

THE EVOLUTIONARY EMERGENT OF UNIQUE SELF

A New Chapter in Integral Theory

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ABSTRACT This article outlines the basic teachings of a new chapter in Integral Theory: the post-metaphysical evolutionary emergence of Unique Self. The article begins by contextualizing the Unique Self conversation within a larger discussion on individuality and traces the emergence of the Unique Self teachings through the life and writings of the author. The core Western understanding of individuality and its affirmation of the dignity of the separate self is contrasted with the Eastern teaching of dissolution of the small self, before both are integrated into a higher integral embrace through a new understanding of Unique Self. This article elucidates how the teachings of Unique Self fundamentally change the classical enlightenment paradigm through the assertion that enlightenment has a unique perspective, which might be termed the “personal face of essence.” Perspective taking, which emerges from enlightened consciousness, is rooted in the ontological pluralism that lies at the core of the Hebrew textual tradition. The new enlightenment teaching of Unique Self therefore rests on a series of integral discernments between separateness and uniqueness, ego and Unique Self, and personal and impersonal man. The Unique Self teaching suggests a new understanding of enlightenment through intersubjective love; the Unique Self perception is then set within an evolutionary context of being and becoming, in which it is seen to express one’s response to the personal address of the evolutionary God impulse itself. In this sense, Unique Self is understood to be an essential chapter in the emergence of a truly evolutionary mysticism.

KEY WORDS consciousness; ego; enlightenment; Integral Theory; Unique Self

Two Visions of Enlightenment, East and West

Throughout the history of consciousness, two very distinct understandings of the self have emerged and contended for dominance. The first view of the self comes from classical mystical consciousness, which understands the separate self—or ego—as being an essentially false construct and the source of all human suffering. This view proclaims impersonal consciousness—often called True Self, or Inner Self—to be the essence of our true nature or identity. While this view is often correctly identified with the classical nondual Eastern teachings, it is not limited by geography. True Self has gone by many names, including *rigpa* (innermost awareness) in Tibetan Buddhism, *Mochin deGadlut* (expanded consciousness) in Kabbalah, *antar atman* (inner self) or *tat* (that, as in the aphorism “thou art that”) in Hinduism, and Christ consciousness in Christianity. The realization of the True Self is what has been classically termed enlightenment. It has also been called self-realization (Adi Shankara, Abraham Abulafia), liberation (Ramma Maharshi), or simply being awake. This classical enlightenment understanding of self is true, but also partial.¹

The second understanding of self, which flowered in the West during the so-called “Age of Enlightenment” in the 18th century, asserts the exact opposite view: that our personal, separate self—our identity as a distinct individual—is our essential nature. This view was expressed by Western enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, who proclaimed the dignity and reality of the separate individual self as the

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basis of all human rights and responsibilities. This understanding of the self and enlightenment is also true but partial.²

The recognition of what I am calling Unique Self transcends and includes the true but partial insights of both the classical mystical and classical Western enlightenment views of the self, and for the first time offers a higher evolutionary integral embrace to hold both.³ What do I mean by Unique Self? Unique Self is the personal face of essence, our ultimate nature—it is the unique God-spark or love intelligence that lives in you, as you, and through you. Enlightened realization of Unique Self transcends the limitations of our separate self while simultaneously affirming the autonomy, value, and infinite dignity of our own unique individual perspective and expression. The Unique Self is revealed in moments of flow and grace, regardless of our level of consciousness, yet it is only after we have developed beyond the grasping of our separate self and have realized our unity with the infinite unqualified field of consciousness that Unique Self wholly manifests as a full and stable realization in our lives. In other words, Unique Self describes a particular form of enlightened individuality. While glimmerings of Unique Self are available at virtually all levels of consciousness, Unique Self is fully realized only after transcending narrow identification with ego and identifying with one's true nature as not separate from, but one with, all that is. This realization then evolves and deepens, as one understands that he or she is not merely a part of the all, but an utterly unique part, unlike any other, of all that is. This realization of Unique Self is the core of integral evolutionary enlightenment.

