of connection making.

### **More Examples of Level 3 Awareness in the World**

*Disclaimer:* The following represent activities to which individuals at this level of awareness may be drawn. They are not intended to be taken as exclusive to the level nor should it be assumed that individuals at this level will restrict themselves to these activities exclusively. *Where levels of awareness are concerned the motivation of individuals for participation in activities is more relevant than the specific activities themselves.*

- Social Groups: The level 3 drive for connections often leads individuals to join such groups as clubs, political parties, service groups, volunteer organizations, fraternities, sororities, etc.
  
- Social Networks: A relatively new level 3 phenomenon is the emergence of the very popular social networking websites like the previously discussed Facebook along with others such as Twitter, MySpace, and YouTube. Also, several major internet organizations like Google and Yahoo host user groups where people can form *ad hoc* online groups centered around virtually any interest area. It is estimated that there are currently well in excess of 100 different social networking systems available on the internet with more being added all the time.

## The Transition From Level 3 to Level 4 Awareness

“We accept the verdict of the past until the need for change cries out loudly enough to force upon us a choice between the comforts of further inertia and the irksomeness of action.”

*Judge Learned Hand*

### The Upside of Problems

Each level of awareness has its dangers and problems. Ironically, it is these very dangers and problems that make a transition to the next level more likely. As problems mount for an individual at their current level and the dangers and problems become more and more obvious, he or she will become increasingly likely to reach his or her limit within that level of awareness and be motivated to move on.

### The Wisdom of Level 3

Each level of awareness provides a new type of wisdom not previously available. In the case of level 3 awareness the wisdom lies in connection, relationship, and membership. Connection illuminates the contexts in which we live. Our relationships define our significance within a membership. However, at level 3 awareness the scope of our connections, relationships, and memberships are all at a strictly personal level. It is not until the fifth level of awareness that this limited scope expands beyond the personal level to include a truly global perspective.

### The Ignorance of Level 3

As time goes on, people operating at Level 3 awareness will inevitably encounter level 3 related problems. Perhaps they will experience the pain of a failed relationship. Maybe they will feel rejected by their peers. Friends might voice disapproval of something they said or did. Pleasing others becomes an impossible task. The severity and number of problems may eventually reach a point at which the individual feels he or she can no longer cope with the demands of his or her life. The individual is overwhelmed.

From the perspective of level 3 awareness there is no way out. The self is trapped in a membership mindset. What has worked in the past is no longer providing solutions. What is needed is a liberation of the constraints inherent in membership; that is, being defined by others and the drive to belong. A transformation of self is needed whereby the self can see the components of membership objectively. The unconscious components of the self as member need to be converted to conscious objects of awareness. As noted earlier, this requires a the creation of a self with the wider perspective afforded by a higher level of awareness. The question is how is the new self formed and how can the process of its formation be facilitated? The Stages of Transition from Level 3 to Level 4 outline this process.



### **Stages of Transition - Level 3 to Level 4**

In our earlier discussion of transitions we identified four possible stages that a transition might involve. We will not look at these stages with the transition from level 3 to level 4 in mind.

*Disillusionment* - recognition that current approaches (level 3) are insufficient to deal with the individual's problems

*Assessment* - identification of what is no longer working such as:

- being defined by membership in a group
- trying to please everyone
- relying on others to meet needs (interpersonal dependency)
- seeking universal approval
- avoiding rejection
- pursuit of popularity

*Experimentation* - trying various alternative approaches to solving the individual's level 3 related problems

- examining items uncovered in the Assessment phase
- reframing the problem

*Reconstruction* - accumulation of successful alternative approaches as they are discovered through trial and error

- defining one's own identity (rather than being defined by group relationships)
- logic and reason in choice making
- personal evaluation as opposed to group consensus
- responsibility for improved self status rather than reliance on group successes
- organization by hierarchies within and between groups
- pursuit of personal goals
- taking personal responsibility for success

Upon complete a transition from level 3 awareness to level 4 awareness individuals find themselves under the influence of a new unconscious drive, the drive for independence and recognition.

## Independence: Level 4 Awareness

“The four cornerstones of character on which the structure of this nation was built are: Initiative, Imagination, Individuality and Independence.”

*Edward Rickenbacker*

“Independence? That's middle-class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.”

*George Bernard Shaw*

For a time he was the third largest newspaper magnate in the world. In July of 2007 Conrad Black was convicted and sentenced to serve 78 months in a United States federal prison. A report to the United States Securities and Exchange Commission by the Hollinger Institute accused Black of running a “corporate kleptocracy” and there must have been some basis for the accusation because Black was ordered to pay Hollinger 6.1 million dollars.

Given that Conrad Black was a man of monumental wealth the question is “why”. Why would a man already rolling in money bother to engage in diverting funds from the company of which he was the CEO for his personal benefit? What compelled Black to break the law in the pursuit of even more wealth?

What seems an irrational act may, however, make some sense if we are dealing with an individual at the fourth level of awareness. Perhaps the level 4 imperative for status was at work here. Conrad Black was born into a relatively wealthy family wherein he likely acquired a belief in wealth as the measure of a man. His ostentatious lifestyle later in life is well documented. To a man in Black’s position status would be measured not against those of moderate means but against those of substantial means. Status to Black would be relative to his position within the wealthiest people in the world. Due to the elevated level of competition for status in this rarefied atmosphere it is unlikely that any amount of money would ever be enough. It seems reasonable to assume that the dynamic of relative status may have played a part in Black’s decision to appropriate funds from Hollinger Institute that led to his downfall.

### Level 4 Awareness

Recall that at Level 3 individuals are driven by powerful needs to connect, to be included, to be accepted, to experience membership. By virtue of the transmutation that occurs in the transition from level 3 to level 4 awareness individuals become conscious of the basic human need to belong and, consequently, are no longer blindly driven by it. Once again, freedom has evolved by means of a further removal of the self from the environment. The concern of individuals now becomes their relative status within the groups to which they belong and within society as a whole. In the pursuit of status

concerns about power come to the fore. Personal ambition is a hallmark of level 4 awareness.

### **Status Anxiety and Level 4 Awareness**

Perhaps the aspect of level 4 awareness that we can most easily recognize, even if we would rather not admit it to ourselves, is status anxiety. Indeed, it is so pervasive that, more than any other common psychological problem, status anxiety may be said to define our modern age. In her introduction to a talk by Alain de Botton, author of *Status Anxiety*, Amanda Smith remarks, “... what other people think of us, and whether we can be judged a success or a failure in the eyes of the world, are widespread anxieties that generally go unacknowledged and unexamined.”

In *Status Anxiety* de Botton defines the malady as "a worry so pernicious as to be capable of ruining extended stretches of our lives, that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society and that we may as a result be stripped of dignity and respect; a worry that we are constantly occupying too modest a rung or are about to fall to a lower one." Having moved from level 3 awareness where he or she was defined by membership in any number of groups the level 4 individual is acutely aware of his or her position within these various groups and within the larger society as he or she strives to forge an independent identity. The individual comes to view his or her self as located at various levels on any number of continuums. A level 4 self is to a large extent defined, in any given situation, by its perception of its level on a continuum that is deemed to be relevant to that situation particular situation. This tends to be the case regardless of whether the situation at hand is one's workplace, family, social club, recreational sports group, or any other situation that involves an opportunity to measure one's mettle against others.

de Botton believes that an important reason why status anxiety is so prevalent in the world today is due to our perception that our societies are *meritocratic*. A meritocratic society is one in which privilege is earned rather than conferred or inherited. In a meritocracy it is assumed that everyone has an equal chance to succeed if they apply themselves with sufficient vigor and perseverance. But as de Botton observes, “The problem with sincerely believing that your society is meritocratic is explaining failure. If you genuinely believe that those at the top deserve their success, you by definition have to believe that those at the bottom deserve their failure.” If this is so it is no wonder that we obsess over our positions on the failure-success continuum. Couple this with the tendency at level 4 awareness to define our now independent selves in terms relative to others and we come up with a potent recipe for extreme levels of status anxiety.

Watch a video with Alain de Botton: [Status Anxiety](#)

## **Components of Level 4 Awareness:**

### **Degree of Freedom**

Level 4 awareness brings with it a degree of freedom from the previously unconscious drives to connect and belong. At this level those drives become objects of awareness permitting individuals to take them into account when dealing with the situations and circumstances they encounter in their lives.

### **Unconscious Foundation of the New Self**

The basis for the new self that forms at level 4 is the experiential history of the individual. In the process of experiencing life we form and store in our nervous systems, conclusions about the way things are. These conclusions include assumptions, beliefs, and opinions that can collectively be referred to as our conditioning. Conditioning is simply what we have learned from our life experiences. The accumulation of conditioning (learning) is essential to life and survival. However, it is fraught with difficulties. Our brains are patterning machines and are constantly seeking to make sense of the world through the discovery of patterns. Because it is so crucial to survival it has evolved to work at an amazing speed. In order for the process of pattern recognition to occur virtually instantaneously, our brains have evolved the ability to make connections with very little information. This comes at a price. Quick connections may be inaccurate or unfounded. The downside of speedy pattern recognition is seeing patterns or connections where no real basis for them exists. The scientific term for this is apophenia and it is rampant. Our brains attempt to "join the dots" or make connections rapidly in order to make sense out of what is continually occurring in the present moment. We may not have the luxury of time needed for careful deliberation in the midst of an emergency situation so we are hardwired to jump to conclusions. As necessary as this is, if we are not vigilant we will draw some very dubious conclusions and hold them to be true. Thus, the very nature of the acquisition of knowledge may serve to fill our brains with some rather questionable content.

Even the blessing that we referred to earlier as brain neuroplasticity has a role to play in the impact of unsubstantiated conclusions. Norman Doidge explains the downside of neuroplasticity as follows, "Neuroplasticity has the power to produce more flexible but also more rigid behaviors--a phenomenon I call "the plastic paradox." Ironically, some of our most stubborn habits and disorders are products of our plasticity. Once a particular plastic change occurs in the brain and becomes well established, it can prevent other changes from occurring."

At level 4 these habits and conclusions, valid or otherwise, form the basis of the self's system of evaluation. Situations are interpreted according to the conditioning of the individual person who, now freed of meaning that was dependent on membership, focuses on the establishment of personal meaning and values within the context of learned values. The hallmark of

level 4 is unexamined assumptions and beliefs. Underlying assumptions and biases are largely unconscious and unavailable for scrutiny.

### **Truth**

At Level 4 relative truth is believed to be absolute. “Gold is valuable.” is a self-evident truth to an individual with Level 4 awareness. Likewise the importance of status is a given. The author of *Status Anxiety* concluded that, although it may be alleviated to a degree, some form of status anxiety is inevitable. Level 4 truths are seen to be universal rather than relative to particular situations or contexts.

### **Drive**

Status drives individuals with Level 4 Awareness. Level 4 individuals are motivated by the possibility of personal gain relative to others. This drive stems from their unconscious conditioning which, in turn, stems from their personal histories. These personal histories inevitably involve some form of social conditioning which, by definition, includes the inculcation of the prevalent culture’s dominant mores and norms.

### **Behavior**

Advantages are sought with a view to improving an individual’s ranking within every area of his or her life. Opportunities are sought for enhancing the individual’s relative position in the hierarchies within the groups to which he or she belongs. Competition is a natural behavior for Level 4 individuals. The pursuit of power through wealth, celebrity, and admiration is common.

### **Meaning**

For the Level 4 individual meaning is determined by the possible relative personal advantage or disadvantage regarding his or her status in a given context. People at this Level of Awareness are attracted to situations that hold the potential for personal advancement within a hierarchy.

### **Morality**

Questions of right and wrong are resolved by individuals by applying truth to the situation. Judgements are made using absolute criteria. “Killing is bad.” The absolute criteria often used are the laws of the land, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices. While any of these criteria may be challenged they are usually challenged on the basis of alternate absolute criteria rather than a fundamental questioning of the criteria themselves. This is a morality that is seen to be equivalent to justice.

### **Success**

Success at level 4 awareness is measured in terms of relative status, the importance and recognition of the individual self.

