

THE BIG IDEAS

Integral Philosophy

Welcome to the Integral Era. Meet your guide.

Holons & You

Transcend and include.

Spiral Dynamics

Colors in a food fight.

Yes, AND...

No more either/or, please.

Subject & Object

Witness a new view.

States & Stages

Focus on stages. Develop!

The Integral Sage

Become the radiant manifestation of Spirit.



Ken Wilber

Notes and comments on wisdom gleaned from some books and workshops

"In the heart of Emptiness there is a mysterious impulse, mysterious because there is actually nothing in the heart of Emptiness (for there is nothing in Emptiness, period). Yet, there it is, this mysterious impulse, the impulse to ... create. To sing, to shine, to radiate; to send forth, reach out, and celebrate; to sing and shout and walk about; to effervesce and bubble over, this mysterious exuberance in the heart of Emptiness."

— Ken Wilber from *One Taste*: July 31

Ken Wilber. The Integral Philosopher (& Mystic). The guy with the intimidating and penetrating stare on the cover of those books of his.

I don't know about you, but for a couple years I actually avoided his book, *A Brief History of Everything*, as it stared at me from my bookshelf. A brief history of what?!? And quit looking at me like that, dood!! (If you know the book cover, you know what I'm talking about. :)

My introduction to Ken's work came with his brilliant interview series with Tami Simon of Sounds True. I remember being blown away by the scope of his vision, his (ridiculous!) ability to communicate complex ideas, and his sense of humor. At one point Tami asked him something along the lines of whether he was enlightened (that wasn't it but close enough) and his reply was, in effect, that he was still a jerk on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That cracked me up and won me over.

I actually didn't read my first book of Ken's until AFTER I'd already spent 8 days in his workshops (I-WET and ILP—highly recommend both) and after I'd spent a couple hours chatting with him in person in Denver. (I was just getting started with Zaadz and we had an awesome chat about all things Integral/community/Internet.)

Although not an Integral-wonk, my worldview has fundamentally shifted thanks to Ken and his awesome team at the Integral Institute. I owe a huge debt to them for what I've learned and how I've transformed—intellectually and in my day-to-day life.

In this *Note*, I'm not going to go into any level of detail on the theory (for those in the know: I'm not even going to talk about AQAL (gasp!))—the new *Integral Vision* book is an awesome intro to all that stuff. Instead, I'm going to fill up these few pages with some of my favorite Big Ideas that we can apply to our lives today.

In the process, if you're new to Ken's work, I hope to inspire you to get into it and if you're already an Integral wonk, I hope to inspire you to find even more ways to LIVE the Integral ideas and ideals that have captured our attention.

Enough of my soliloquy. Let's get to work.

"Integrative" simply means that this approach attempts to include as many important truths from as many disciplines as possible—from the East as well as the West, from premodern and modern and postmodern, from the hard sciences of physics to the tender sciences of spirituality. As one critic put it, this integrative approach 'honors and incorporates more truth than any approach in history.' I would obviously like to believe that is true, but you can best be the judge of that as you read the following pages."

~ Ken Wilber from *A Brief History of Everything*

"Arthur Koestler coined the term 'holon' to refer to an entity that is itself a whole and simultaneously a part of some other whole... for instance, a whole atom is a part of a whole molecule, and the whole molecule is part of a whole cell, and the whole cell is part of a whole organism, and so on. Each of these entities is neither a whole nor a part, but a whole/part, a holon."

~ Ken Wilber from *A Brief History of Everything*

INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY

Alright. Ready to jump in?

* stretches brain *

So, if we're going to talk about Ken Wilber, we should start by talking about "integrative" or "integral" thinking.

Think about this: Today is the first time in history that all of the great teachers of all of the great traditions can easily be studied. In fact, we can do it all in the same day. We're experiencing an "integration" of cultures—from shared philosophies to shared recipes—that's unprecedented in the history of mankind. That's a pretty powerful thing. So powerful, in fact, that Ken would say (and I would agree) that we are entering the "Integral Age." We've gone through the Middle Ages, The Renaissance, The Enlightenment, The Industrial Age, The Information Age. Welcome to the Integral Age. What else do you think historians will call it 500 years from now?

So, the idea of "integral" is to integrate as many traditions across cultures and across disciplines and across time as possible. It's a cool pursuit. And something Ken and his big (!) brain have done an incredible job of tackling. So, let's look at some of the fruits of his labor, shall we?

