

A revision of Wilber's "Integral Map" – amending the approach to "States" – Jim Robinson - Jan 2018

This revision of Wilber's "Integral" theory is my attempt to improve his map of human development, specifically, that part of the map that deals with the "states of being" that are possible for us. I hope that I can bring greater clarity and simplicity to this aspect, through being more consistent with the logic inherent in his theory, as well developing the connections between his "lines of development" and "state/stage" development. I hope this gives an improved understanding of the relationship between "states" and "stages".

For those already familiar with Wilber's ideas I hope this new perspective on "states", and how they fit within the overall model, makes sense and contributes something useful. For those not so familiar with his map, I hope that my understanding of the levels of state development resonates in some way with your experience and gives you some sense of where you are on your journey.

As many have said, "the map is not the territory" but I do think maps can be helpful, and obviously the better the map the more helpful it is. It can help us orientate ourselves, to see where we have come from and where we are headed and in doing so, support us to focus our efforts more clearly on what is most usefully attended to now. This lessens the risk of getting lost in the wider picture, of trying to attend to aspects of our development that we are not yet in the best place to address.

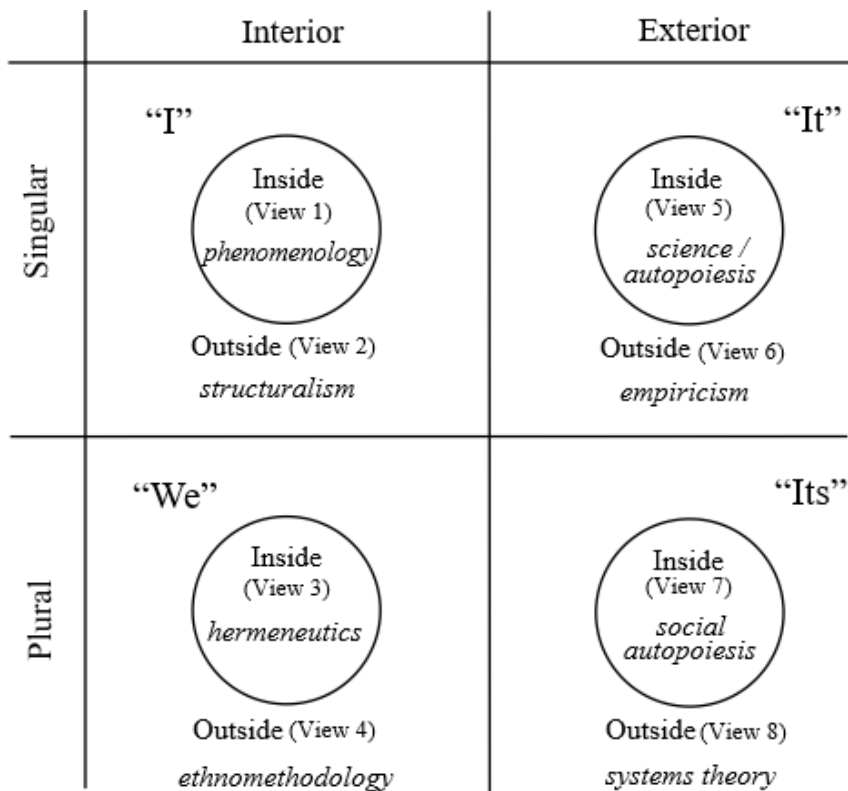
To start with I need to first give some background to Wilber's "Integral map" which is made up of five variables - Stages, States, Quadrants, Lines, Types. Everyone can be seen and understood via the picture that emerges through all these five lenses combined. Due to space constraints I do not reflect on "Types" in this piece.