To be unique means to be irreplaceably singular, a constitutive exception to the universal, an unobjectifiable secret that resists full articulation or appropriation in any system of meaning making. But that is only part of the story. It is precisely this singularity that merges and integrates one into the Single One, or the ultimate universal—the whole in which every part participates. It is precisely this paradoxical insight that is the essence of the nondual realization of the self as Self. Unique Self might be described as the puzzle-piece nature of one's essence and emptiness. Like a puzzle piece, the Unique Self is both unique and distinct, and yet paradoxically it is this very uniqueness that merges one with the larger context of all that is.⁴

Unique Self is the realization that you are both absolutely one with the whole, the whole itself, and absolutely unique. You are free from the contractions of your personality, even as you experience yourself as personally engaged and incarnate in the great evolutionary unfolding of consciousness. In Unique Self enlightenment, you recognize and realize your nature as indivisible from the larger field of consciousness, even as you know yourself to be an absolute unique expression of true self, unlike any other. True Self always looks out through a unique set of eyes, which reveal a radically unique and special perspective through which the evolution of consciousness unfolds. In this way you transcend the limitation of separate self while affirming the autonomy, value, and infinite dignity of your Unique Self.

Unique Self and Individuality

Before we approach the topic of Unique Self substantively, a few words are in order in terms of locating the teaching of Unique Self within the larger intellectual discussion on individuality. Charles Taylor (1992a) and others have already pointed out the distinction between two core forms of individuality (pp. 25-29). The first form of individuality might be called the enlightenment variety and the second the romantic variety. The first form views the human being as a separate self, a skin-encapsulated ego (i.e., the human being is seen to be a distinct monad, separate and therefore not defined or controlled by any larger context). This understanding of the separate self in which the individual human being is seen both as a source of value and a self-governing authority is perhaps the key breakthrough in consciousness and ethics that defined the Western enlightenment as it emerged in the mid-18th century. Because this understanding located the value of the human being in the separate self, it liberated human beings from the larger frames of political and spiritual tyranny that sought to define them. Man was set free, but he was also set adrift. He was not only free of larger frames of control, he also drifted free of larger frames of meaning. The original enlightened impulse of deism that powered many

of the great theoreticians of individuality in the enlightenment would all too quickly give way to a flatland vision of the individual as a desiccated Giocametti sculpture, disassociated from depth and the Great Chain of Being, aimlessly progressing in what Lewis Mumford has called the “disqualified Universe” (as cited in Smith, 1976, p. 16).^{5,6}

So, while Unique Self is informed by the original vision of enlightenment individualism, if we are to find inspirational affinity between the Unique Self teaching and some variety of modern individualism, it would be closer to Romantic individualism. The term *Romanticism*, as Arthur Lovejoy (1924/1948) points out, includes too many strands of thought and admits too many definitions to be helpful without some form of elucidation (pp. 53, 232-236). Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I have chosen one scholar, Charles Taylor, upon whose authoritative, classic description of Romanticism we will draw in order to make the case for some affinity between the fundamental matrices of Romantic thinking and those of Unique Self as laid out in this article. Despite its affinity with Romanticism, the Unique Self teaching also parts company with Romantic notions of individuality in several key ways, which I will examine in more detail below. Moreover, as I will point out below, while Romanticism inspires and animates Unique Self teaching, it is not the ultimate or even primary source of the Unique Self teaching. First, however, it is worth noting some of the parallels.⁷

The first feature of any description of Romanticism is almost always its radical emphasis on interiority, which Laurence Sterne refers to as the “divinity, which stirs within” (as cited in Taylor, 1992b, p. 302). Secondly, Taylor (1992b) notes that this emphasis on heart and interiority did not remain abstract for the Romantics, but had very real normative implications (p. 370). Not only did the Romantics, for the most part, view nature as a divine moral source, they also viewed a person’s evolution as connected to their ability to participate in the cosmic spirit running through all of nature (p. 314). The Romantics saw this divine yet accessible nature as a guide to all normative human action. Romanticism often had a distinctly antinomian sensibility and taught the importance of following one’s sense of inner conviction; what came to be known as one’s “inner voice” (Taylor, 1992b, p. 370).