HOLONS & YOU

Alright. *Holons*. It's a really cool concept that we need to understand to get some of the other important ideas of "integral" philosophy.

Here's what you need to know: EVERYTHING in the Universe is a holon (that, together, form "holarchies"). It's a whole "thing" by itself and it's ALSO, very importantly, ALWAYS (yes, always) part of a whole. Think about that. Try to think of one thing that isn't part of something bigger and not made up something smaller. You can't. You can't take away "cells" from your body and still have you. You can't take away atoms from a molecule and still have a molecule. Every "higher" level transcends AND includes the prior. The molecule transcends and includes the atom, the cell transcends and includes the molecule, we transcend and include the cells. Make sense?

This is relevant because we tend to get in trouble when we attempt to transcend and EXCLUDE something. It violates reality. And you typically want to avoid doing that. ;)

I'm going to jump straight into one application of this so we can bring it to life immediately:

SPIRAL DYNAMICS

Ever heard of "Spiral Dynamics"? Very cool stuff integrated into Ken Wilber's work and developed by Don Beck and Chris Cowan from the work of Clare Graves. (That's a mouthful! ;)

It's a simple model that is useful to get a handle on the more complex ideas Ken uses to walk through stages of development. I'm going to share this here because I think it'll help us bring holons and transcending/ including to life in a powerful way. Here's the quick overview:

People and cultures go through different stages of development. The Spiral guys like to color-code them to make it easier to keep track. It goes like this:

RED. Think: Terrible twos. I'll blow you up if you piss me off. (Yikes!)

BLUE. Think: Ten Commandments. Fundamentalist anything. Rules are paramount. Literal interpretations of the Bible are absolutely (God damnit!!) correct. Ahem. ;)

ORANGE. Think: Wall Street. Academia. Science and ambition are key here.

GREEN. Think: Environmentalism. Pluralism. All is one. Non-violent.

So, the idea goes that we all (necessarily!) evolve through different stages of development. All of

"So spirit is both the highest "level" in the hierarchy, but it's also the paper on which the entire hierarchy is written. It's the highest rung in the ladder, but it's also the wood out of which the entire ladder is made."

~ Ken Wilber from *A Brief History of Everything*

those stages above are part of what they call the "first tier." Here's the funny thing about those perspectives: they're all convinced they're 100% right. It's a big food fight.

GREEN looks at ORANGE and says, "You greedy capitalists!!! You're good for nothing and totally destroying our planet! And, my non-violent self HATES you!"

ORANGE looks at GREEN and says, "You tree-hugging, New Agey hippies!! Get a job and contribute to the economy, will ya?!? And quit gazing at those crystals."

BLUE looks at everyone and says, "You're all going to hell because you don't believe in [insert favorite God here], God damnit!!"

RED looks at everyone and says, "F*\$% you!!! I'm blowing your *ss up."

Everything is "either, or." No one can see the validity of the other perspectives. Not so good. The ideal? Let's consciously evolve as individuals and as a culture to a "second-tier" level of consciousness. Here, for the first time, we can hold multiple perspectives. We can see that, in Ken's words: "No one is smart enough to be 100% wrong." :)

What's that look like? Well, you can see the truth in the need to take care of our environment AND the need for a powerful economy AND the need for rules and regulations AND the need to take aggressive action when the situation demands it.

Every stage has a PARTIAL truth. To embrace the whole we need to transcend AND include. Powerful. VERY powerful.

Now, notice that each level transcends the prior. However, it wasn't until we reached the "second tier" that we were able to transcend AND INCLUDE the prior levels of development. You see how much trouble we get into when we try to transcend and EXCLUDE prior levels of development? I mean, food fights are fun on occasion, but every moment of our lives? Not so cool.

Transcend. AND Include. (Pretty, please. With agave on top. Thank you. :)

This leads to perhaps the most powerful practical application of my Integral studies, learning how to say, "Yes, AND..."

YES, AND...

"No one is smart enough to be 100% wrong." What that means, stated positively, is that everyone has, however small, a partial truth to their position. They're not smart enough to be 100% wrong. Why is this relevant? Well, if you want to have good relationships—whether it's with your spouse or with your "enemy," you'll be wise to first acknowledge the partial truth of the other person/ideology/country/whatever.

Yes, that includes Bush if you hate him/his policies. He's not ALL wrong. We need to protect ourselves. Obviously, in my opinion, not in the manner in which he's done it, but if you can't BEGIN by acknowledging this truth in his policy you're not going to get very far. You'll be slipping on the banana peels from the first-tier food fight you're in. Green against orange/blue. Not very helpful.