I do like the holistic nature of his model, and the way so much of it is based on phenomenology and research. He has collated many studies to support the view that there are clearly recognisable "stages" to human developmental. These "stages" work through "developmental lines", which are simply the different aspects of human nature. For simplicities sake I will take as the essential ones, the intellectual, emotional and physical aspects of ourselves. These "lines" when combined, can give an overall stage of self development. The "stages" that any "line" develops through are strictly sequential, so our development has a structure to it, not just through childhood into adulthood, but throughout the whole of our lives. Our development is towards the possibility of reaching our extraordinary potential.

The next aspect of his map I need to present in order to lay the ground for this 'revision', is his division of the world into "Quadrants". (See any number of his books for a detailed explanation, I am using "Integral Spirituality" 2006). The Quadrants are based on a combination of two polarities, the individual / plural, and interior subjective experience / external objective scientific 'facts'. This gives "I" and "We" and "Its and "Its" and this gives the total field context for any thing, event, idea or experience. So, taking any experience, there is the personal perspective, the cultural and relational context, all the material aspects of it, and lastly the systemic web that it exists in. Everything exists within a field that has these four aspects to it. This field exists in this present moment but also within the context of the past and future. Additionally, each of

these four basic “views” has itself an “inner” and “outer” perspective to it, which give what Wilber calls eight “primordial perspectives”. (Diagram below)

This piece is concerned with the first quadrant (upper left), the personal or “I” perspective. The interior of this is our felt personal experience, it is our phenomenology, including the “state” we are in, from which we experience life. He calls this “View 1”. The exterior perspective or “View 2” then is the outside view, the developmental structure of sequential “stages” that we go through. The qualities of our felt experience are defined partly by our “state” of being, and whilst this obviously varies from moment to moment, it is also partly defined by the developmental “stage” we are at.



From Wilber’s (2006) diagrams pages 36-37

We cannot feel a “stage” directly, like fish are not aware of water. But we can recognise where we have been, have some understanding of where we are and what is next, but these are deductions and intuitions, rather than a direct felt experience.

“Stages” then are our “external” understanding of, our internal experience (View 2 above). View 2 is also what we use to identify and look at whatever “state” we are in. The directly experience itself is a View 1 perspective. Because states are fluid, we are always moving between from moment to moment. Stages however, evolve sequentially over time. So, where we are at any one time is defined by our current stage/state situation. Our ability to temporarily experience “higher” states provides us with glimpses of what living in more conscious/loving/embodied ways of being might be like.

Descriptions of the “stages” of development

(and how the “lines” of our head, heart and body, or self as a whole, develop through these stages in “three Tiers”)

“1st Tier” Stages –

- Archaic / Symbiotic / Family
- Magic / Impulsive / Tribal
- Mythic / Conformist / Religious
- Rational / Conscientious / Scientific or Modern
- Pluralistic / Individualistic / Postmodern

These are the stages we go through during a ‘normal healthy’ development into young adulthood, approximately to mid to late twenties. It is trauma (in its widest sense) that causes us, or parts of us, to become stuck at any stage along the way, leading to blocked or uneven development.

The point to emphasise here, is that in all these “1st Tier” stages there is an identification with the perspective of that stage, each thinks they are “right” and the others are “wrong”. The ego is largely identified with it, and the self has not yet learned to be really self-reflective. This is something that can slowly develop through these 1st Tier stages, but it is not until the movement into 2nd Tier that it becomes essential.

“2nd Tier” – “Integral stages” (States 2 to 3)

- Global and System Aware / Able to hold multiple perspectives
- Autonomous / Fully “Quadrant” aware / Truth or Construct Aware

It is here that we need to learn to “separating myself from myself” (Gurdjieff), to learnt to insert a sense of “I” into the awareness of experience, learn to “make an object out of what I am subject to” (Kegan). When we can do this, it brings into consciousness the fact that I am experiencing whatever I am experiencing. It facilitates self-reflection, being able to look, face, question, explore and take responsibility for, the nature of my experience, my conditioning and my environment. It is this that makes deep self-knowledge and understanding possible.