Thus, Romanticism, according to Taylor (1992b), is invested with an almost inexorable impulse to slide away from Orthodox theology, to depart from traditional ethical codes, and to dissolve the distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic. One’s new and fresh understanding of the good virtually always triumphs over the old and stale understanding of the good. Precedent ceases to wield decisive authority. In Taylor’s recapitulation of the Romantic position, “Each of us must follow what is within and this may be without precedent” (p. 376). It is in this sense that all the great Romantic writers framed their work in terms of a rejection of neoclassicism. Whatever previous type of classicism existed—whether philosophical, hierarchical, or legal—it was overridden by the sensibility of the moment, which reveals a higher law. The normative implications of this tendency manifest as antinomian sentiments. The Romantic also tends to assert the primacy of will over intellect; therefore, the goal of the Romantic is the transformation of the human will. In Taylor’s (1992b) summation of the Romantic invitation: “Our will needs to be transformed... by the recovery of contact with the impulse of nature within us” (p. 372).

For the Hasidic masters of Hebrew mysticism in the mid-19th century whose writings first inspired the awakening of the Unique Self teaching, this transformation is accomplished by the realization of the ontic identity of wills between the human and the divine. In a parallel manner, the Romantics identify not only with the natural within us, but seek to become united with “the larger current of being” (Taylor, 1992b, p. 377).

The final pivotal parallel between Romantic individualism and Unique Self concerns their emphasis on the radical uniqueness of the individual. While the dignity of the individual was already a dominant theme of the Renaissance, it was Romanticism that highlighted the idea of originality. Taylor (1992b) writes:

This is the idea... that each individual is different and original and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live... Just the notion of individual difference

is of course not new. Nothing is more evident or more banal. What is different is what really makes a difference to how we are called to live...[which] lay[s] the obligation on each of us to live up to our originality. (pp. 375, 377)

What replaced the interlocking or hierarchical order of a classical worldview was the Romantic notion of a “purpose or life coursing through nature” that addresses each individual uniquely. Unique Self, in its radical emphasis on individuality and originality, is the source of the personal direction and purpose even when it flies in the face of all convention. Taylor also points out that the defining characteristic of the Romantic personality is freedom. Romanticism, with its law of divine nature that is beyond reason, becomes the basis for a new and fuller individuation. Similarly, freedom is a basic defining characteristic of the spiritual personality animated by Unique Self.

One key difference between Unique Self and the Romantic school of individuality is that Unique Self does not fall into what I term a level one–level three confusion, which Wilber has called the Romantic pre/trans fallacy.⁸ The Romantics, according to Wilber, failed to distinguish between the primal, pre-rational human experience and the far more subtle, moral, and evolved transrational human experience.⁹ In Unique Self teaching, the ability to distinguish between individual impulses, which emerge from ego, and self-realization is an essential part of one’s spiritual evolution.

I draw this analogy not so much to credit Romanticism with the notion of Unique Self but to place it in the context of the larger zeitgeist in which Hasidic thinkers developed the Unique Self idea. However, it must be said that these Hasidic thinkers lived highly insular lives, never cited from the literature of Romanticism, and were forbidden by their internal codes from even reading it. So to speak of the direct influence of Romanticism on their Unique Self teaching would be more than inaccurate. However, I do not discount the more subtle influences of zeitgeist in which, from the perspective of what might be called evolutionary mysticism, an idea shows up at around the same time in seemingly disparate contexts. This happens because that emergent new insight of consciousness has reached a critical stage of evolution, which causes its birth in multiple and seemingly disconnected cultural contexts.

It would also be misleading to suggest that the Unique Self teaching as I have unfolded it over the years was drawn from Romanticism. It was not. The Unique Self teaching came to me from four primary sources. First and foremost, I draw from particular strains of my lineage tradition of Kabbalah and Hassidism. I have spent more than 40 years studying these sources with reverence and delight and in a formative period at Oxford University, where I wrote a dissertation on the Unique Self tradition of nondual humanism as it revealed itself to me in these living texts. Later, I found some confirmation of this tradition in the Diamond Approach (Almaas, 2000). The second influence on my thinking comes from the Eastern enlightenment traditions of no-self, which I have engaged and studied over the years.¹⁰ My third source is modern and postmodern philosophy. Modern and postmodern notions of perspective, which have become the lodestone of post-metaphysical thought in Integral Theory, have significantly deepened my own thinking. There has been a mutually fructifying relationship between the modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern understandings of perspective and the centrality of enlightened perspective-taking which discloses the incarnate word of God. Lastly, I’m continually informed by my own realization of the true nature of things, as arrived at through spiritual meditative disciplines of study, chant, and prayer.