Yes, that includes Osama bin Laden. He's not ALL wrong. America's foreign policy is anything but perfect. Obviously, his tactics are horrific, but if you can't start by seeing his partial truth, again, you're screwed. The world isn't black and white. We need to quit seeing it as "either this OR that." That just isn't how it works. At least, not how it functions well.

It's not either a free market economy OR compassion. It's: "Yes, a free market economy. AND compassion." It's not either you can be in integrity with your spiritual practice OR you can become extraordinarily wealthy. It's: "Yes, my spiritual practice is my top priority AND I manifest my spiritual practice in creative service that makes me extraordinarily wealthy."

"Evolution goes beyond what went before, but because it must embrace what went before, then its very nature is to transcend and include and thus it has an inherent directionality, a secret impulse, toward increasing depth, increasing intrinsic value, increasing consciousness. In order for evolution to move at all, it must move in those directions—there's no place else for it to go!"

~ Ken Wilber from *A Brief History of Everything*

A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe'; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison."

~ Albert Einstein

"Thus, ultimately to try to escape a distress merely perpetuates that distress. What is so upsetting is not the distress itself, but our attachment to that distress. We identify with it, and that alone is the real difficulty."

~ Ken Wilber from *No Boundary*

Where do you get stuck? Start paying attention to where you see things as a little too "either/or." And insert a healthy dose of "Yes, And..."

Yes?

And, that reminds me of being able to witness our perspectives—which is the only way we can ever evolve to a higher one, eh?:

SUBJECT & OBJECT

Here's a cool idea. I was actually introduced to this by my "Integral" coach, Bert Parlee, who's kinda like Ken's Chief of Staff. When we started working together, Bert's first homework assignment for me was to read the first chapter of Robert Kegan's classic book, *In Over Our Heads*.

Fascinating stuff.

The Big Idea: Subject-Object orientations. Try this one on: How you see the world is your subjective perspective. What you look at through that subjective perspective is the object of that subjective perspective. So far so good? Now, here's the trick: Can you make your current subjective perspective the OBJECT of a NEW perspective?

In other words, can you step back and "look at" the current way you see the world? Sounds simple/easy but that's a really powerful thing to be able to do. When we're not locked into one perspective on the world, we have the flexibility to shift into a healthier way to see things. Most of us tend to get locked into our perspective and think it's the absolute truth. Not so effective.

This was particularly powerful for me because I saw that I was totally locked into one perspective—at the time, I was locked into my identity as the CEO of Zaadz, the company I started and was running at the time. It was the weirdest thing. Until that moment, I couldn't see just how attached I was to the company—how my identity WAS the company. And, any threat to its survival (there were many threats... almost missing payroll several times isn't fun) was a threat to MY identity.

It was fascinating to observe this. Actually, it was a lot more than fascinating. It was absolutely transformative and catalyzed the sale of the business (within less than 90 days of that realization) and the opening into a much more expansive existence.

I also really like to use this in my intimate relationship. The ONLY time my Goddess and I get stuck in an argument is when I have BECOME my position. The moment I can step back and observe/witness the situation and my perspective on it, I create the spaciousness needed to allow the space for HER perspective. Suddenly, there's no need to argue and the tension dissolves. We still may not see eye-to-eye but I can enter the dialogue less from my head and more from my heart... allowing us, you could say, to see "heart-to-heart" as we continue our dialogue.

Powerful.

Soooo...

How are YOU stuck?

What can you do to witness yourself more?

In Kegan's language, can you make your current subjective perspective the object of a NEW perspective—one that you can be a little less attached to and a little more open to evolving? Sweet.

(And please remember to smile while you do it. This is supposed to be fun. :)

STATES & STAGES

States and stages. Quickly: We've all had moments of inspiration—whether it's that time when

"States" still must be converted to "traits." You still have to go from an acorn to oak if you are going to become one with the forest. So while "states" are important, "stages" are even more important."

- Ken Wilber from *A Brief History of Everything*

we're in flow as we write or paint or speak, or when we're on a psychedelic trip and see the interconnectedness in ways we've never dreamt of (hasn't been my path) or when we're making love and feel that ineffable union with our partner's mind, body and spirit.