## **Problems**

### *The Flip Side of Ambition*

When the drive to achieve status is taken too far blind ambition enters the picture. Blind ambition can lead people to trample on the rights of others in the interest of personal advancement. Behavior may become callus and even ruthless in the obsessive pursuit of advantage over others. Also, the flip side of ambition, jealousy, may become problematic when rivalries become too intense. In addition, when combined with Level 3 membership imperatives groups may engage in unhealthy practices when the status of the group becomes a vehicle for personal advantage. For example, groups may cultivate a culture of exclusivity by creating demanding membership requirements that insure the collective status of its members.

### *Environmental Concerns*

Another possible problem stemming from Level 4 awareness is that the same kind of callus and ruthless behavior that may be directed at other individuals may also be directed towards other cultures resulting in racism. This is a particular danger when an individual feels compelled to choose between his or her status and a concern for another culture's well being. Personal status can also be at odds with the health of the environment. If there is an opportunity to increase wealth at the cost of damage to the environment level 4 awareness may favor pursuing the status perceived to be commensurate with an increase in wealth.

### *The Internet as Status Machine*

There are lots of things I like about information technology. I love being able to find information on any topic in seconds. I love the way it lets me keep in touch with my friends and relatives. One of the most powerful aspects of the internet is that anyone can be heard. Those who might otherwise be disenfranchised are able to make themselves heard. On blogs, public forums, and places like Facebook and MySpace anyone with a computer and internet connection can put their thoughts, opinions, photos, movies, music and more in front of the world.

But this sword of accessibility is double-edged. The internet is almost completely anarchistic. Attempts to police the web have been largely unsuccessful. The fact that web content is largely unregulated means that there is little or no control over the truth or accuracy of what you might stumble across as you travel around in cyberspace. In the minds of those at the fourth level of awareness this may be perceived as license to promote themselves in any way necessary to gain status within a community of like minded people.

Also, while the once powerless are now empowered to make themselves heard, there is no guarantee about the level of veracity spoken with their new-found voices; particularly where opinions are concerned. When anyone

can express their thoughts publicly and with anonymity we will inevitably be inundated with a flood of opinions all vying for our sympathy. More often than not, these opinions will be bolstered with emotion and hyperbole rather than with reasoned arguments and supporting evidence. We are afloat on a sea of opinionated opinions all being given unqualified and, in many cases, undeserved validity. Taste and personal preference are afforded equal status with informed arguments and expert opinions.

Often a large collection of similar snap opinions are given more weight than less numerous but more carefully considered thoughts. It's as if the sheer weight of the number of people who hold a belief is the best way to measure truth. If truth were determined by popular belief then the world would have actually been, and still be, flat. Quantity often wins over quality when it comes to the power of opinions in an unmoderated environment like the internet. This is democracy in its most noxious form; freedom devoid of accountability. When personal opinion is afforded equal status to informed opinion we are in danger of losing the crucial perspective of intelligent reflection. However, if you have a desire to gain status the internet and all of the forms of public forums it provides will probably be seen as a powerful tool to achieve your goals.

As with most technologies the internet itself is not good or bad. It is the way we use it and our motives for doing so that matters. For individuals at the fourth level of awareness the drive for individuality and personal status will often be a dominant motive when taking advantage of the power of the internet.

## **Level 4 In The World**

Together with level 3 awareness, level 4 awareness is the most prevalent level of awareness encountered by developmental psychological researchers. As with level 3, evidence of level 4 awareness in the world is ubiquitous.

### **Level 4 Awareness in Education**

Individuals at level 4 awareness tend to value hierarchies because hierarchies, by their very nature, establish clear measurement guidelines for determining personal status within them.

School Grading Systems use a type of hierarchic classification. Student performance is sorted according to a system of letter grades. While many educators feel that there are serious problems with this system of grading it is not likely to change so long as level 4 awareness remains as prevalent as it is today. Our western society is founded on hierarchic systems of merit as favored by those with level 4 awareness. Letter grades are, within the context

of student performance, a system of meritocratic status symbols. As with any meritocracy the school system operates under the assumption of equality of opportunity. It assumes that all students are created with equal opportunities for achievement. The typically difficult job faced by inner city schools in poverty ridden districts put the lie to this assumption. Students from families living in poverty do not come to school with the same advantages as those from wealthier homes. The No Child Left Behind initiative in the U.S. was instituted in recognition of this situation. While this initiative has many commendable features it does not address the underlying cause of inequity -- the ever widening gap between the rich and poor in western society. As long as we continue to define success in terms of status (wealth and celebrity) this gap will continue to widen and the dubious meritocratic practice of assigning letter grades for student performance will favor those who are already advantaged.

#### **Level 4 Awareness In Consumerism**

With the level 4 awareness drive for independence comes a strong desire for individuality. Reacting to the limitations of an identity defined by memberships in groups found at the third level of awareness, level 4 individuals strike out to forge an independent identity. Since individuals with level 4 awareness constitutes a large proportion of our current population it is not surprising that much in our culture reflects the assumptions and beliefs of this level of awareness.

In a book called *The Ego Boom: Why the World Really Does Revolve Around You* authors Steve Maich and Lianne George outline many ways that the drive for individuality has permeated out Western society. In the book's product description we find: "The unifying theme has been the same: there is nothing more vital than the power to choose—and to express oneself through those choices. Atomization—the breaking apart of social systems into ever smaller pieces—is emerging as the most powerful force shaping Western society." Writing in the Winnepeg Free Press, Key Porter, In his review of *The Ego Boom* Key describes the situation addressed by Maich and George, "This is the existential and social crisis described by Toronto authors Steve Maich and Lianne George: How a combination of ubiquitous information technology, affirmational advertising and a culture of self-esteem is fragmenting our society into billions of hyper-individualistic, self-absorbed pieces"

The themes of *The Ego Boom* serve to illuminate many instances of the individualistic ethos that pervades our culture. Never have there been so many ways to customize our lives. Nearly everything we purchase comes with options for personalization: cars, computers, refrigerators, home plans, cell phone plans, cable and satellite subscriptions, insurance coverage, and so on.



Maich and George have coined a term to refer to the underlying idea marketers use to sell their wares to those of us concerned with the individual aspect of self. “You Sell” is a reference to the unspoken marketing message that tells us every product is about us. What could be more appealing to forth level awareness than to be told, however subliminally, that, as individuals, “You are the center of the universe.”

#### **Level 4 Awareness In Entertainment**

The much disparaged “rat race” is an apt metaphor for much of the perspective inherent in level 4 imperatives. With a drive for status and a desire for self-reliance individuals with level 4 awareness are often on the lookout for advantages to bolster their ambitions. These level 4 qualities are perfectly suited to the requirements of such reality TV shows such as The Apprentice, American Idol, and Survivor.

Survivor was conceived in 1992 and was first produced in Sweden as “Expedition: Robinson” in 1997. Its eventual release in the USA in 2000 was a huge success and the reality TV era was born. Survivor is a show in which contestants are isolated in wilderness environments and compete for one million dollars. Along the way contestants must deal with reward challenges and immunity challenges. Adding to the intrigue is the fact that contestants can vote to eliminate each other. The tag line for the show speaks volumes about the its fundamental nature: “Outwit, Outplay, Outlast”. To survive from day to day players need to use a blend of manipulation, deceit, and persuasion with the object of lasting to the end of the game and being crowned Sole Survivor. Much about this game, with its focus on individual success at the expense of the success of others, is in tune with the sensibilities of level 4 awareness.

#### **More Examples of Level 4 Awareness in the World:**

*Disclaimer:* The following represent activities to which individuals at this level of awareness may be drawn. They are not intended to be taken as exclusive to the level nor should it be assumed that individuals at this level will restrict themselves to these activities exclusively. *Where levels of awareness are concerned the motivation of individuals for participation in activities is more relevant than the specific activities themselves.*

- *Business:* “Upwardly Mobile” is a term that applies well to level 4 individuals in the business world. Whatever hierarchy they may find themselves in, they are looking to make upward movement.
- *Politics:* While at the level 3 level people may join political parties to connect with others, level 4 drives lead them to seek improved status within the party power hierarchy.

- *Law*: With a propensity to arrive at independent opinions it is virtually inevitable that there will be disputes between individuals and groups of people at level 4 awareness. Consequently the need for an impartial system of conflict resolution is very attractive to individuals at this level. As we have become more and more enamored of personal independence there has been a corresponding propensity to resort to litigation as the preferred method for resolving our differences. In addition to serving as arbiter of our differences the legal system also provides another important function in the eyes of individuals at this level. We are able to hide behind rules, regulations, and laws rather than face personal liability when our ambitions get us into trouble. At this level there is a tendency to over-ride concerns for right and wrong with concerns over personal advantage and status. When operating from level 4 awareness we may be tempted to prefer litigation over ethics.

## **The Transition From Level 4 to Level 5 Awareness**

“All of the past is but the beginning of the beginning; all that the human mind has accomplished is but the dream before the awakening.”

*H.G. Wells*

### **A Level of Tolerance**

Level 5 awareness facilitates the emergence of tolerance in individuals. From the level 5 perspective, others are understood to be selves in their own right with valid thoughts and feelings. This deep-felt respect for others is the foundation for tolerance, empathy, and compassion. All aspects (truth, drive, behavior, meaning, morality, and perspective) of level 5 awareness support compassionate tolerance and respect.

### **The Wisdom of Level 4**

Level 4 awareness with its drive for independence contains the seeds of personal responsibility. Individuals are enabled to discover their own personal power to make things happen in the world and with this power comes great responsibility. The full implications of this responsibility may go unrecognized by individuals with level 4 awareness since it may be obscured by their concerns for advantage and status. A wise perspective on personal responsibility may have to wait until level 5 awareness is achieved when it may come to be known as a responsibility to the planet. Similarly, a wise use of personal power may arise only after at least a partial transition to level 5 has been made. A level 5 person may come to understand their personal power as the means to making a unique contribution to a better world.

### **The Ignorance of Level 4**

When you are operating from the perspective of level 4 awareness you are prone to the problems inherent in that perspective. You may spend years of your life in pursuit of wealth or celebrity only to find that any successes you may have achieved leave you unfulfilled. You may become disillusioned with the so-called absolute standards that have guided your choices once you stop to question their validity. Rivalries may have resulted in feelings of deep hurt and loneliness. In an effort to be more self-reliant you

may have driven away others and alienated yourself. Your intolerance for the beliefs, values, and opinions of others may prove to be a further source of isolation. You may have sacrificed meaningful relationships in order to pursue your status related goals. It may turn out to be true that it is lonely at the top and that the closer you get to the top the lonelier it gets.

### **Stages of Transition - Level 4 to Level 5**

*Disillusionment* - recognition that current approaches (level 4) are insufficient to deal with the individual's problems

*Assessment* - identification of what is no longer working such as:

- equating success with relative status (wealth, fame)

Status anxiety was presented as a common symptom of level 4 awareness. Individuals suffering from this affliction may eventually become disillusioned with the pursuit of status. Recall that in a meritocracy it is believed individuals should succeed in accordance with their individual merits. But there is evidence that this is not how success operates in the real world. In his book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell makes an argument for factors other than merit that he believes play important roles in determining who succeeds and who does not. According to Gladwell's research successful people "...are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot." Examining the lives of outliers from Mozart to Bill Gates, he builds a convincing case for how successful people rise on a tide of advantages, "some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky."

According to Malcolm Gladwell success depends on:

1. opportunity
2. being born in the right place and time
3. intelligence/talent/aptitude
4. 10,000 hours of practice

Notice that only the fourth of these factors is under the direct control of the individual. If Gladwell is correct it makes sense that some at the fourth level of awareness may find the quest for status through wealth or celebrity, the currently prevailing definitions of success, to be less than satisfying.

- absolute faith in personal truths
- blind ambitions
- competitive rivalries in business, arts, politics, etc.
- over-reliance on self
- intolerance for beliefs and opinions of others
- others as objects in the competition for status
- trust in hierarchies

*Experimentation* - trying various alternative approaches (outside the level 4 strategies already tried) to solving the individual's level 4 related problems

- examining items identified in the Assessment phase
- reframing the problem
- trial and error

*Reconstruction* - accumulation of successful alternative approaches as they are discovered through trial and error

- treating others as selves not objects
- defining success as benefit to all stakeholders
- taking responsibility for improved community
- openness to a variety of organizational structures in addition to hierarchies
- respecting others' beliefs, values, and opinions
- trusting in the worth of consensus community values
- setting community oriented goals
- contributing unique gifts to the community
- recognition of existence and influences of conditioning in personal biases

Once the transition from level 4 awareness to level 5 awareness is complete a new unconscious drive takes precedence. The level 5 drive is for unity.