Unique Self: A New Chapter in Integral Spirituality

Write for yourselves this song; and let the song be in front of you as witness.

– Deuteronomy (Chap. 32, Verses 24-26)

This biblical scriptural text forms part of the matrix of the commandment for every person to write a sacred

scroll with the words of the Torah. The esoteric meaning of this law, as interpreted by Kabbalist Isaac Luria, is that every person must write his or her own unique letter in the Torah. Your letter in the Torah is your song.¹¹

Luria, emerging from a rich intellectual history of proto-Unique Self theorists and mystics, taught that every person has an obligation to write his or her own letter in the Torah.¹² Our letter in the Torah is a precursor for the evolutionary emergent, which I have termed in this article and in earlier writings *Unique Self*.¹³ Like all evolutionary emergents, it evolves and emerges from the best of every lineage in every spiritual tradition in history.¹⁴ And yet it adds something undeniably new. Unique Self has the power to forever change us, and through us to change the vision of enlightenment in the 21st century. Unique Self is an idea, a realization, and the very enactment of our life, which delights, comforts, and challenges all human beings. This article is both a third-person transmission of the conceptual structure of the Unique Self teaching as well as a first-person invitation for us to enact and realize Unique Self in the story of our own lives.

Before I address the fundamental teachings of Unique Self directly, I want to offer an integral contextual framing that will elucidate Unique Self as a distinctly post-metaphysical construct. What that means, stated simply, is that while Unique Self may be perceived by those within some of the great traditions as the eternal immortal unique soul, it may also be realized as one's utterly unique perspective within a Buddhist or even a materialist context. Unique Self is not a metaphysical given in the sense of the old Platonic archetypes. It is rather an enlightened realization that emerges from the enacted injunctions of practice. The depth and nature of the realization is directly related to Kosmic address (Wilber, 2006, pp. 231-79), that is to say, the developmental level of the realizer.

What follows is a more elaborate unpacking of the integral context for the Unique Self teaching. The following section, "An Integral View of the Unique Self," was co-authored by Ken Wilber, Robb Smith, Diane Musho Hamilton, and myself in an attempt to integrally frame the core Unique Self teaching which I had evolved over the years and brought to ISE.¹⁵

An Integral View of Unique Self

Unique Self is a liberating realization that promises to integrate the so-called "trans-egoic," no-self teachings of Eastern traditions with the individuality emphasized in the West and the uniqueness that is inherent to all human beings. We offer Unique Self as a living koan; an inquiry meant to provoke curiosity, exploration and presence, rather than an attempt to reify or fix our self-understanding.

We understand that Unique Self can and will be interpreted differently according to personal inclination and constitution, cultural orientation, and differences in stages of development. For example, a Benedictine monk whose realization validates an eternal transcendent soul may understand Unique Self as an expression of that unique soul. A Zen Buddhist, whose realization does not posit a reified transcendent, may experience Unique Self as the freedom to manifest exactly as we are: complete, whole, empty, and unique. In another example, a secular materialist might understand Unique Self as an expression of one's unique perspective and abilities to succeed and develop.

In each case, we would hope that the integral practitioner would see that classic enlightenment, in the formulation of the great traditions as a realized state of unity with the oneness of ever-present reality, is recognition of what might be called "True Self." This realization finds that the total number of true selves only and always is one. This, however, is only true in unmanifest oneness. There is no True Self anywhere in the manifest world. Every person's awakening to this oneness arises through his or her own unique perspective. In this way, True Self + Perspective = Unique Self.¹⁶ In developmental psychology terms, the fullest flowering of Unique Self might best be articulated as a living glimpse into indigo altitude (à la Wilber, 2006, p. 68): this is the stage of evolution of human consciousness at which my felt ever-present unity of reality—a state of ongoing "flow presence," if you will—and the unique characteristics of my own life and perspective—the unique evolutionary features of my life—intersect and find a cohesive and stabilized integration.¹⁷ Perspec-

tive is an inherent part of the realization of attaining the indigo structure. When someone develops to indigo altitude, they know they are looking through a particular perspective even as they recognize other perspectives, and are even to some extent able to disidentify from their own.