Here people can increasingly hold multiple perspectives, see other’s points of view, understand and see that Truth does exist in an objective way and that life is a developmental journey towards it, through “transcending and including” (Wilber) the ego. The heart of this stage is about moving towards being able to increasingly take responsibility for our ‘problems’, (i.e. those aspects of ourselves that keep us away from living in the here and now). Here then we can identify a problem, detach from it sufficiently to then investigate and explore, face and integrate it. Here we can increasingly value our problems because they provide us with the doorways to our healing, development and freedom. What we once regarded as “awful”, or “the enemy”, either within us or outside us, becomes our essential ally in this journey of healing our heart and expanding our self-understanding. As I understand this, it is this, it is what Jesus’s teachings of “Love thine enemy” and “Accept your suffering”, are all about. It is this process of conscious development in terms of reconciling ourselves so that we can live increasingly connected to the here and now, that comes to characterise this stage/state of development. Here we express our authenticity by actively taking more and more self-responsibility, responsibility for our bodies, our hearts, our intellect as well as our spirituality. Mary O’Malley’s book “What’s in the Way is the Way” delightfully describes this process.

“3rd Tier” (from “The Religion of Tomorrow” – 2017) (States 4 and 5)

- Para-mind
- Meta-mind
- Over-mind
- Super-mind

These are the terms Wilber uses for the stages of increasing freedom from the ego, where Consciousness, Love and Energy are increasingly embodied, the awareness of wholeness lived and not just understood and conceptualised as in Tier 2. Each is a step towards living more and more deeply in the ‘here and now’. My experience of these stages is only from having had glimpses of some of them from time to time.

He acknowledges that in this third tier of development the difference between stage and state development becomes increasingly meaningless. It seems that these stages are about living with increasingly less ego, less attachment to good or bad, to happiness or unhappiness. The analogy that comes to me is, that the ‘here and now’ is rather like the sun, it is so bright, that without being fully reconciled and open and clear, we are forced to turn away. As we become increasingly free, or ‘transparent’, we can increasingly live in its brilliance.

“Lines” of development and blocks to our development

One point I want to make clear here, is that using a “stage” lens, anyone’s overall “state of being” will be partly defined by the different stages of each of their “lines”. For example, an adult with a strong intellect and undeveloped heart will live in a different world from someone with a developed heart but an undeveloped head, etc. If one “line” remains significantly undeveloped in relation to the others, it acts as an anchor against further development and means that the person cannot fully embody more advanced stages. It is useful however in understanding this model to also simply view the self as a whole journeying through these stages.

Trauma of some sort is the norm for the vast majority of people it seems. It is an essential aspect of trauma that in order to keep the unbearable feelings repressed the self splits the connections between our head, heart, body. These parts become isolated bunkers with restricted connections, which means their ability to relate, or inform, or work with each other is limited. This is part of the self’s survival strategy and the effect is to keep us away from the here and now and the pain that was too much to bear. This means that we often live in fantasy, in fear and wanting. This keeps at bay the risk of re-contacting the trauma, but it leaves us living in constant conflict, part of us wanting to avoid and defend, and part responding to our deep and instinctive need for health and reconciliation.

It is the process of connecting our parts (“lines”) together that helps us to increasingly heal and live closer to the here and now. It gives us greater presence through which we experience life as more satisfying, enjoyable and meaningful. The hallmark of all these moments of integration, be it the pleasure of doing anything creative or rewarding, of making real contact with anything or anyone, is that there is a greater connection to the ‘here and now’. Connecting our head, heart and body together connects us with the here and now and this works the other way around as well, coming into the here and now helps us to feel our bodies and know what is in our heart and clarify our thinking. I see this all the time with my therapy clients, being supported to re-connect split off parts enables old held trauma to emerge back into consciousness, where it can be attended to, understood and healed.