Whatever catalyzes your "state" experiences, it's really only a nice little balloon that'll lose its air in a week and lay shriveled on the floor unless you can create the structures in your life to LIVE from that place of awareness. THAT requires you to evolve to a new STAGE of development at which level of development the state experience is normal.

States and Stages. Make sense?

Too many "spiritual" people have a flash of insight at a rave and come back all wide-eyed and unblinking, telling you about this incredible experience and their newfound enlightenment. Or, they come back from the latest empowerment weekend seminar where they picked up the latest "secret" and tell you how they're unstoppable now. But it's usually (always?) short-lived because they haven't evolved to a point where it's more than just a state experience—they aren't living from a STAGE of development where the new awareness can "stick." And, sure enough, a week or two later, they're back to their deflated selves and wondering what (the hell?!?) happened.

The remedy?

Honor the state experiences we're blessed to have but see them for what they are: a TASTE of what's possible. And know that the way you get to live with those state experiences on a sustainable level is to build the structures in your life that push you forward as a human being.

Think of it like this: You want to see the world from a certain height? You have a couple of options: You can get shot out of a cannon and see the world from 1,500 feet up. Briefly. Then what happens? Well, unless you're Superman and fly away and live happily ever after, you come crashing back down to earth. Ouch.

A much better option: If you want to live from that height, why not build a skyscraper and live from penthouse suite? Too much work? Yep, for most people. But if you want to have any more than the fleeting experience of flying across the sky in a gleeful state experience, you MUST do the work. You must advance through stages of development. You must dig an incredibly (!!!) deep foundation (go into your darkness, do your shadow work and dig dig dig) and then you must patiently erect floor after floor after dozens of floors until, alas, you have a view from one of the highest and most beautiful points in the world.

That's states and stages.

Are you focusing on your rituals? Your meditation? Your journaling? Your authenticity? Your transparency? Your fearlessness? Your mind? Your body? Your open heart?

Good. See you at the top! :)

THE INTEGRAL SAGE

"But 'egoless' does not mean 'less than personal'; it means 'more than personal.' Not personal minus, but personal plus—all the normal qualities, plus some transpersonal ones. Think of the great yogis, saints, and sages—from Moses to Christ to Padmasambhava. They were not feeble-mannered milquetoasts, but fierce movers and shakers—from bullwhips in the Temple to subduing entire countries. They rattled the world on its own terms, not in some pie-in-the-sky piety; many of them instigated massive social revolutions that have continued for thousands of years. And they did so, not because they avoided the physical, emotional, and mental dimensions of humanness, and the ego that is their vehicle, but because they engaged them with a drive and intensity that shook the world to its very foundations.

The great yogis, saints, and sages accomplished so much precisely because they were not timid

little toadies but great big egos, plugged into the dynamic Ground and Goal of the Kosmos itself, plugged into their own higher Self, alive to the pure Atman (the pure I-I), that is one with Brahman; they opened their mouths and the world trembled, fell to its knees, and confronted its radiant God... There is certainly a type of truth to the notion of transcending ego: it doesn't mean destroy the ego, it means plug it into something bigger... Put bluntly, the ego is not an obstruction to Spirit, but a radiant manifestation of Spirit.

The integral sage, the nondual sage, is here to show us otherwise. Known generally as 'Tantric,' these sages insist on transcending life by living it. They insist on finding release by engagement, finding nirvana in the midst of samsara, finding total liberation by complete immersion."

[from *One Taste: November 17*]

The chapter from which those (incredible) thoughts are lifted wins the award for THE most underlined chapter in all of my books. (That's a tiny fraction of its grand mojo and the chapter alone is worth the price of the book.)

I'm still absorbing the power of those words so I'll simply suggest a re-read or five and, more importantly, an embodiment of that wisdom.

My vote? Let's plug into our highest Selves and become the radiant manifestation of Spirit that is our destiny.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Profiled Teacher:

KEN WILBER



Ken Wilber is one of the most widely read and influential American philosophers of our time. His writings have been translated into over twenty foreign languages. He lives in Denver, Colorado. (adapted from the book) Learn more about all things Wilber at KenWilber.com.

For all things integral: Check out the Integral Institute, the non-profit that Ken started: IntegralInstitue.org Want to build an Integral Life Practice? Check out MyILP.com.

If you're new to Integral, Amazon the new book: *Integral Vision: A Very Short Introduction to the Revolutionary Integral Approach to Life, God, the Universe, and Everything* and get your Integral mojo on.

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a "Philosopher") and a passionate student of life who's committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.