ISE is meant to provide a vibrant, open, and enlivened look into the emerging potential of the possibility for humanity at this stage in our evolution. From the first-person perspective, Unique Self is a practice of recognizing the profundity of your own life, the preciousness of your specific perspective, history, and talents, and the opportunity to become fully who you already are—I am uniquely this. In the second-person perspective, Unique Self is an opportunity to see and support the uniqueness of others' gifts and to foster a durable community that supports the evolutionary possibilities of humankind—I see who you uniquely are. And in the third-person perspective, Unique Self can be understood as an evolutionary emergent, a subtle, gentle, yet powerful and compelling whisper from the emerging future of humankind—this is who we can become.

The Foundation of Unique Self

Integral Spirituality provides a foundational program upon which to reconstruct spiritual insights and human meaning making in a modern world that has transcended literal interpretations of religious mythology and seeks to transcend the nihilistic and narcissistic assertions of atheistic scientism and postmodern relativism. Unique Self rests squarely on the post-metaphysical core of Integral Spirituality.

Tenet 1: Perspective is Foundational

Integral philosophy maintains that the deep structure of reality is composed of perspectives. Whether we take this commitment as “strong” (ontologically real) or “weak” (usefully descriptive), we can still easily understand that all sentient creatures have a perspective.

Tenet 2: Uniqueness is Obvious

All human beings and perhaps all sentient beings have a unique perspective. This perspective will be unique on the one hand due to different location—all perspectives have a unique angle of perception—but also due to the different psychology, biology, culture, and history of each creature and its context.

Tenet 3: Perspectives Evolve

Going further, we see that all sentient creatures have their being arise in four quadrants—those of intentional, biological, cultural, and social dimensions—and that each of these quadrants is holonic in nature. Therefore, each aspect of reality evolves over time and thus perspectives will also evolve over time.¹⁸

Tenet 4: Conventional Metaphysics is Unnecessary

While a metaphysical perspective is not necessary to an engagement with Unique Self, there is nothing about perspective that precludes ontological revelations. Perspectives thus create a common ground up and down the spiral of development. In the post-metaphysical view they arise, for example, in human beings and evolve over time, inexorably influenced and co-created by the evolution of all four quadrants. We need not make any necessary reference to any transcendental concepts or extra-evolutionary features to describe Unique Self. At the same time, Unique Self does not exclude communities who hold a set of realizations that they signify as pertaining to the transcendent (e.g., God; and indeed, ontologies reclaimed at their appropriate Kosmic address significantly deepen Unique Self). Thus every perspective grounded in direct experience supported by a valid community of interpreters has an honored, if partial place, at the integral table.

Tenet 5: Ego Need not be Transcended or Obliterated

The term *ego* is used in many ways. I will use “ego” to mean the general patterns of self-understanding and self-identity that developmental psychologists have tested and articulated using structuralism (zone 2 of Integral Methodological Pluralism) (Wilber, 2006, p. 36). Of course, viewed from within our own subjectivity (i.e., zone 1), these same patterns “look and feel” as purely phenomenological realities. Because this usage of ego is around an enduring line of self-development that extends up and down the first-person holonic spectrum, it is inaccurate to think of ego as being transcended, per se. Rather, ego expressions become more inclusive, subtle, refined, and expansive with each successive stage of development and envelopment. As I have stated elsewhere, “We never evolve beyond ego; we evolve beyond exclusive identification with ego.”¹⁹ When the West first ran into the Eastern traditions, particularly Theravada Buddhism, and first met the whole notion of transcending self, the ego was made bad in all ways. Generally, two columns were identified. In one column was ego, which was equated with the devil and in the second column was non-ego, which was equated with God. The critical Western insight of ego being the functional organizing center of conventional awareness, which is utterly essential in the finite world, was effaced.

Tenet 6: We are Never Outside of a State, and Always within a Stage

All “structure-stages” of consciousness get enacted within the ontology of present-moment states. We are never outside of the now. So, states describe a “substrate of awareness” in which the real arises (and gets interpreted), and stages of consciousness can be understood as the large-scale characterizable patterns of these moment-to-moment interpretations. So we can discuss a state of deep presence, flow states, or nondual identity. But as any uniqueness of self comes into the picture, there will always be a stage particularity to the interpretive act. It makes no sense to talk about Unique Self as a state outside of a particular developmental stage, in other words. Unique Self is always interpreted through the prism of stage development.