As we develop the connections within us, we become more alive, conscious, aware and open. This is the continuum of our developmental awakening towards realising our full potential, our freedom, our 'enlightenment'. Whatever means we use to support the deep instinctive drive we all have towards realising our destiny, be it studying, meditating, prayer, spiritual exercise, therapy, ritual, art, the body, music, nature, etc., they are all about developing our ability to open to, and connect to, the dazzling, all-encompassing, stunningly holistic, full of profound potential, spaceless and timeless Now. As Wilber and many others have said, what is so staggering is that we are all already enlightened, we just do not know it, we cannot see it for all the 'stuff' we have in the way.

States are both fluid and developmental

We all experience many different "states" in our daily life, there are the different forms of sleep, we are different in the morning, when we are hungry, or tired, or interested, or caught in reacting in some way or another. We can be open or closed, active or shut down, energised or tired, in a whole variety of ways, depending on an infinite number of internal and external forces.

Stages, whilst being about our maturity over time, obviously play a significant role in how we are at any moment. We are different being hungry as a baby to how we are as an adult, although there might well be strong similarities! As I am now, having worked hard to grow up over decades, is different from how I was thirty years ago. The states that I inhabit day to day are different. Some, at moments are frustratingly similar, but I'm aware that my "centre of gravity" in terms of states has shifted, as has the stage that I am at. But my point here is that states, whilst always remaining fluid, do evolve with the stages of our development, each is just different perspectives on the same phenomena.

Maturity is about time, i.e. we need enough experience of life to have the possibility to both "grow up" and "wak up". This is about the development of our heart, head, body "lines", as above, but the other essential part of maturity is the degree of integration between these parts of ourselves. It is this integration which plays such a significant role in shaping the "state" of our being.

"States" then also have a development trajectory, which, as I understand this, corresponds to how Wilber groups the stages into three "Tiers" as above. As Wilber explains, many "state" development models around the world use three, four or five levels. The reason for there being fewer "states" than the eleven or twelve "stages" of development, is I think, simply because they fluctuate more, they are more fluid and it is more difficult to discern the steps, which means we need to use a broader brush.

The model I am proising for "state" development is based on Wilber's five levels. The first level is states associated with 1st Tier stages. Next is what I am calling the "in-between state" that describes the often-long transition from the upper reaches of "Tier 1" stages into getting established into the "Tier 2" "Integral" stages, which are the third "state". I can see that it makes sense to me to divide "Tier 3" into two state levels, as per Wilber (ROT).

In general, I find Wilber's elucidation of these different "states" much less satisfactory than that of his "stages". I agree though with the principal that there are developmental steps to our "states" of being. These steps are also sequential, but they also remain fluid in that we can always have temporary experiences of many different states. But any persons "centre of gravity" will be around the particular state/stage that they live at.

Both “stage” and “state” development are ultimately about our journey towards living ever more deeply connected to the ‘here and now’ with its potential for Love, Consciousness and embodied Presence. The particular “stage of development” and “state of consciousness” of a person defines where they are along this continuum towards the most enlightened beingness currently possible. As Wilber emphasises this possibility is constantly evolving as consciousness evolves.

Problems with Wilber’s version of states and their development.

In my view Wilber does not stick to his own map logically enough when looking at “states”. In places he assumes that the development of states only comes about from years of meditation or spiritual training. At other places he argues that states and stages are more deeply connected. At one-point Wilber calls the relationship between states and stages the “64 thousand-dollar question” (2006 p.82) and answers it by referring back to the “I” part of the Quadrant idea. He re-affirms that stages are the outside understanding (“View 2”) of our inside subjective experience, or “state” (“View 1”).

He affirms then that “stages” are the outer form of the inner experience of “states”, and visa-versa, but goes onto argue that “stage” and “state” development do not relate to each other by giving the example of how a person can develop through “stages” “till the cows come home” and not experience enlightenment. I cannot see how this makes sense, because the higher, especially “3rd Tier “stages” of development, are all about enlightened “states”. To be fair he does acknowledge this elsewhere when talking about “3rd Tier” development, describing how the,

“3rd Tier is marked by being essentially a specific union of states and structures (i.e. “stages”) (my brackets). All structures are always arising in a particular state (that is every experience is a “structure/state” experience), but at “3rd Tier”, the particular state becomes an intrinsic part of the structure itself.” (2017 p.211)

He is saying that development does not bring “enlightenment”, which is true if the stages of development are only along the cognitive “line”, but this then becomes an example of the consequences of un-even “line” development (usually caused by trauma) rather than about the relationship between stages and states.