## Interdependence: Level 5 Awareness

“It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act. There are two aspects to action. One is to overcome the distortions and afflictions of your own mind, that is, in terms of calming and eventually dispelling anger. This is action out of compassion. The other is more social, more public. When something needs to be done in the world to rectify the wrongs, if one is really concerned with benefitting others, one needs to be engaged, involved.”

*Dalai Lama*

“The secret of happiness is to find something more important than you and dedicate your life to it.”

*Daniel C. Dennett*

“The life of the individual has meaning only insofar as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred, that is to say, it is the supreme value to which all other values are subordinate.”

*Albert Einstein*

As a twelve year old Toronto schoolboy Craig Kielburger came across a newspaper article that reported the shooting of a 12 year old Pakistani boy. It was suspected that the boy was shot as a result of his criticism of the Pakistani carpet industry’s habit of using children as laborers. Craig was deeply moved by this story. He determined to make an effort to help those less fortunate than himself. He founded Free the Children, a human rights organization. Free the Children is run by children and seeks to curb the use of child labor around the world. A book called *Free the Children: A Young Man Fights Against Child Labor and Proves That Children Can Change the World* tells the story of Craig’s efforts in this area.

Craig soon felt the need to know more. In the company of a chaperone he set out on a seven week journey. He visited Bangkok, Calcutta, Karachi, and other cities. Free the Children is written as a travelogue. It chronicles Craig’s awakening to issues of injustice and poverty as well as the incredible diversity and heart rending beauty of the world. It is an inspiring story of a boy’s courageous dedication to make his world a better place.

### Level 5 Awareness

Attainment of Level 5 awareness is relatively rare. Because of this some of the research conclusions tend to be tentative in nature. This is the level of a new order of self-observation. At this level individuals become aware of their personal conditioning. They are now able to see the relative nature of beliefs and assumptions that they previously

held to be absolute. They can observe their own conditioning at work as it biases their day-to-day choices and decisions and thereby mitigate any inappropriate influences.

The issues of *Jumping to Conclusions* and *Conflict* presented below serve to underscore the power of level 5 awareness to deal effectively with fundamental problem dynamics.

### **Jumping to Conclusions**

My dog, Shelby, always knows when we are going somewhere. She gets all wiggly and her tail starts wagging furiously. She sticks very close to my wife and me lest she be left behind. Like us, dogs learn to recognize signs. Shelby has learned that when we pack a suitcase or even turn off the TV there is a very good chance that we will be going somewhere. She is employing pattern recognition and making predictions based on the patterns she perceives.

The brain's capacity to discern patterns is how we are able to make meaningful connections. By means of this capacity the brain places events in context and, consequently, makes meaningful what would otherwise be disconnected, incomprehensible sensory input. Pattern recognition is fundamental to our lives. We would not be able to learn, think or act without it. A strong case can be made that pattern recognition is the essence of intelligence. It has evolved because it affords us tremendous survival advantages. Recognized patterns allow us to make predictions and to make comparisons in order to decide what to do in a given situation. We are constantly engaged in pattern recognition and making decisions based on the patterns we see. Because it is so crucial to survival it has evolved to work at an amazing speed.

But there is a trade-off for speed. In order for the process of pattern recognition to occur virtually instantaneously, our brains have evolved the ability to make connections with very little information. However, this comes at a price. Quick connections may be inaccurate or unfounded. Apophenia is this downside of pattern recognition; seeing patterns or connections where no real basis for them exists. Our brains attempt to "join the dots" or make connections as rapidly as possible in order to make sense out of what is going on at the moment. We may not have the luxury of time needed for careful deliberation in the midst of an emergency situation so we are hardwired to jump to conclusions. As necessary as this is, if we are not vigilant we will draw some very dubious conclusions and hold them to be true.

When we look at some of the patterns discerned by ancient or primitive people the consequences of apophenia are clearly evident. When our ancestors gazed into the night sky they inevitably saw patterns there. The most well know of these patterns are the twelve constellations. Now, you may be thinking, "So what? This is just a way of having innocent fun. Where's the harm?". In most cases there is no harm unless the patterns and connections are taken to be more than just fanciful products of imagination. When imagined connections are taken to have reality in their own right, when they are taken literally, problems can arise. This kind of literalization of imaginary patterns and connections is the essence of superstitions and fundamentalist beliefs.

The field of astrology is a case in point. Astrology asserts connections and influences between heavenly bodies and individual personalities. Still, this is fairly innocuous when left at the level of daily newspaper horoscopes. Where the danger lurks is in elevating a belief system such as astrology to the level of a science. Once this leap of faith is made all manner of mischief may ensue. What has occurred is this. A fundamentally flawed pattern has been elaborated on and those elaborations have, themselves, been elaborated on and so on until the original apophenia has been buried under the mass of elaboration that it spawned. Now we have what appears to be a self-consistent body of “knowledge” worthy of our respect with its underlying imaginary pattern almost completely obscured. When taken seriously enough astrology could be used as a basis for making life and death decisions about our own lives and the lives of others. No doubt this has happened in the past and probably continues to occur today. This is nothing less than apophenia run amok.

Apophenia occurs naturally. By the brain’s standards any pattern is better than no pattern. We are anxious when we cannot see a pattern in the events of our lives. There is great comfort in finding a pattern in what is going on in our lives. Even if the pattern would not hold up to careful scrutiny, we are happy to have it and may even filter our perceptions in order to obscure challenges to the pattern. We may also unconsciously seek evidence that seems to confirm the validity of the pattern. In this way a pattern formed by apophenia may become a distortion field through which we view the world.

While this may seem to indicate that we are doomed to fall prey to the ravages of apophenia, “It ain’t necessarily so”. *Level 5 awareness provides us with the perspective necessary to mitigate the effects of apophenia.* If we are aware of our inclination to jump to conclusions we can be on the lookout for the workings of apophenia. We can also use the knowledge of the existence of apophenia to motivate us to look at our assumptions and beliefs to see if they might be built on the shaky foundations of imaginary connections. When we understand the workings and the dangers of apophenia we need no longer be the unwitting victims of its workings. We have the means for liberation from its tyranny through the application of level 5 awareness of the workings and consequences of personal conditioning. It may take some practice since apophenia is the default mode of our brains and it works its speedy mischief quietly below the level of conscious awareness. But, as the I Ching (an excellent example of a system based on apophenia) says, “Persistence furthers”.

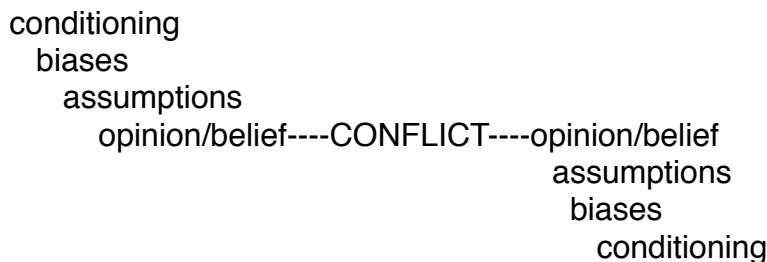
### **A Broader Perspective on Conflict**

I think it is fair to assume that most people would say, when they are engaged in some kind of fight, that they are fighting for what they believe is right. What may be overlooked is that both sides of the fight will claim this. Why does this happen? Even if the parties involved are well educated and well informed on the issue of contention they can be on complete opposite sides of an argument, both convinced of the rightness of their respective positions. This can occur even if both parties have been restricted to exactly the same information concerning the issue. So, we have two intelligent people with identical information coming down on opposite sides of an issue. Why?

The variable is not intelligence. Nor is it information. It is personal history. My history is made up of two components: my genetic heritage and my experiential history. My history is both biological and psychological (personal). Moreover, my psychological history has been informed by my family, my community, my country, and my culture. None of this history is innocent. Every bit of it constitutes some form of bias. Whenever two people disagree it may not be the facts, but their biases that are in conflict. So, who is right or wrong?

Fights, conflicts, arguments, etc. are often generated by differences in biases. Furthermore, these biases are inevitable consequences of living a human life with its accumulation of learning. They are what underlie our, mostly unconscious, assumptions. When we engage in a conflict these assumptions are rarely questioned but, instead, act as a foundation for argument and action. Suicide bombers don't question their assumptions, much less the biases underlying them, and even less the sources of conditioning (biological and psychological) underlying their biases.

What is the cause of conflict then? The two-way causal chain looks like this:



What sense, then, does it make to engage in this kind of activity? It is extremely unlikely that one side is going to convince the other that they are wrong. More likely, each side will just spend more energy dredging up evidence and reasons to support their positions. *Confrontations tend to harden and solidify our biases making us even more blind to our conditioning.* If this is so, then we cannot logically support confrontational styles of conflict resolution. We must find a different approach, one that is capable of overcoming the powerful force of bias-based assumptions. We need a way of resolving differences that does not involve antagonistic confrontation.

C. Terry Warner makes a compelling case for an alternate approach to resolving conflict. In *The Bonds That Make Us Free and Leadership and Self-Delusion* Warner discusses a philosophy and a psychology that is very reminiscent of Martin Buber's I-It and I-Thou modes of being. Simply put, Warner maintains that when we are in a confrontational conflict we are in the I-It mode of being. The other party is perceived as an object, an enemy. We are able to do this only when we ignore the fact that they too are the product of their conditioning, biases, and assumptions. However, if we take a moment to reflect on the fundamental nature of conflict (as shown in the two-way causal chain above) we may recognize the futility of confrontational strategies. More critically,



as an individual with level 5 awareness, we may begin to question our own certainty and to wonder if we might not be wrong after all.

The crucial difference is made in just seriously posing this question to ourselves because we ask it out of an level 5 awareness of the undeniable fact that we are, ourselves, biased and that we too hold unexamined assumptions. When we seriously ask ourselves if we might be wrong, a transformation takes place. No longer are we seeing the other party as an enemy (an object) but as another equally human person (who might or might not be wrong) equally deserving of respect and empathy. This changes the nature of the relationship between the parties involved. The conflict has been transformed into an opportunity for the growth of both parties. Both parties stand to uncover a piece of their conditioning and understand its influence on their thinking and behaviour. A little bit of liberation. It is important to note that this transformation does not require both parties to question their certitude. Once one party makes this shift an “invitation” is automatically sent (due to the transformation in the demeanor of the changed party) inviting the other party to engage in a more open relationship.

This is, of course, a very brief introduction to Warner's thinking but I hope I have given it a fair synopsis. He has much more to say in the books mentioned above.

### **Components of Level 5 Awareness:**

#### **Degree of Freedom**

At this level individuals achieve a degree of freedom from the tyranny of their own experiential histories. A lifetime of learning has led to the accumulation of innumerable biases, assumptions, opinions, and beliefs that, up until this point, have operated at a primarily unconscious level. The drive for status and advantage is now understood to be the virtually inevitable product of the individual's conditioning, most of which has been learned. The very probable existence of inaccurate conditioning (apophenia) is now recognized. Biological (or genetic) conditioning is also recognized and can now be taken into account in the choice making process.

#### **Unconscious Foundation of the New Self**

The level 5 self is an observing self. This self has the ability to observe and take into account previously unconscious conditioning. What remains unconscious at this level is the brain processing that is responsible for the very existence of the observing self. The observing self still believes in its own independent existence.

#### **Truth**

Rather than the universal truths of Level 4, truths at Level 5 are seen as relative to particular contexts. “Gold may be valuable in some situations.” Since criteria for evaluation are always biased by personal conditioning there can be no absolute criteria for truth and, therefore, no absolute truths. Truth is seen to be situational.

### **Drive**

While personal status was the imperative at Level 4, Level 5 awareness invokes a drive for meaning and purpose. Individuals recognize their personal experiential histories (conditioning) as a resource that provides possibilities for making unique and valuable contributions to the world.