Tenet 7: Unique Self is Most Fully Realized as an “Indigo” Stage of Consciousness

After considering all other tenets above, it is clear that Unique Self therefore can best be described as the stage at which general patterns of ego development evidence an integration between stabilized “no-self” insight (e.g., cosmic identification) and one’s own felt-sense of uniqueness in their life, talents, and history (i.e., their four-quadrant evolution). This stage has been empirically mapped and articulated using zone-2 methodologies as the “indigo” self.

We might describe the subtle and refined ego of the Unique Self understanding in terms of one who has let go of exclusive identification of the subject with its separate self. The transcending of the egoic separate self through repeated access to “presence-flow” states is the goal of classical enlightenment teaching. This, however, does not mean that the ego is annihilated. Rather, the exclusive identification with the egoic separate self is overcome. We are able to experience our fundamental identity—not as an ego isolated from other, nature, community, and all that is—as part of a larger whole. Note the similarities of this description with how researchers (e.g., Cook-Greuter, 2000) have characterized the indigo stage of ego development:

[They] experience themselves and others as part of ongoing humanity, embedded in the creative ground, fulfilling “the destiny of evolution” and are in tune with their lives and their shared humanity as a simultaneous expression of their unique selves. (p. 115)²⁰

That is, these individuals are capable of integrating the unity of reality realized only in deep presence-states

(the “creative ground”) and their own uniqueness as a living expression of a dynamic evolutionary process that continually calls on them for their special contribution (“the destiny of evolution”). We allow for the possibility that glimmerings of this stage of consciousness, where Unique Self has emerged as this integration, can appear up and down the spiral of human development.²¹ With this as our integral framing, let us now turn to the core teachings of Unique Self.

The Essential Teachings of Unique Self

The Dharma of Four Selves

The evolution of personal realization within the trajectory of individual development takes places through what I have termed *the stations of the four selves*. These four stations are: separate self, false self, True Self, and Unique Self. All the great traditions tell us about two selves: a true self and a false (or fallen) self. Our everyday ordinary self is known as the separate self, while our false self is a distorted or unhealthy expression of our separate self.²² This might involve a distorted self-understanding caused by false core sentences or belief structures such as “I’m not safe,” “I’m not good,” or “I’m not enough,” which unconsciously filter our perception of reality.²³ False self also expresses itself in one’s identification and “stuckness” in their typology. The separate self may have developed in order to overcome the shock and pain of separation so as to navigate reality, as it understands it.²⁴ Even after we clarify the distortion of our false self and access our healthy separate self, a fundamental distortion still may remain in place. This distortion is the illusion our separate self is all that we are. From this perspective, our separate self is also our false self in that it is our limited identity with our personality or ego—it is the cluster of needs, drives, memories, fears, and expectations that typically referred to as “me.” It is a painfully finite self, born into the illusion of separation. It is a life cast in shadows, like a prisoner in Plato’s cave.²⁵

We are invited to evolve beyond our personal ego, beyond separate self and false self, in order to realize our deeper identity as the True Self. While our false self is trapped in time and therefore destined to die, our True Self is eternal. It is the infinite spirit within, the effortless expanse of awareness that is behind all experience. And it is forever unblemished by the pains and ecstasies of time, for it exists completely *outside* of time. The overall number of True Selves in the universe is one—it is a singular to which the plural is unknown. Our personalized expression of True Self *is* our Unique Self. The understanding that True Self always shows up differently through every pair of eyes is the central realization of Unique Self. The point is that there is no True Self in the manifest world. The True Self is *always* looking through a perspective, so in the manifest world there is only the Unique Self. It is important to note that Unique Self, however, becomes progressively more conscious and full in direct proportion to one’s level of True Self realization.²⁶

In the old enlightenment, True Self was often understood to erase all distinctions of individual personhood as we moved beyond preferences that emerged from our limited perspective on reality.²⁷ In the new enlightenment, we realize that enlightenment always has a perspective. Our enlightenment is the clarity of our unique perception and perspective—a radical clarity that can only be fully achieved after we have evolved beyond identification with the graspings of ego and realized our nature as True Self.²⁸ The combination of True Self and our own unique perspective is our Unique Self: True Self + Perspective = Unique Self.²⁹

The centrality of perspective was simply not understood in the pre-modern world the way it is understood in our post-postmodern context. Humans used to think they were directly engaging reality as it is, which is why every spiritual system thought that it owned the truth.³⁰ This was only half true. At some point, the stance was adopted that reality is *fundamentally constructed from perspectives*. There is nothing that we see that is not filtered through the prism of perspective, in other words. True Self cannot exist independent of our unique perspective, thus every enlightenment realization is defined in part by the unique perspective of the practitioner. Of course, perspective itself can be understood from many perspectives. Perspective might

imply ontology, methodology, or epistemology.³¹ All of these understandings of perspective appear in the old Hebrew texts, which unfold perspective as the central hermeneutic category of textual interpretation, which reveals the “word of God” through the incarnate voice of the textual interpreter.