The converse that Wilber gives is more reasonable. You can meditate and have any number of “enlightenments” and not be aware of anything about “stages”. This is because to see stages we need a cognitive outer “View 2” understanding of them. This just goes to show how the cognitive aspect of our development is less essential for “enlightenment”. But again, this is about uneven development in such an “enlightenment”. We all have a strong inbuilt need for holism and our head has a deep need to make sense, so given half a chance (relative freedom from trauma) we do want to understand the patterns and meaning in our experience. So, to me this example is of someone’s intellectual development lagging behind.

Holism, though, must surely be the aim, head, heart and body all taken responsibility for, and their development attended to. Then both state and stage development can happen without distortions. If a particular “line” remains undeveloped it will constantly interrupt, interfere with and resist the self’s overall movement to the next “stage of development” with its corresponding “state of being”. Until what has been preventing that line’s growth, is attended to, unblocked and released, overall growth will be impeded. It is when the heart “line” gets neglected that most problems arise, then someone can lose their connection to compassion and Love. We repeatedly see the consequences of this with those “gurus” who do seem to find a lopsided

uneven “enlightenment” and even become very powerful, but then get into trouble and disgrace themselves with destructive behaviour.

To summarise here, my argument is that “state” development occurs as the result of much more than just meditation, and that the relationship between “stages” and “states” goes all the way down and up, their mutuality is not just in the 3rd tier stages.

Developmental sequence of States

In both the books quoted here Wilber talks about “gross-waking states”, “subtle” and “causal” “Witness” and “Non-Dual”. The “subtle” state he relates to dream sleep and the “causal” to deep sleep, but I find these last two difficult to relate to. These two descriptions seem to come from the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and I confess to not relating to them, they do not make sense to me. The others I think I understand. So, I hope my slightly revised model of “states” will give a clearer picture, perhaps a more “Western” perspective on this. It is one that more closely relates “states” to the development of “stages” which is what makes sense to me.

Wilber’s levels of State development
Gross-waking (ordinary waking)
Subtle-dream (vivid dreams, basic meditative states)
Causal- formless (Deep sleep – emptiness in meditation)
Witness (unbroken silent attention, capacity to lucid dream)
Nondual Awareness (Beyond any ego)

(Wilber 2006 p.74)

My suggested names for the Levels of State development
Un-aware (Not self-reflective)
In-Between
Integral / Authentic
Ego partially Transcended
Ego fully Transcended

My description of state development

So, yes, “states” are fluid and vary enormously, but I do think that the general state of someone also reflects the “stage” of their development. Again, this is made up of all their developmental “lines”. It makes sense to me that there are step changes in our state of being, we are different when we arrive at a new “Tier” of development. There are steps in the progression of our development where the quality of someone’s being goes through a significant change.

Mostly people then in the “First Tier” stages can be seen as in the first “state”, they are not yet able to be deeply self-reflective. There can still be plenty of moments of relative waking up and connecting to the here and now, but they are temporary experiences without an integrated understanding of its meaning. Teenagers especially can have intense experiences of “being”, but it is generally not until the later stages of “Tier 1” that people can start to embed self-reflection and so start the move into the second state which I am calling the “in between state”. This is the long period transitioning “Tier 1” to “Tier 2” where we live between “Yes” and “No”, where we struggle to really take responsibility for ourselves, where we struggle to let go of our attachment to being a victim in one form or another.