### **Behavior**

An essential behavior at Level 5 is observation. The individual is able to observe their own decision making processes with the added information arising from the knowledge of their own conditioning. This observation takes into account an individual's personal conditioning affording a much wider perspective on any situation. Actions arising out of level 5 observation and wisdom tend to be acts of compassionate contribution offered to the well-being of others and the environment.

### **Meaning**

In contrast to the Level 4 concern with personal advantage, meaning is now derived where mutual well-being is served through the unique contributions of individuals to a community

### **Morality**

Because of their understanding of their own biases, Level 5 individuals have great empathy for others. Interpersonal actions are engaged in a compassionate atmosphere where the goal is to be a contribution to the well-being of others.

In 1987 Phillip Moffitt walked away from his highly successful post as chief executive and editor-in-chief of Esquire magazine to devote himself to exploring the inner life full time. He subsequently was ordained as a lay priest in the Theravada Buddhist tradition through Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Northern California, where he is now a member of the Teachers Council. He is the author of [\*Dancing With Life: Buddhist Insights for Finding Meaning and Joy in the Face of Suffering.\*](#)

### **Success**

Wrapping up a talk on his book, *Status Anxiety*, Alain de Botton had this to say, "... the heart of the book is the question of success and what success is and should be. I'm very interested in success personally, I very much like to be successful, I think it's a great thing to be. But before you decide what I mean by that, I think we have to question our own assumptions about what success is. If I said, 'Behind the curtain there's a very successful man,' you might think it's someone who's made a fortune, maybe involved in business, attained some kind of renown in political life or something like that.

We have an idea of success and these ideas of success come to us in the daily newspaper, on television etc, we're surrounded by suggestions of success and I think that it's an important feature of any mature life that we have to submit the idea of success that we're often handed on a plate by our society, to some kind of critical scrutiny – to decide whether it's really the vision that we can actually genuinely concur with, rather than simply something that we've sucked in from the outside. Really the message is – success, yes, ambition, yes – but let's make sure that it's an idea of success that actually suits us and that we've taken care and trouble to investigate.”

Success at level 5 awareness challenges the assumptions surrounding the meaning of success found at lower levels of awareness. At this level success is measured in terms of contribution made to the well being of the world. It does not ignore the well-being of the individual but, rather, understands the well-being of the individual as being inextricably linked to the overall health of the planet and all of its inhabitants.

### **Problems**

It may seem from what has been said above that level 5 awareness would preclude any serious problems. However, even this lofty perspective may be perverted if misunderstood. Some individuals, upon realizing the relative nature of truth, take it to mean that anything goes. They reason that, if there are no absolute standards for right and wrong, they have license to do anything they want. They become essentially amoral. There is no flaw in their reasoning but there has been a failure to make a complete transition from Level 4 to Level 5. These individuals are still pursuing personal advantage or gain. They are still being driven by their level 4 unconscious conditioning believing that their wants are absolutely justified by relative standards.

Another possible problem with partial Level 5 awareness is apathy. If there are no absolute criteria for right or wrong then neither are there any standards for better or worse. Nothing really matters. It's all just relative. The mistake here is the assumption that relative difference is without meaning. This is only true when viewed from the Level 4 perspective of personal advantage. It may well be true that the pursuits of wealth, celebrity, or admiration are ultimately meaningless since these goals depend on the tacit agreement that these things are of absolute value in and of themselves. So, when applied to Level 4 goals of personal advantage the Level 5 awareness of relative value may result in apathy.

Individuals at this level may yet experience a sense of incompleteness and a vague, intangible yearning for something more.

## **Level 5 In The World**

The incidence in world population of individuals at level 5 awareness is believed to be quite low. As mentioned earlier, Robert Kegan has said he has ever come across a person operating exclusively at the self stage that approximately corresponds to this level of awareness. However, it has been over a decade since he made that statement and in looking around for evidence of level 5 awareness today in the world there are examples demonstrating, at least, a movement toward this awareness level.

## **Level 5 Awareness in the World**

### **Level 5 in Business**

All businesses want to do well, but can they also do good? In his book, *Business and the Buddha: Doing Well by Doing Good*, Lloyd Field says yes, they can do good, and moreover, no business can afford to focus simply on “doing well.” Increasingly, public assessment of a business’s worth must take into account its consideration of shared human values. That doesn’t mean a business can’t or should not compete; it means that investing in efforts to build a better society can, on many levels, be an asset. In this book, Field lays out the guidelines for putting social responsibility, both corporate and individual, into practice without sacrificing profits. Drawing from traditional Buddhist teachings, Field shows how, with attention to ethics, skillful means, and corporate responsibility, entrepreneurs and decision-makers can achieve new levels of happiness and security both inside the company and out, while acting as a powerful force for positive global change.

Field explains why the globalization of the traditional capitalist way of doing business is, at least in part, responsible for some of the more pressing global problems including as social and environmental issues. He goes on to discuss the changes that are taking place and must continue to take place in the world of business if we are to move toward sustainable global practices. Field reports that in its 2004 report, WorldWatch Institute identified four ways in which governments, businesses, and consumers might adjust consumption in the service of improving global conditions.

1. Ecological Tax Reform: To mitigate the harmful impact on natural resources governments could tax manufacturers for damage done to the environment. Production standards and other regulatory guidelines could be introduced to curb environmental impacts.
2. Take-Back Laws: Through banning the disposal of landfills by burning, and implementing laws that require companies to take back products at the end of their useful lifetimes governments can help to minimize waste and the consequences of the disposal of used products.
3. Durability: By making goods that are more durable and use less materials industries can take responsibility for their impact on ecologies.

4. Personal Responsibility: Millions of individual decisions about the consumption of food, water, and energy can have a tremendous effect on the over-all well-being of our planet and its inhabitants.

If a sustainable world is to be achieved businesses will need to take to heart the messages for change found in *Business and the Buddha: Doing Well by Doing Good*.

### **More Examples of Level 5 Awareness in the World**

*Disclaimer:* The following represent activities to which individuals at this level of awareness may be drawn. They are not intended to be taken as exclusive to the level nor should it be assumed that individuals at this level will restrict themselves to these activities exclusively. *Where levels of awareness are concerned the motivation of individuals for participation in activities is more relevant than the specific activities themselves.*

*Groups:* At level 5 individuals may organize or support groups having a social awareness agenda such as environmentalism, animal rights, anti-poverty initiatives, etc.

*Networks:* Networks may be formed with other community-minded individuals to share resources and ideas.  
eg. WorldChange.com

*Film:* In *Shindler's List* directed by Stephen Spielberg (based on a book by Thomas Keneally), Oskar Schindler, a German businessman approaches Itzhak Stern, a Jew who is no longer allowed to own his pot-making factory, with a proposition to buy the factory and appoint Itzhak factory manager. Itzhak accepts. When the Jews of the area are rounded up some, who can work, are allowed to work at the factory.

Schindler, influenced by Stern, comes to feel sympathy and responsibility for his workers and when the Nazis confine all Jews to a forced labor camp Schindler volunteers to keep his workers confined to the factory. Later, by mistake, Itzhak Stern is put on a train headed for a concentration camp. Oskar hears of the situation and is able to retrieve Itzhak in time.

At Oskar's birthday party many Germans are in attendance. Several young Jewish factory workers come to the party to give Schindler a gift. When one of the young girls gives him the gift he kisses her in return. This is against the Race and Resettlement Act but Oskar is forgiven later when he apologizes.

When all Jews are ordered to be moved to a different camp to avoid the advancing Russians, Schindler comes up with a desperate plan. He constructs, at his own expense, a new factory farther to the west and bargains with the Germans to buy all the Jewish workers he will need to staff

it. He draws up a list of over 1100 men, women, and children. In a race against time he is able, through luck and determination, to rescue “his Jews”.

The compassion demonstrated by Oskar Schindler is a level 5 characteristic. At this level personal concerns may be subjugated to a perceived greater good. Schindler’s empathy for and personal sacrifice on behalf of a group that he might have been expected to despise, or who, if he were operating with level 4 awareness, he might even have used for his personal advancement, speaks of a higher morality consistent with level 5 awareness.

## **The Transition From Level 5 to Level 6 Awareness**

"I live on Earth at present, and I don't know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing — a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process — an integral function of the universe."

*Buckminster Fuller*

"We are the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness. We have begun to contemplate our origins: starstuff pondering the stars; organized assemblages of ten billion billion billion atoms considering the evolution of atoms; tracing the long journey by which, here at least, consciousness arose. Our loyalties are to the species and the planet. We speak for Earth. Our obligation to survive is owed not just to ourselves but also to that Cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring."

*Carl Sagan*

Some early alchemists are said to have viewed alchemy as a spiritual discipline. To these alchemists the literal and common understandings of alchemical formulas were but a clever ruse designed to hide their true significance. Because the true meanings of these formulas were at odds with the Medieval Christian Church it was believed necessary to obscure their true significance in order to avoid the disagreeable fate of being put to the stake or rack by the Inquisition. Fortunately, we in the west live in more tolerant times.

### **Transcendence**

In the section on level 6 awareness we discussed a situation where the separate self had become integrated into a state of continuity with all of existence. This constitutes a transcendence of separation. Upon completing the transition from level 5 awareness to level 6 awareness the self is liberated from its bondage to unconscious drives by virtue of the fact that all of its previously hidden drives are now exposed in the light of awareness.

### **The Wisdom of Level 5**

With level 5 awareness comes the recognition of the value of personal contribution in an effort to make improvements in the world. A wider view of membership is achieved in which individuals see themselves as members of the global community with all of the

implications that entails. Personal responsibility may, likewise, be felt to apply on a global scale. Connections and relationships take on new meanings with level 5 awareness. Connectedness is seen as a fundamental property of existence and relationships now define the significance of all beings.

### **The Ignorance of Level 5**

While level 5 awareness may bring a level of peace not possible at lower levels the journey is still incomplete. The final transition remains. In level 5 the observing self is an independent entity that *has* awareness. At level 6 the tyranny of the separated self is transcended in that it becomes, in its entirety, an object of awareness. There are no hidden drives/instincts unconsciously determining an individual's experience.

### **Stages of Transition - Level 5 to Level 6**

*Disillusionment* - recognition that current approaches (level 5) are insufficient to deal with the individual's longings

*Assessment* - identification of what is no longer sufficient:

With the elimination of the sources of pain from level 4 an individual at level 5 awareness has achieved liberation from his or her body, desires, membership, and conditioning. He or she has gained an awareness of how conditioning has previously colored his or her every thought and behavior. There is now only one source of pain remaining; separation itself, the experience of being an observer of reality rather than an integrated phenomenon in and of it. With every increase in his or her degree of freedom has come a corresponding increase in the degree of psychological separation from his or her environment. It is this separation that is the source of pain now. The individual now experiences a longing for an ending to this separation; a need to be liberated from the perspective of an observer separated from the observed, a desire to be whole, a need for unity, where observer and observed are one.

*Experimentation* - trying various alternative approaches to solving the individual's level 5 related problems

- examining items uncovered in the Assessment phase
- reframing the problem

*Reconstruction* - entering a different way of being

- experiencing existence as continuous; an indivisible whole
- acknowledgement of the primacy of brain processes in creating the experience of separation

With the transmutation of the last form of ignorance into wisdom no further transitions are required. The transition from level 5 awareness to level 6 awareness is the final transition.

## Wholeness: Level 6 Awareness

Both praise and blame cause concern,  
For they bring people hope and fear.  
The object of hope and fear is the self  
For, without self, to whom may fortune and disaster occur?  
Therefore,  
Who distinguishes himself from the world may be given the world,  
But who regards himself as the world may accept the world.

Lau Tzu

**The Great Work** (Latin: *Magnum opus*) is a term originating in medieval European alchemy. It refers to the successful completion of the transmutation of base matter into gold or the creation of the philosopher's stone. On a less literal level it is used as a metaphor for spiritual transformation. It has three stages:

- nigredo(-putrefactio), blackening(-putrefaction): individuation, purification, burnout of impureness
- albedo, whitening: spiritualisation, enlightenment
- rubedo, reddening: unification of man with god, *unification of the limited with the unlimited*.