Perspective Taking

In the matrix tradition of Unique Self, that of Talmud and Kabbalah, taking different perspectives on the sacred text is a central spiritual practice. Judaism is first and foremost a textual tradition. The nature of a textual tradition is that competing readings of the text need to be explained, especially if the text is said to be divine. How can it be that different readers of the text, with different and often mutually exclusive readings of the same text, all express the word of God?

This question can be answered in a number of ways. Each is based on a different reading of the idea of perspectives. The champions of methodological pluralism claim that in fact only one reading of the text is correct and the other readings are granted equal status simply because we lack an appropriate method to inform us of which reading is correct. In this reading, what is emphasized is the limited nature of each perspective on the one hand and the hierarchy of perspectives on the other; namely, one perspective is better than the others because it more clearly captures the true intention and meaning of the divine text.

On the far other side of the spectrum are the champions of ontological pluralism. They assert the radical ontology of perspectives as the core tenet to be recognized and affirmed. This position is rooted in both the classic Hebrew legal and mystical traditions for which the text was thought to be a living expression of divinity that did not exist independently of the perspective of its reader. “God, Torah, and Israel are one” is an old Kabbalistic dictum, which essentially means “reader, God, and text are one.”³² In one expression of this teaching, this ontology of perspectives is thought to originate at the source event of revelation: the theophany of Mount Sinai. In this teaching, every person standing at Mount Sinai during the time when the divine voice was heard is said to have *stood at a different angle in relation to the mountain*. As a result, each person heard a different voice of revelation. Each unique perspective on the mountain yielded a unique voice of God (Pesikta De Rav Kahana, 12:5). This is an ancient version of the new enlightenment teaching of unique perspective, which creates Unique Self. For the Kabbalists who assert ontological pluralism rooted in perspectives, the validity of the hermeneutic is based on the unique perspective of the interpreter, which is situated at a unique angle and therefore offers a unique expression of the divine face. It is this unique angle that dictates a person’s unique letter in the cosmic scroll.³³

This original insight of perspectives in regard to revelation becomes the matrix for a sophisticated ontological pluralism in Talmudic and Kabbalistic sources. Related to this pluralism in regard to the voice of revelation, there emerges what has been called the *one-letter teaching* of Lurianic Kabbalah. In this teaching, each person is regarded as having his or her own letter in the Torah. In one-letter theory, our letter in the Torah is both the ontological source and purpose of our existence. Our individual existence is rooted in, nourished by, and intended to realize our unique letter in the cosmic scroll.³⁴ Our unique letter is our Unique Self whose notes are formed by our unique perspective.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, operating in a pre-modern metaphysical context, Unique Self was often expressed as the unique perspective and radiance of our eternal soul. Our eternal soul was our True Self. Its distinct quality of personal essence was a way of referring to what is being called, from a post-metaphysical perspective, Unique Self.³⁵ In Buddhism, Unique Self would manifest as the unique perspective and radiance of enlightenment. Yet for all of these examples, our evolutionary equation holds true: True Self + Perspective = Unique Self. Integral consciousness adds nuance to the understanding of Unique Self by noticing that the world is refracted through four quadrants of reality, a particular level of consciousness, lines of personal development, states of being, and typologies.³⁶

Intersubjective Love is Unique Self Perception

Unique Self expresses a desire to move beyond exclusive identification with the small self to realize something *within* us that is both unique to us and infinitely *larger* than us. In this process the first step is to disidentify with the small self, or ego, and identify the larger field of existence. Here, *ego* refers to the tendency to identify everything with the body-mind personality.³⁷ In this sense, the ego is an expression of the false self.