The third state becomes established in “Tier 2”, which Wilber calls the “Integral Stage”, this is also called the “Authentic stage”. Here the ego is healed, we no longer need to pretend to be something we are not, we are no longer so defensive. This necessarily includes some equalisation of the head, heart and body developmental “lines”. We cannot after all start to let go of what we have not completed, owned and made conscious. The States 4 & 5 in “Tier 3”, are about increasingly letting go of the ego.

Moving permanently to a new state, i.e. one that is a significantly more deeply connected to the here and now, is not at all easy. Wilber and others talk about how such transitions have the quality of going through some “dark night of the soul” process and this does correspond to my experience. The movement to starting to wake and take responsibility for ourselves often comes as the result of a very difficult patch, something like a deep relationship crisis, a breakdown or burnout, being plagued by anxiety or depression, something that has been sufficiently painful for the person to want to find a way out. The next transition from the “in between” to “Authentic” state is tough as well because it means facing the core or the depth of our held trauma. I imagine that there is some difficulty to making the transitions to the 3rd Tier fourth and fifth state levels, maybe around “letting go”?

Next, I will describe each stage in a little more detail and then try to assess my own journey in relationship to this scheme, by way of an example.

The first level (Tier 1 stages) is what many developmental traditions speaks of as a state of being “asleep”. Here, we live in a way that is entirely ruled by unconscious reactivity. A place where most of us live defensively with the consequences of our un-reconciled trauma in its widest sense. This place of un-awareness is usually around living with insecurity and being a victim in one way or another. It is often a place of giving all one’s attention to the outside material world, and or, of trying to ignore anxiety/ depression, living under the influence of “not good enoughness” or arrogance and specialness, stuck on the narcissistic see-saw between the two. In this place we live with little awareness of what is really driving us to be the way we are. It was not until I started therapy in my early thirties that I really could see the insecurity behind being the way I was.

The next level (the “in between”) is about the development of self-reflection, self-awareness and taking responsibility for how we are. It is about living through the years of self-exploration, of developing self-awareness, self-understanding and the struggle to take more and more responsibility for ourselves. It is about moving out of “blaming” (self, other, or the world), which is simply the projection of our un-faced onion layers of insecurity. This can take decades to work through. It takes much work attending to our wounded hearts, to our understanding and to our body, to slowly resolve those long-held insecurities. Here we live “between two stools”, with the struggle of moving out of habitual defensive ways of being, with the pull of un-reconciled trauma always tending to pull us ‘down’ again into our unconscious reactivity. It is about making the struggle between ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ within us more conscious so that we can start to have the ability to choose what we want, i.e. to choose ‘Yes’ to Life. There is an essential human paradox here, to choose ‘No’ or death is not really a choice, it is to get lost in believing the nightmare that emanates from our un-healed trauma. So, choosing “Yes” to Life is the only real choice we have, yet we still have to make that choice deep down in our souls.

Becoming established in the third “authentic state” happens when the depth of our insecurity has been largely faced and we can increasingly live in a freer, more choiceful relationship to our lives. Our being is then different. We have largely understood, and taken responsibility for ourselves, so that we can live more flexibly and spontaneously, closer to the ‘here and now’. We

are no longer so caught in the patterns of reactive living that characterised our previous living. We can largely be “authentically” ourselves.

Working through this third state is about attending to the remaining unevenness of our development between our feelings, thoughts, sensation and spirit. If a part remains undeveloped it becomes a barrier to further development. The risk is that we build on sand because any remaining splits between our head, heart, body and spirit can, as ever, lead to our getting lost in projections, in hypocrisy and however else we avoid the truth of who, what, how we are. Integrating these basic aspects of ourselves means we can live increasingly connected to an embodied presence which can only fully emerge when all parts are integrated. The fullness of this state comes from living increasingly informed by understanding, openness, sensation and meaning, being able to accept whatever life throws at us with relative equanimity. My sense is that the barrier preventing me from living in the “here and now” is getting thinner. Living as our “authentic selves” is to be largely free of “shoulds” and “oughts” along with being free from identifying with, or denying, our underlying insecurity.