With the metaphor of alchemy running through this book it is appropriate that the ultimate goal of alchemical pursuits is the “unification of the limited with the unlimited”. As we are about to find out, this is an apt description of the fate of the self at level 6 awareness.

### **Siddhartha by Herman Hesse: Synopsis**

For three years Siddhartha and his friend, Govinda have followed a group of ascetic monks. When they hear about the Buddha they decide to seek him out. Govinda joins the Buddhist monks but Siddhartha decides to trust in personal experience instead and re-enters a worldly existence. He meets a woman with whom he decides to live and eventually becomes a successful businessman and slowly slides into a life of greed and gambling. After a time he grows depressed and leaves the town and the woman behind.

He is despondent and prepares to drown himself in a river. But he hears a murmuring sound in the river. It is “OM”, the sonic symbol for the oneness of the universe, and Siddhartha’s thoughts of suicide disappear. He falls into a peaceful



sleep. When he awakes he finds Govinda there watching him. After Govinda goes his own way, Siddhartha meets an enlightened ferryman. The two work and live together for years united in the sacred sound of “OM”.

One day the ferryman brings a woman, who is dying from a snakebite, along with her son to their hut. It is the woman with whom Siddhartha lived in the city. As she is dying the woman tells Siddhartha that the boy is his son. Siddhartha cares for the spoiled child and tries to teach him to live simply but the boy runs away. The ferryman explains to Siddhartha that he must let the boy go to experience his own suffering. Knowledge, he infers, can be taught but wisdom comes from experience.

The ferryman, realizing that Siddhartha is now enlightened goes off into the woods to die. Soon Govinda comes by. Still searching for enlightenment he asks Siddhartha about what he has learned. Siddhartha tells Govinda that searching can inhibit finding, that time is an illusion, that all is one, and that love for all things is the most important thing in the world.

### **Level 6 Awareness**

The concept that wisdom comes from experience fits well with the ideas we have been exploring. Each progressive step up the ladder of awareness is precipitated by the experiences of the individual and brings with it a corresponding expansion of perspective and freedom. In the story of Siddhartha the understanding that all is one is presented as the key to enlightenment. This is the perspective proposed for level 6 awareness.

Level 6 awareness is partially speculative in nature and has just recently begun to be researched and studied with proper scientific rigor. This does not mean that this level of awareness is purely imaginative or that individuals with level 6 awareness have never and can never exist. The features of Level 6 presented here are based on the same evolutionary trajectories that we have been following throughout the other Levels of Awareness: separation from the environment, conversion of components of self from subject to object (transmuting ignorance into wisdom), and an increasing degree of freedom from embeddedness in the environment.

What sets level 6 awareness apart from all previous levels is that there would no longer be any drive (ignorance) operating unconsciously. All of the unconscious drives will have been “transmuted” into the realm of conscious awareness. At this level there are no hidden drives compelling behavior. All of the drives are still operational but they are now recognized and understood in conscious awareness. The self is totally removed from embeddedness in its environment and is, instead, now understood to be continuous with the rest of existence.

Level	Unconscious Drive (Ignorance)	Available in Awareness (Wisdom)
6		Unity Drive, Independence Drive, Membership Drive, Security Drive, Physical Drives, Environment
5	<b>Unity Drive</b> (meaning, purpose)	Independence Drive, Membership Drive, Security Drive, Physical Drives, (Environment)
4	Unity Drive, <b>Independence Drive</b> (status, self-reliance)	Membership Drive, Security Drive, Physical Drives, (Environment)
3	Unity Drive, Independence Drives, <b>Membership Drive</b> (belonging)	Security Drive, Physical Drives, (Environment)
2	Unity Drive, Independence Drives, Membership Drives, <b>Security Drive</b> (protection)	Physical Drives, (Environment)
1	Unity Drive, Independence Drives, Membership Drives, Security Drives, <b>Physical Drives</b> (food, warmth, water)	(Environment)
0	Impulses	

**Bold** = operational drive of the level  
 (Environment): not experienced as self (not an drive)

**Components of Level 6 Awareness:**

**Degree of Freedom**

A Level 6 individual would achieve a degree of freedom from the unconscious brain processes that maintain the perspective of the observing self found in Level 5 Awareness. This does not mean that these processes would cease to occur, only that they would be recognized and understood. Level 6 awareness is not some kind of non-material form of existence. *It is, like all other levels of awareness, dependent on a properly functioning brain.* The difference is that, while all other levels of awareness were conditioned and, therefore, limited by the existence of unconscious forces, this level of awareness is unconditioned and unrestricted by such drives. It is awareness without the agenda of a driven self. Some might call this level of awareness liberation.

### **Truth**

To a Level 6 individual truth would be absolute: “All is one, one is all.” All other “truths” would be relative to this truth. Independent entities would not exist except as psychological concepts. There would be no independent things, only *phenomena* consisting of configurations of other phenomena that persist as spatial and temporal patterns over time.

### **Drive**

With the transmutation of level five ignorance (the drive for unity) into the awareness of this drive (wisdom) at level six the self is no longer a driven entity. With an awareness of the essential and universal interconnectedness of all phenomena, no unconscious drives would remain hidden at this level. All drives would have been transmuted from unconscious ignorance to conscious wisdom.

### **Behavior**

Can there be behavior in the usual sense without a driven self? In Level 6 Awareness action should be regarded as naturally occurring intra-actions between phenomena within the dynamic totality. The term “intra-action” refers to an action involving two or more phenomena within the whole. It is a term borrowed from Karen Barad as defined in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (see “One With the Universe” below). Phenomena are not understood to be independently existing or acting entities. Rather, all phenomena owe their existence and behavior to intra-activity within the whole.

Phenomena do not act independently but are part of the activity of the whole. Phenomena do not move themselves but are *moved by* virtue of their intra-actions within the whole. Does this situation herald the annihilation of individuality? Is this pure nihilism? Does individuality melt into a homogenized cosmic soup? Not really. Although there is no longer a separate self at level 6 awareness, individuality (the sum of all learning and inherited tendencies) continues to exist as patterns within the nervous system and, therefore, continues to be a factor in the intra-actions of the phenomenon of the organism. Agency exists but without an independently existing agent.

### **Meaning**

Since all meaning is relative to context and the context at this level is the indivisible and infinite whole, existence would be infinitely meaningful; not as some have concluded utterly meaningless. Any thing (phenomenon) that exists has meaning within an arbitrarily circumscribed context (eg. family, community, country, planet, solar system, cosmos). The larger the context the wider the influence of the phenomenon will be. Ultimately, all phenomena exist in the context of the entire cosmos endowing them each with consequence (significance) throughout the whole of existence.

### **Morality**

With no real boundaries between phenomena there would be no exclusion. Where there is no exclusion there remains only unconditional acceptance/inclusion. Some might be moved to say that all there is at level 6 awareness is love.

### **Perspective**

Perspective at this level would be all-inclusive. Integration with the entire web of the phenomenal universe would be an experienced reality. This total integration would be the exact opposite of the embeddedness of the newborn. Total integration involves full awareness while embeddedness is a total absence of awareness.

### **Problems**

Because there are no unconscious drives (no ignorance) at this level there are no problems inherent in level 6 awareness.

## **One With The Universe**

While it seem reasonable to assume that we can, at level 5, learn, with practice, to observe our conditioning in action and thereby take it into account in making choices, it is not so easy to accept the possibility of achieving a similar objective perspective on the very brain processes involved in the act of observation itself. This would require brain processes to observe brain processes in the act of processing. This is akin to an eye being able to see itself. We are left with a situation where it makes no sense to speak of a separation between observer and observed. This distinction is dissolved leaving only the *process* of observing. From this perspective, the observer and the observed are simply different aspects of the same process, the process we call observing.

At this point it is non-sense to talk about a self having awareness of something other. Self and other are seen to be products of brain activity which creates the appearance of a separation between subject and object. This is what it means when we say that the separation of self from the environment is purely psychological. The apparent separation is only possible because the brain, by virtue of the way it is structured and functions, creates, at each level of awareness, a self that appears to have separation from its environment. But everything that we know and are is brain activity and brain activity takes place in the brain which is part of the nervous system, which is part of the body, which is part of the environment, which is part of the world, which is part of the solar system, which is part of the galaxy, which is part of the universe. This chain of connectedness is not hypothetical, it is physical and real.

But *connectedness is not oneness*. In a chain of connected things there are still things, distinct from one another, being connected. To speak of oneness is to speak of a situation where there are no separate, independently existing entities. This is precisely the issue that Karen Barad, in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics & the Entanglement of Matter & Meaning*, confronts. In this work Professor

Barad presents her “agential realist” physics/philosophy. Fundamental to agential realism is the tenet that there are no separate things, only phenomena. In contrast to things, phenomena do not have an independent existence but are the result of what Barad calls “intra-actions”. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* she says, “the agential realist understanding of matter [is] as a dynamic shifting entanglement of relations, rather than a property of things.” Unlike interactions, intra-actions, are not between independent things but between phenomena.

Phenomena are persistent patterns of intra-actions, much like a whirlpool is a pattern resulting from intra-actions of water currents. Intra-action between phenomena of one class can give rise to other classes of phenomena. Phenomena that we call atoms intra-act with each other producing phenomena that we call molecules. The intra-action of phenomena is responsible for the entire material universe. As Barad puts it, “Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena. Because phenomena constitute a nondualistic whole, it makes no sense to talk about independently existing things as somehow behind or as the causes of phenomena.” In the agential realistic view there are no boundaries between phenomena and, therefore, no separately, independently existing entities. It’s all an indivisible dynamic whole.

If Karen Barad is right, the ultimate nature of reality is oneness, just as the components of the sixth level of awareness discussed above would suggest.

### **The Persistence of Individuality**

With the disappearance of the separate self at the sixth level of awareness it would seem to follow that individuality would also vanish. But, as noted above, if individuality is defined as the accumulation of experiential learning in the brain it is not eliminated at all. The brain still exists and so do its contents. Individuality, what makes one organism different from another of the same species, is preserved in the brain and the body of the organism as long as that organism lives and it is not compromised by damage or disease. I would argue that this unique individuality is the real you as opposed to the imagined separately existing self that you might think you are. Just by being alive, the unique individuality that is the real you matters. It is a unique contribution to the world and every phenomenon that intra -acts with it is altered by those intra-actions. In this lies the heart of responsibility even beyond a separate self. An individual operating at level 6 awareness would be absolutely responsible because he or she would be the awareness of oneness itself. In fact, the very idea of irresponsibility would be meaningless at this level of awareness. Intra-action cannot and does not do anything that is not in unconditional accord with the fundamentally unified nature of reality.

### **Innocence**

At each level of awareness the foundation of the self was seen to be an unconscious drive. What, then, becomes of this separate self when all unconscious drives have been exposed to awareness? At level 6 awareness there is no foundation for the self and, hence, no separate self exists. In its place is a new state of being characterized by innocence. In all previous levels the the self was driven by the agenda of an

unconscious drive. A hidden agenda precludes innocence. In speaking of some of the consequences of operating under the influence of such an agenda, Phillip Moffit, in *Dancing With Life* says,

“Each of these reactions removes you from being fully present with what is happening right now by inserting a story or concept between your heart and your direct experience of *now*. The part of you that is innocent rests in emptiness, meaning it is *empty* of any story or concept that limits you to a personal identity.”

To be in a state of innocence simply means to operate without a *personal agenda*. This is partially accomplished in level 5 awareness when the personal agenda of level 4 awareness gives way to a community agenda based on compassion and contribution. In level 6 awareness even this agenda is transcended. What this means is that there is no longer any *preconceived* agenda. Instead, a *priority of the moment* arises in the immediacy of the “now” according to the properties of the present situation.

... I am abstracted from the world,  
The world from nature,  
Nature from the Way,  
And the Way from what is beneath abstraction.

Lau Tzu - Tao Te Ching

## Where Are We?

It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.

*W. Edwards Deming*

Information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, and wisdom is not foresight.  
But information is the first essential step to all of these.