Living fully in the fourth state is beyond my experience. However, as with many other people, I have experienced moments of touching higher states through “peak experiences”. Wilber talks, as Gurdjieff did, about how each state is made up of a different energy or substance. They both see every emotion, thought, sensation, even spirit, as having its material / energetic correlation and see states as being made up of finer and finer matter or energy as they develop. This “matter” constitutes the ‘body’ and quality of the ‘being’ of any particular state/stage.

Experiences of higher states can happen within special conditions such as meditation and during retreats. In such conditions as a retreat this finer energy is able to accumulate, because it is not being wasted in habitual distractions, also love and presence are being supported and amplified within the group. This can facilitate a shift into a state which is significantly more open and deeply connected to the miracle of the ‘here and now’. This “higher energy” or presence having been accumulated, can lead to experiencing temporarily something of what living in the ‘higher’ states is like.

As I understand it, this fourth level is about living consistently with such energy. This seems to be about living with a presence that is informed by a more direct connection to the Goodness of Life, to God, to Love, to Truth, to Consciousness, to Energy, or whatever names we choose. This seems to be about living with a connection to something, (whether this “something” is seen as originating internally or externally I don’t think matters) that is coming from beyond the ego / personality level of ourselves. Trust is more deeply established, and we can move into living less self-centredly, move into being of service to others and the universe. Having previously managed to fully embody the ego in state three, the process of starting to let it go, happens here.

In assessing myself in these terms I can see that the fifteen years that I spent in my twenties and early thirties trying to develop and tune into my presence, were partly about “spiritual bypassing” to avoid my emotional wounds. I needed another twenty five years or so of attending to my insecurity (I had a lot to sort out!) as well as developing my thinking, in order to find my way through state two (“in-between”) and establish myself in the “Integral” or “authentic” state. I am now starting to sense the pull of the possibility of moving into the fourth “state”. The hints I have of how to move into this level are around questioning my need to control myself and my world. It is obviously about healing the remains of my insecurity and letting go of wanting more than I have. Is it about more deeply opening my heart, perhaps through more or deeper meditation? Attending with greater fullness to the here and now, staying closer to the

awareness of Awareness? Maybe it is about finally getting off the narcissistic 'see-saw' with its attachment to life, or myself, as being 'good' or 'bad'?

Reaching this forth level seems to me to be rather like my experience of meditation. On a good day, it takes me fifteen to twenty minutes to reach a place of deeper peace and opened consciousness, my body is changed and my breathing more deeply relaxed. To get there I have to go through a period of chaos and resistance where I need to keep coming back to attending to 'letting go', otherwise I drift into daydreaming. But if I persevere, my state changes. This feels like where I am in my life just now, holding my intention onto this 'here and now' process of 'letting go' into being, because this is what I want. I sense and hope that by doing so I will break through into being changed, into embodying this fourth state of being.

I have experienced several "false dawns" over the years, of thinking that I was at some level when I was not. Reality would then crash through my self-delusion. What is different now? I would say a stronger consistency in my being, I'm more able to hold my insecurity without being so identified with it. I feel more solid and grounded and ready. But time will tell, and it will be what it will be. My understanding comes from my conscious development over many years now, as well as the experience of helping many people for some part of their journey. This has given me the "height" to see where I have come from as well as a glimpse of the journey ahead. I have left behind the depression and alienation that dogged a large part of my life. There are still aspects of my underlying insecurity around, but there is also an increasing openness and freedom I am very grateful for. This gives me trust that I am growing into the "Goodness, Beauty and Truth" of the here and now. As indeed I trust we all are.

The last step to the ultimate fifth state is, it seems, one of letting go of all attachments and fear. To finally let go of our ego and rest in pure Being and Love, in the peace of the Tao, the place of pure Non-Dual Witness. I hope that I can find this before I die, even if only shortly before, because it feels to me that then I will be reconciled, and done, and happy to go.

References

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