*Arthur C. Clarke*

Now that our tour of the Levels of Awareness is complete we have an understanding of the levels that an individual may potentially progress through in her lifetime. However, as mentioned earlier, not everyone reaches the same awareness level by the end of their lives. Some people achieve a greater degree of freedom than others. People at different Levels of Awareness are driven by different unconscious forces. As a result it is no wonder that many people just can't seem to see eye to eye and that serious conflicts between individuals and groups are so prevalent. Exacerbating these discrepancies in Levels of Awareness are the unique demands of our age. As citizens in a post modern world we encounter a variety of daily demands that are unique to our time.

As Robert Kegan has pointed out in his book "In Over Our Heads", meeting the demands of our complex world requires something more than the mastery of new skills or the acquisition of yet more knowledge. Our post modern world demands a higher level of awareness than that which has been achieved by the majority of the population of the world within their individual lifetimes. Collectively, we are truly in over our heads. The average Level of Awareness of our species is inadequate to deal with the demands and challenges of our increasingly complex world.

The question is can we do anything about this situation? To answer this question we need to know two things.

1. Where are we now as a general population in terms of the Levels of Awareness?
2. What Level of Awareness is required to meet the demands of our world?

There is some urgency to these questions. Our survival as a species may well hinge on what we discover in answering these questions. We must hope that the gap between where we are and where we need to be, in order to deal effectively with the many forms of intolerance currently infesting our world, is not insurmountable.

### **Where Are We Now?**

There are at least two ways of determining what Level of Awareness most people have achieved. We can look at the most serious problems facing us today in the world and attempt to correlate them to problems associated with one or more Levels of Awareness. Alternatively, we can survey sample populations in an effort to gauge the Levels of Awareness of those surveyed.

Each of level of awareness houses its own potential problems. The chart below identifies the most prevalent conflict type for each level.

Level	Conflict Type	Identity	Disregard For	Aggression Against
2	interpersonal	needy self	rights and opinions of others	individuals
3	ideological	member self	rights and opinions of other groups	groups
4	power	independent self	rights and opinions of competitors	competitors

The type of conflict at a given level is related to the basis for an individual's identity at that level of awareness. Depending on the type of identity a corresponding disregard for rights and opinions arises. When conflicts erupt individuals direct their aggressions against the enemy that is consistent with their own level of awareness.

Taking World War II as an example conflict we can see how individuals at levels 2, 3, and 4 might perceive their involvement.

*Level 2 Awareness:* Aggression would be primarily directed against individual soldiers seen as having different selves like "Germans" or "Japanese".

*Level 3 Awareness:* Aggression would be primarily directed against groups of differing ideologies like "Nazis" or "Fascists".

*Level 4 Awareness:* Aggression would be primarily directed against institutional competitors like "Germany" or "Japan".

Of course this is a gross over-simplification designed to emphasize stereotypical sketches of how the different levels of awareness may influence the ways in which individuals perceive the world in a particular situations. In the real world most people would not fall neatly into one level of awareness or another. There would be aspects of two or more levels of awareness at work at any given time. Even so we see that in war, at least, several levels of awareness may be at work at the same time. Similar analyses of global issues such as human rights violations and climate change will, no doubt, reveal that there is not just one level of awareness creating the problem. World problems tend to stem from the actions of individuals at several distinct awareness levels.



While there may be differing opinions concerning which specific problems are most serious and what level of awareness is responsible for them there may be a greater degree of consensus regarding the general characteristics of problems plaguing our world today. One such characteristic is intolerance. The problem of intolerance is at the root of several of the most urgent issues we see in our world; war, violence, prejudice, ideological conflicts (religious and political) and more. The manifestations of intolerance are many and varied and it seems an appropriate candidate to use in exploring how different Levels of Awareness might contribute to world problems. If we refer back to the problems associated with the different Levels of Awareness we find that intolerance of some kind appears at levels 2, 3, and 4. At level 2 individuals may be intolerant of the needs of others since they are driven to satisfy their own needs and desires. At level 3 groups of individuals may be intolerant of the activities and ideas embodied in other groups. This intolerance of other groups can extend from small family groups and peer groups all the way to large groups such as cultures and nations. At level 4 individuals may express intolerance regarding the opinions and evaluations of competitors. Justice to one level 4 institution may conflict with that of another level 4 institution and since there are no absolute standards to determine right from wrong, each group will feel a kind of righteous justification for their position.

Since we do, in fact, see many examples of the expected forms of intolerance in today's world, it seems probable that many of us are operating somewhere in level 2, 3, or 4 awareness. Unfortunately, this method of identifying common levels of awareness does not give us any clear or focused picture of how these levels are distributed in the general population. We do not know if the majority of us are at level 2, 3, or 4. This is crucial information if we are to attempt to find workable solutions. We want to know where we are relative to where we need to be in terms of the Level of Awareness that might provide an ability to mitigate our all too real global challenges. For this we must turn to population surveys.

Robert Kegan and others have conducted a number of population surveys. According to these surveys the adult population is distributed over levels 2, 3, and 4 as we suspected. The proportions are not precise but they are revealing.

Level	Fraction of Those Surveyed
Level 2	1/8 to 1/3
Level 3	5/9 to 2/3
Level 4	1/2 to 3/4

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 How Consciousness Develops Adequate Complexity to Deal With a Complex World: The Subject-Object Theory of Robert Kegan

In an interview published in *What is Enlightenment?* magazine Dr. Kegan, referring to what he calls “orders of consciousness” (roughly corresponding to the Levels of Awareness) stated,

“...the data across a number of studies suggest that a majority of even well-advantaged, well-positioned adults haven't yet reached even the self-authoring mind, fourth order consciousness [similar to the fourth level of awareness]. This means that they do not have the capacities that would enable them to thrive within today's increasingly pluralistic world that requires individuals to exercise a kind of authority that, throughout human history, human beings have never had to do. In fact, pooling lots of different studies, we found that 58 percent of a composite sample of people, who were middle-class and most likely had the great advantages, had not reached the self-authoring level...”

Whatever the actual figures may be it would appear that a large proportion of us are either at the third or fourth Level of Awareness. An important consideration not shown in this data but reported by Dr. Kegan, is that the transition, if it occurs at all, from level 3 to 4 typically takes place somewhere between the ages of 25 to 55.

No matter how you slice it there is a significant number of us operating at Level 3 awareness. It may be that Level 4 individuals will be more successful in surviving the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and in dealing with global concerns than those at Level 3. It makes sense, then, to make every effort to assist anyone with Level 3 awareness in making the transition to Level 4. Dr. Kegan says,

“There's a tremendous power in the move from the third [order of consciousness] to the fourth order [of consciousness]. In the history of humankind, it's only been in the last little blip of human history that so many persons have been able to even pierce beyond the third order. They are actually able to stand back from their own cultural surroundings and look at the nature of these arrangements and make decisions about whether this is what it's going to mean to them to be a member of this tribe or to live their life in this way. It's essentially the transformation into what we today call modernism.”

But there is a hint of a bigger problem here. If level 4 is the level of modernism it may still not be a sufficiently high Level of Awareness to deal with our post-modern world. Of course, it will be more effective than Level 3 awareness and so the more individuals that we find arriving at this level of awareness the more encouraged we can be. It is Robert Kegan's belief that there is a trend in this direction.

Read an interview with Robert Kegan: [How the Self Evolves](#)

But does Level 4 supply the awareness necessary to meet our current challenges? When we examine the possible problems that can occur at Level 4 we find that many

forms of intolerance and aggressive tendencies are still prevalent. Individuals and groups of individuals with Level 4 awareness, because of their focus on status, may become excessively ambitious and competitive. They may, in their ambitions, dismiss the needs and opinions of others. They may disregard environmental concerns. In addition, one of the trends in affluent countries is a growing chasm between the poor and the well to do. Personal gain seems to be more of a motivation than mutual well-being.

Compassion, an antidote to intolerance, is the hallmark of Level 5 awareness. It would appear that if we are to survive the global challenges we face including the widespread issues such as environmental degradation and ideological intolerance we must learn what it means to become a level 5 citizen of the world and make that a priority for ourselves and our species. We will be examining evidence indicating that there is currently movement in this direction later in the book. After all, the levels of awareness present not only a picture of who we are but a vision of who we might become on both an individual level and as a species.

## Getting There

Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills -- against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation...

It is from the numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man (or a woman) stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he (or she) sends a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

*Robert Francis Kennedy*

We have defined our problem. We *are* “in over our heads”. The challenges of the modern world are more than our current collective levels of awareness are capable of handling. The solutions we need will not be available to us until a significant portion of the population reaches level 5 awareness.

Are we then doomed to an inevitable collapse of our social structures. Will we some day soon be living in the dystopian world portrayed in post apocalyptic fiction? I submit that without an increased global awareness of our present predicament and its root causes we are in danger of some kind of eventual social breakdown. Of course, we could get lucky and things might work out favorably on their own. But is this a risk we are willing to take? If we are to survive the twenty-first century it would behoove us to leave as little to chance as possible and to do whatever might be done to move our population in the direction of increased awareness.

### **Getting From Where We Are to Where We Need to Be**

How then, might we move toward a level 5 world? It seems a daunting if necessary task. But if it is necessary we must not be dissuaded by its difficulty. We must do more than hope that things will just work out for the better. We have seen that, left to our own devices a too many of us will fail to arrive at level 5 awareness in our lifetimes.

### **Is There A Shortcut?**

In our analysis of where we are on the Levels of Awareness continuum we found that many of us are at Level 3 or Level 4. However, to solve the issues related to the serious global concerns we now face we cannot count on Level 4 awareness to be sufficient. Too many problems are commensurate with Level 4 mentality. To move beyond our widespread global problems a Level 5 awareness will be needed. It would therefore be encouraging if we could discover some sort of shortcut from level 3 awareness directly to level 5 awareness and thereby enable individuals to skip level 4 altogether.

Unfortunately, such shortcuts are not possible in the evolution of awareness. Evolution does not work this way. One evolutionary stage must follow another in a step by step

progression. There can be no butterflies without there first being caterpillars and a the all important transitional phase from caterpillar to the butterfly. Let's review what a transition from one level of awareness to another entails. Movement to a higher level involves the transcending of an unconscious drive that is the essence of the self at the lower level. *You must become the driving essence at each level before you can transcend it.* You cannot transcend the Level 3 drive to connect unless you first become that drive. Once that self, whose essence is the drive to connect, has come into being the possibility of its transcendence exists, but not before.

### **One Step At A Time**

But before we despair, all is not lost. It may be that if individuals now operating at Level 3 can be helped to achieve Level 4 awareness and those at Level 4 can be assisted in moving up to Level 5, a momentum might be established that would be sufficient to bring about the changes we so desperately need to save ourselves from the consequences of our insufficient maturity and inadequate levels of awareness.

Moreover, and even more encouragingly, many level 5 initiatives already exist, as we will be discussing shortly. There is evidence that level 5 activity is gathering momentum throughout the world. This is good news for those of us making our ways through level 3 and level 4 awareness. Although we cannot sidestep the lessons we need to learn as we progress through the levels of awareness, *there is nothing stopping any of us from getting involved right now in the level 5 activities going on all around us.*

### **Resistance to Transition**

The natural dynamic behind transitions between levels is conflict between an individual's challenges and the unconscious drives of his or her present level of awareness. Periods of transition are often periods of intense insecurity, even deep psychological distress. A transition may take years to run its course and high levels of anxiety and depression may come and go during these periods. When the equilibrium established at a level of awareness is sufficiently disturbed an individual is forced, often against his or her will, to re-examine his or her world view and to look beyond it for a wider perspective in which the conflict that is disturbing the current equilibrium may be resolved. The conflict must be intense enough to motivate an individual to undertake the often protracted, painful and difficult work necessary to make the transition to the next level. Unfortunately, but quite naturally, each level of awareness has a degree of internal resiliency that often allows us to weather minor disruptions to the equilibrium of that level. Robert Kegan uses the term "immunity" to refer to our natural tendency to withstand and resist change.

It should also be noted that if an individual has been particularly successful at achieving the imperatives of a certain level that person may be all the more resistant to moving beyond that level of awareness. For example, if a person has achieved a high degree of popularity (a level 3 success) that person would be unlikely to be moved to undertake the work of making a transition to level 4. In this way success at one level can prove to be an impediment to moving beyond that level.

### **Prerequisites to Transition**

If an individual is to make a transition from one level to the next there must be a high level of disenchantment with the current level of awareness. It must be plainly felt to no longer be working. In addition there needs to be a willingness to experience whatever pain is necessary to engage in the process of transitioning for as long as it takes. It has been said that we don't change unless the pain of not changing outweighs than the pain of making a change.

In addition to a readiness for change there needs to also be a significant level of commitment, a willingness to persevere over an extended period. How extended? This will depend on the specific situation of the individual. I don't know of any rule of thumb or any method of predicting the length of time that a particular transition will require. We do know, however, that naturally occurring transitions are not typically short term undertakings. Often months or years may pass during a transition.

### **Aids to Transition**

It is hoped that this book can serve as a supportive resource for individuals encountering the pain of a serious conflict at their current level of awareness. One way it might do so is by helping to provide individuals with a clear understanding of their current predicament within a level of awareness. This knowledge could strengthen an individual's resolve to undertake the process of transition. In addition, knowledge of the next level of awareness and its power to resolve current distress may serve to support an individual in the process of transition. In other words, it might provide a kind of transitional roadmap.

### **Reaching The Limit**

Just as with individuals, as a group we will need to feel sufficient collective discomfort at the current state of affairs before we will be moved to pursue a new perspective. Distressing as they are, events like the war in Iraq and the conflict in Afghanistan and their attendant atrocities may actually provide motivation for change. As lives of excess take their toll on celebrities and political leaders are found to be less than trustworthy the emptiness of the pursuit of status (level 4 awareness) becomes glaringly obvious. There is an ongoing and increasingly real concern over the spread of nuclear capability in the third world. Global communications bring the violence of ideological conflicts from around the world into our living rooms. The obvious costs of the various forms of intolerance are piling up daily. It may be that groups of people around the world are, one by one, reaching their separate breaking points; a kind of collective nervous breakdown. If this is already happening it is possible there could be, at this moment, a kind of viral ground swell of a felt need for global change spreading throughout the world. Indeed, on an individual level and in communities scattered around the world there are many who have already begun to search for, experiment with, and implement ways of building a better world. It is initiatives being undertaken by such individuals and groups of dedicated people involved in causes about which they are passionate that are moving us in a hopeful direction. We will have more to say about this later in the book.

### **Preparing The Way**

If there is to be the kind of worldwide evolution of awareness that is becoming more and more a matter of necessity, there will need to be a concerted and widespread campaign to alert people of the hope offered by a raising of their individual and collective levels of awareness, so that, if and when they reach the limit of their tolerance for the way things are in their personal lives or in the world in general they will have a possible roadmap of transformation at hand.

Hopefully, the material in this book will provide an introduction to a process that could eventually lead to real and lasting change in the way things are; moving from a world of rife with the ravages of ignorance and intolerance to one of greater tolerance for diversity and increased appreciation for the differences that make up the incredible tapestry of humankind; a world of greater and sufficient wisdom.

### **Facilitating Transitions**

*Some of what follows in this section is theoretical but it has been constructed to be logically consistent with the research sources referred to throughout this book.*

The strategies that follow apply to transitions between any two levels.

*Facing:* It would seem at first that there is nothing anyone could or should do to encourage disillusionment. In fact, to do so would seem almost cruel. But, if an individual is to rise above the pain related to a given level of awareness, whatever can be done to help him or her face his or her problems would be, in fact, a kindness. As mentioned earlier, there is a natural tendency to avoid and resist change and this includes avoiding problems rather than facing them. If we can ignore a problem it will not help us see that what we are doing is not working. Individuals need to be encouraged to face their problems squarely. A fool who persists in his or her folly may eventually recognize it as folly. It must become sufficiently obvious that what is being done is not working and a change is required to overcome the felt distress. There must be a sufficient level of disillusionment with the coping strategies available to the individual at his or her present level of awareness.

*Clarification:* When an individual is going through the Assessment stage of transition the clarification of the approaches that that are not working could be helpful. If the person can identify and attend to his or her dysfunctional behaviors he or she is more likely to willingly give them up as the ineffective approaches to solving his problems that they really are. Possible level specific problem approaches are listed in the chapters for each level of awareness.

*Alternatives:* Typically, trial and error is the default method of searching for more successful approaches to solving an individual's level related problems. This is a very time consuming process prone to many discouraging failures. It would be helpful if individuals had access to tried and true alternatives that they could implement more readily. Transition specific approaches are suggested in the chapters dealing with each specific levels.

*Illumination:* As successful approaches are discovered and a new self is gradually constructed more and more of the previous self will be illuminated. More and more of what was subject will become object and, as such, available for use in making choices and decisions. Focusing on these newly revealed objects of thought could help speed up the completion of the transitional process because awareness of them makes the possibility of falling back into old habits less of an issue.

### **How to Proceed**

At this point it is essential to remember what has been said about the need to progress one level at a time. There are no shortcuts through the levels of awareness. Each level must be personally experienced and each transition must be personally won.

*The important thing is to recognize where you are and proceed from there.* When you are ready to make a transition going over the material presented in this book that is related to your particular transition may prove helpful. However, since each person is unique it is unlikely that everything you need to go through to make a real transition from your level of awareness to the next level will be covered in this book. It will be important to reach out other resources as required. Making a transition is seldom a simple undertaking but it need not be a lonely one. There are trained professionals, public services, and support organizations available.

### **The Necessity of Drives**

When a transition is made from one level to another the drive of the lower level is not forever annihilated. It is just that what was an unconscious drive is now available as an object of thought which means that the drive can now be taken into account and consciously managed when appropriate. Individuals with level 4 awareness still have a drive for membership. Our drives, unconscious or not, serve evolutionary purposes and as such cannot and should not be eradicated. Nor should we attempt, as we sometimes do, to wall them off from our experience or denying them their healthy expression. Once brought into the light of awareness our drives can become necessary resources in the pursuit of mental well-being.



## Creating a Hopeful Future

“When we are on the precipice we change.”

*Klaatu in The Day the Earth Stood Still*

We are standing on a global precipice and we need to change our world. We must move toward a world characterized by practical wisdom. The reality is that most of us are operating at a level of awareness that falls short of this condition. But, as previously pointed out, none of us need be left out of the solution. Some of us will lead and some of us will follow but *we can all participate meaningfully in the creation of a better world*. There is considerable evidence that the change is already happening and that it is not only growing but accelerating.

### A Geography of Hope

When Chris Turner’s wife gave birth to a baby girl Chris, author of *Planet Simpson* and former Greenpeace canvasser, was overwhelmed by a sense of sadness. The source of his melancholy was the generally dismal state of the world at the time. Chris wrote in his book *The Geography of Hope: A Tour of the World We Need*, “I can’t even tell her [his daughter] with any confidence that there is a future with sufficient durability to serve as a drawing board for her lifelong dreams. There’s a legitimate possibility that she’ll face calamity on a scale I can’t imagine, on a scale beyond anything humanity’s ever seen. This is a prospect that makes it hard to think, makes my vision cross with angry, impotent tears. It terrifies me.”

Chris Turner resolved to begin a search for hope. For one year the Turner family traveled the world looking for people living sustainably. Chris was not only seeking the traditional sustainability of our forefathers but, also, any activity that would be “capable of continuing on its present course for the foreseeable future without exhausting the planet’s ability to sustain human life at something like the current population and quality of life”.

He describes his visit to Samsø, a Danish island that uses no fossil fuels. “While most of the world has been spinning in stagnant circles of recrimination and debate on the subject of climate change, paralyzed by visions of apocalypse both natural (if nothing of our way of life changes) and economic (if too much does), Denmark has simply marched off with steadfast resolve into the sustainable future, reaching the zenith of its pioneering trek on the island of Samsø. And so if there’s an encircled star on this patchwork map indicating hope’s modest capital, then it should be properly placed on this island. Perhaps, for the sake of precision, at the geographic centre of Jørgen Tranberg’s dairy farm.

There are, I’m sure, any number of images called to mind by talk of ecological revolution and renewable energy and sustainable living, but I’m pretty certain they don’t generally include a hearty fiftysomething Dane in

rubber boots spotted with mud and cow shit. Which is why Samsø's transformation is not just revolutionary but inspiring, not just a huge change but a tantalizingly attainable one. And it was a change that seemed at its most workaday—near-effortless, no more remarkable than the cool October wind gusting across the island—down on Tranberg's farm."

As it turns out Chris Turner found many encouraging examples of sustainable practices being carried out with level 5 sensibilities and he now has a "scrapbook from a year spent living optimistically" to share with his daughter.

## Becoming the Solution

### Me to We

In the level 5 chapter we met Craig Kielburger, the twelve year old Toronto schoolboy who founded the Free the Children initiative. Craig is now a grown man and still active in the pursuit of social change.

In a recent book, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, Craig and his brother, Marc, set out a plan for personal and social transformation. Their plan involves the practice of making "one act at time" with the idea that it is through an accumulation of many individual acts that real and lasting change can occur.

Echoing de Botton's advice to define success mindfully, *Me to We* entreats each of us to re-define our life goals with a mind to the legacy we wish to leave behind us. The book contends that, in doing so and taking action accordingly, the elusive qualities of happiness and meaning are to be discovered. Contributors to the book include Oprah Winfrey, Richard Gere, Queen Noor, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. *Me to We* is a call to action and provides a practical pathway to level 5 awareness.

"Me to We is a new kind of social enterprise for people who want to help change the world with their daily choices. Through our media, socially responsible choices and leadership experiences, we support [Free The Children](#)'s work with youth creating global change. Every trip, t-shirt, song, book, speech, thought and choice adds up to a fun, dynamic lifestyle that's part of the worldwide movement of we.

Through donations and in-kind contributions, Me to We is designed to help bring [Free The Children](#)'s already low administrative costs to zero while, at the same time, encouraging people to change the world with their daily choices.

Think we. Join the movement."

Clearly, Craig Kielburger and the Me to We movement are involved with level 5 awareness activities. Their initiatives are very much about making compassionate contributions to the world. There could not be a more succinct phrase to describe the transmutation that takes place during the transition from level 4 to level 5 awareness than “Me to We”.

To participate in Free the Children visit: <http://www.freethechildren.com/>

To find out more about Me to We go to: <http://www.metowe.com/main/>

### **Worldchanging.com**

*The advent of the internet is a significant factor in the acceleration of global change.* In terms of encouraging individual and collective advancement through the levels of awareness it may be the most potent source of encouragement. It offers innumerable resources for those interested in getting involved in sustainable initiatives.

Worldchanging.com describes its mission as follows:

“Worldchanging is a 501(c)3 media organization that comprises a global network of independent journalists, designers and thinkers covering the world's most intelligent solutions to today's problems. We inspire readers around the world with stories of the most important and innovative new tools, models and ideas for building a bright green future. Our readers are ready to change the world, and Worldchanging links them to the first steps. In the five years since its founding, Worldchanging has produced more than 8,500 visionary articles and one bestselling book, and has become a go-to source for forward thinking, solutions-based journalism that takes a big-picture approach to sustainability. Our international network of experts and allies, known on these pages as "the Worldchanging team" seek out new systems and ways of living from around the world. They report on those ideas with a healthy dose of curiosity and analysis, and ignite discussion and debate with you, our readers, via comment threads on every page.

Worldchanging has brought awareness to innovative responses to concerns like refugee aid and renewable energy, and to cutting-edge solutions for improving building, city planning, transportation, communication and quality of life. By connecting thoughtful people with the boldest new ideas, we have earned a devoted following: a recent Nielsen study named us the second-largest sustainability website on the planet.

If you consider yourself part of that community of intelligent, engaged, optimistic people who are willing to be the change they want to see, and ready to live differently right now, we are your news source. Stop in often, learn what's out there, and join the conversation.”

The Worldchanging website provides information organized into categories:

- Stuff: Things we make, buy, use and live with
- Shelter: Building future friendly homes
- Cities: Living green by living urban
- Community: Working together for the common good
- Business: Growing sustainable prosperity
- Politics: Progressing toward a free and fair world
- Planet: Restoring and exploring the earth

There could hardly be more obvious agreement with the level 5 awareness imperatives of contribution and compassion than can be seen all but the first of these category descriptions. And clicking on the Stuff link reveals the following explanation:

“Our things define us.

What we buy, what we use, what we keep and throw away, what we waste, and what we save: the stuff that surrounds us and flows through our lives is a key indicator of the kinds of lives we're living. To be an affluent twenty-first-century person is to float on a sea of material objects - each with its own history and future.

They may be hidden from our eyes, but in practical global terms, those histories and futures tend to be the most important aspects of the stuff we own.”

To explore this site go to: <http://www.worldchanging.com/>

There is a wealth of information on this site related to ways of participating in changes compatible with bringing about the sustainable solutions we have been talking about, solutions that are compatible with the practical wisdom found in level 5 awareness.

### **Sustainability Management Course**

One thing leads to another when you are on the web. While I was working on the Worldchanging section above I noticed a link on their site to a Sustainability Management course being offered at the University of British Columbia department of Continuing Studies. Here is the course description:

#### **SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT**

##### **Overview**

Today, public and private sector organizations require specialists in sustainability able to deliver holistic strategies that make an impact.

Participants will gain a clear understanding of how sustainability strategies extend through all areas of an organization and beyond.

By responding to climate change issues, new market challenges, green marketing, and GHG emissions management, these courses will address this complex topic, challenge traditional practices, and teach participants how to help transform an organization to support a sustainable future.

\*UBC Award of Achievement in Sustainability Management coming Fall 2009.

### **Who Should Participate?**

Courses are designed for individuals who wish to take the lead in helping to build sustainability into their organizations, including sustainability consultants and coordinators in community organizations and institutions seeking practical training in sustainability planning and administration. Courses are delivered part-time at UBC Robson Square in short, intensive formats.

### **Benefits**

Participants will:

- learn the essentials of sustainability and climate change
- identify drivers for organizational and behavioural change
- develop positive environmental and social strategies and implement new initiatives
- understand credible marketing strategies and how to avoid greenwashing
- learn how to measure and report on carbon accounting

In this course description we again hear echos of level 5 considerations: “holistic” and “sustainability” strategies, “transform an organization to support a sustainable future”, “positive environmental and social strategies”, and “credible marketing strategies”.

To learn more go to: <http://cstudies.ubc.ca/sustainability/management/>

### **GiveMeaning.com**

GiveMeaning exists to reduce the barriers separating people’s generosity from the problems that need attention. Their website explains what they do this way:

“GiveMeaning.com hosts fundraising pages on behalf of charities, non-profits and grassroots projects. Founded in 2004, GiveMeaning has provided free online fundraising pages to over 1200 different initiatives around the world.

From grass-roots international development projects to online fundraising pages for walks, swims and rides, you can create your own fundraising page at GiveMeaning.com to fundraise for most any benevolent purpose.”

GiveMeaning.com charges nothing for donations collected online and they even cover the credit card costs associated with each donation. They rely on the support of donors and advertisers to provide this service. It is as a labor of love. They get their inspiration from the people who are using their tools and service to make the world a better place.

Find out more at: [www.givemeaning.com](http://www.givemeaning.com)

## **Kiva**

Microfinance is becoming a popular way to provide financial assistance to entrepreneurs in impoverished countries. Lending funds to these entrepreneurs is called microcredit. Kiva is a website that is set up to facilitate making connections between lenders with borrowers. Kiva's mission is to connect people through lending for the sake of alleviating poverty. The following is from kiva.org:

“Kiva is the world's first person-to-person micro-lending website, empowering individuals to lend directly to unique entrepreneurs around the globe.

The people you see on Kiva's site are real individuals in need of funding - not marketing material. When you browse entrepreneurs' profiles on the site, choose someone to lend to, and then make a loan, you are helping a real person make great strides towards economic independence and improve life for themselves, their family, and their community. Throughout the course of the loan (usually 6-12 months), you can receive email journal updates and track repayments. Then, when you get your loan money back, you can relend to someone else in need.

Kiva partners with existing expert microfinance institutions. In doing so, we gain access to outstanding entrepreneurs from impoverished communities world-wide. Our partners are experts in choosing qualified entrepreneurs. That said, they are usually short on funds. Through Kiva, our partners upload their entrepreneur profiles directly to the site so you can lend to them. When you do, not only do you get a unique experience connecting to a specific entrepreneur on the other side of the planet, but our microfinance partners can do more of what they do, more efficiently.

Kiva provides a data-rich, transparent lending platform. We are constantly working to make the system more transparent to show how money flows throughout the entire cycle, and what effect it has on the people and institutions lending it, borrowing it, and managing it along the way. To do this, we are using the power of the internet to facilitate one-to-one connections that were previously prohibitively expensive. Child sponsorship has always been a high overhead business. Kiva creates a similar interpersonal connection at much lower costs due to the instant, inexpensive nature of internet delivery. The individuals featured on our website are real people who

need a loan and are waiting for socially-minded individuals like you to lend them money.”

Visit [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org) for more information.

### **The Internet as a Tool of Wisdom**

No one would argue that the internet is not a dangerous place. But in the end it is just another tool and whether it is a tool for good or evil depends on our intentions for using it, skill in using it, and understanding of how to use it. Where achieving practical wisdom is the intention great good can come from using the internet with skill and understanding.

In his book, *Here Comes Everybody*, author Clay Shirky discusses four forms of social interaction that the internet facilitates: conversations, sharing, collaboration, and collective action. Each of these four kinds of interaction can be leveraged in the service of practical wisdom. Each can support both the quest to achieve wisdom through the pursuit of level 5 awareness activities and the spread of wisdom itself throughout the world. In addition products of wisdom can be shared and acted on through internet enabled communities.

*Conversations*: Email is the most ubiquitous example of an internet conversation. Others include instant messaging, web forums, and chatting.

*Sharing*: Some examples are YouTube.com (video sharing), Flickr.com (photo sharing), and Delicious.com (website url sharing). An interesting thing about sharing sites is that they allow for group formation around any topic. Weblogs (Blogs) also provide a means of sharing content on the web. (see below)

*Collaboration*: These include sites that allow users to collaborate in various ways. Google Docs allows sharing(viewing and/or editing) documents online. A company called 37signals has created a range of collaboration tools aimed at making group collaboration easy and intuitive. Their offerings include:  
BaseCamp: management of projects and collaborate with teams and clients  
Highrise: tracking contacts, leads, and deals  
Backpack: organizing and sharing information across a business  
Campfire: real-time chatting, file sharing, and remote teams

*Collective Action*: Collective action refers to situations where group members cooperate to achieve a common goal.

Shirky makes the point the every url (a web address such as “www.website.com”) is a latent community. What he means is that any web address can be the hub of an online community.

Essentially, what Clay Shirky presents is an exploration and explanation of the many ways that groups can form through the use of internet technology. Unlike groups of the past, internet groups can form between members who are physically removed from each other. In fact, there are no geographic limitations imposed on internet group members. All that is required is some common interest and an internet connection.

The social interactions made possible by the internet along with websites dedicated to enterprises that are consistent with level 5 awareness demonstrate the power of the internet to effect the kinds of actions we have been advocating and to do so on a global scale.

## **Other Ways to Connect on the Internet**

### **Blogging**

A Blog (a contraction of the term "Web log") is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. Anyone can create and maintain a blog.

As of 2008, blog search engine [Technorati](#) was tracking more than 188 million blogs.

To find out about setting up a blog go to:

<https://www.blogger.com/start>

<http://www.weblog.com/>

### **Yahoo and Google Groups**

The popular search engine providers Yahoo and Google both provide ways to join or form groups. There are literally millions of groups in existence so chances are you will find one for almost any interest you may have. These groups provide platforms for conversations and sharing.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

<http://groups.google.com/>

### **Wikis**

A wiki is a collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone with access to contribute or modify content. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. The collaborative encyclopedia [Wikipedia](#) is one of the best-known wikis.

### **Scribd.com**

This website is dedicated to sharing information that would traditionally be published as paper documents. About 50,000 items are uploaded every day and there are more than 50 million readers. These items include such things



as research papers, articles, books, brochures, catalogs, creative writing, illustrations, maps, recipes, sheet music, and more.

The website describes itself this way:

“Scribd began with a simple observation – that there's a writer in all of us. And that even more fundamental than our desire for self-expression is our need to learn and be inspired.

Today, Scribd is the place where you publish, discover and discuss original writings and documents. More than 50 million people each month are finding or sharing fun, functional or fantastical writings and documents on Scribd.com and tens of thousands of other websites that have embedded Scribd's document reader.

We built a technology that's broken all barriers to traditional publishing and in the process also built one of the largest readerships in the world.”

Check it out at: [scribd.com](https://www.scribd.com)

Like it or not, the internet is changing the world. And it is changing it at a rate never before seen in the history of our planet. As frightening as this seems it is also an opportunity to be a part of something grand. If we commit to leveraging this powerful technology in the service of creating a world of more compassion and wisdom there is a very good chance that we might just pull it off. The time is right for action.

## Conclusion

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

*Margaret Mead*

We saw, in the first pages of this book, the dire predictions of experts who had little confidence in our ability to survive this century. We also identified ignorance as a common cause of many of our global problems. Following Einstein’s observation that a problem cannot be solved at the same level of awareness as the one at which it was created, we began our exploration of the levels of awareness. We soon discovered that many of us are operating at a level of awareness below that which is required to deal effectively with the challenges we face as individuals and as a global population.

It was then asserted that in order to improve our chances of survival as a species it would be advisable to find and employ strategies to increase our personal and collective levels of awareness. The good news was that our brains are perfectly capable of changing in the ways necessary for the desired personal evolution of awareness to occur. The bad news was that evolution is not revolution. Evolution takes its own sweet time when left to its own devices and there seemed to be no available shortcut that might allow us to achieve our goal in a more timely manner. Even taking into account the material presented in this book and the strategies outlined for encouraging and supporting transitions between the levels of awareness the rate of global change seemed too ponderous and unreliable to ensue that we would avert a global crisis. You may have had a sinking feeling of hopelessness.

Fortunately, as our exploration progressed we found a reason to hope. With the advent of the internet and the incredible communicative power it provides, change is taking place at an unprecedented rate. The required global changes are already in motion. It may have seemed improbable or even impossible that we could lift sufficient numbers of ourselves up to level 5 awareness in time to change the world in the ways necessary to support sustainable solutions to our world-wide problems before these problems became truly insurmountable. But it has become increasingly evident that our initial estimates concerning both our collective present level of awareness and the numbers required to reach level 5 awareness to effect sustainable change may have been more pessimistic than the facts support.

We found convincing evidence that numerous activities consistent with level 5 awareness are already well underway. Due to the communicative power of modern technology these initiatives are growing exponentially in both the number of new activities being initiated and in the number of people taking part in these activities.

While it is hoped that the material presented herein will facilitate an overall movement toward a general increase in the levels of awareness for all who read it, it is encouraging to know that it is not necessary to effect a world-wide increase to level 5

awareness in order to take the steps necessary to save our planet. Some of us will be leaders and some of us will follow. We need only to each become involved in any of the wide-ranging individual and group initiatives already underway throughout the world. The important thing is that we commit to being a part of this necessary momentum.

In the end what we each have to offer as a compassionate contribution to a better world is our individuality. Out of your unique experiences and genetic inheritance a singular, one-of-a-kind person has emerged. The miracle that you are will not come this way again. You possess gifts that only you can offer. Often these gifts are only discovered in the willingness to participate in something that is bigger than your separate self.

The ways of making compassionate contributions are many. However we choose to do so, we can each make a personal and meaningful contribution to the global transmutation of ignorance into wisdom, the world-wide alchemy of awareness that is, even now, transforming our lives and our planet, one act at a time.

## The Author

*The Alchemy of Awareness: Transmuting Ignorance Into Wisdom (2009)* was written by Terry Findlay. Terry is a retired teacher with interests in psychology, philosophy, physics, neuroscience, and epistemology. This book is the result of Terry's explorations of these topics.

These days Terry keeps busy designing and building websites for his clients ([www.simtechcomputerservices.com](http://www.simtechcomputerservices.com)) as well as writing software for Macintosh computers ([www.ttpsoftware.com](http://www.ttpsoftware.com)). He is also involved in a number of community organizations in his home town of Keremeos, B.C., Canada.

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