Classically, enlightenment is the move from false self to True Self. The motivation to disidentify with the egoic false self is the evolutionary impulse of love.³⁸ Evolutionary love expressed in the intersubjective context is not an emotion but a perception—it is the capacity that allows true nature to be viewed as far more vast, stunning, and spacious than our “skin-encapsulated ego.” Love realizes that our small self is not isolated, alienated, and alone—it is a spark in the inferno of love and evolving consciousness that we sometimes call God. It is the force of evolutionary love that drives us to transcend our separate egoic self and move toward union with the whole. In this sense, to love another human being is to perceive their true infinite and radiant nature as part of the whole. It is to perceive the infinite specialness and divine beauty of the beloved—the beloved being both our personal lover and all that is.

To be a lover is to see with God’s eyes, and to be loved by another human being is to have our true nature seen. Our true nature is our Unique Self. In this sense, ultimate love in the intersubjective human context is a Unique Self perception. In other words, love in the intersubjective context between human beings, and between God and human beings, is Unique Self recognizing each other. However, love of God can also be understood as a first-person realization of God through the Unique Self. In this sense, to love God is to let God see with our eyes, which is to empower God with the vision of our unique perspective. In the evolutionary mysticism of Unique Self, to be successful is to make your perspective available to God. Indeed, we must consider that being a devotee is nothing but actually being God from a distinct perspective. For mature individuality is not about being separate; it is about having a distinct perspective within the context of union. This is the great paradox again and again. To be a lover is to see with God’s eyes, and to love God is to let God see with your eyes.³⁹

Images of Light

Until the 20th century, light was thought to be one of quality and nature. Science has evolved to realize that every beam of light vibrates at its own unique frequency. To be enlightened in this new scientific paradigm, then, means to consciously live the radiance and purpose of our singularly unique frequency of light. Similarly, in the old spiritual paradigm, perception was thought to be a faculty in every person, which shined light on the same objective picture (i.e., if everyone was in the light, everyone would see the same thing). In the new spiritual paradigm, we understand that all of our perceptions are frequencies of light; that is, our perceptions themselves are perspectives. Perspective is like the glasses through which our perceptions take place (wear Hindu-tinted glasses and see Shiva or Kali; wear Christian-tinted glasses and see Jesus; wear Buddhist-tinted glasses and see the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara; wear Jewish-tinted glasses and see an apparition of the Shekinah). Every human being sees through a set of uniquely tinted glasses, viewing creation from a particular angle defined by his or her particular existence. This is what I refer to as our Unique Self.

The realization that our separate self is one with the whole is a realization of classical enlightenment. However, this is a *stage* on the journey and not its endpoint. The new enlightenment moves one step beyond classic enlightenment in that we realize that the spark is not merely absorbed in the larger light. Even as the spark dances in the roaring flames of heart melting and searing divinity, it does not lose its unique character. As identification with separate self disappears, our clarified individuality, our Unique Self, appears—the dross of grasping separateness is burnt away so that the luminous character of our unique light can shine.

The New Enlightenment

The recognition that every culture—and indeed every individual—holds a unique perception of the world is an evolutionary emergent. Put True Self together with perspective and we get the evolutionary emergent of Unique Self. *True Self without perspective* is the limited understanding of the old enlightenment, which viewed uniqueness as the enemy.⁴⁰ The belief was that one's experience of uniqueness would obscure the realization of true identity with all that is. Since it is now acknowledged that perception, even the realization of true nature, has perspective, we now realize that True Self never appears without Unique Self. *Perspective without True Self* is but the separate self-ego, which has not realized that is part of a larger whole.

In the old enlightenment paradigm, the ego or separate self is seen as the *enemy* of enlightenment.⁴¹ The ego is something to be surrendered, to be pushed aside, to be utterly dissolved into the timeless Absolute. There is an element of truth to this—the ego must be transcended. To transcend in my teaching is not to leave ego behind, however—it is to “trance-end” (i.e., to end the trance of the ego). This means to end exclusive identification with the separate self. One always experiences reality in part as a separate self—that is as it should be. If not, we would be psychotic or otherwise deranged. What needs to “trance-ended” is exclusive identification with the egoic separate self, for it is this sense of being but a skin-encapsulated ego that creates a sense of suffocation, fear, and drabness that passes as our life. It is my view that this error in identity is at the root of virtually all suffering.

But we must also love and nourish the ego, not destroy it altogether. The ego contains within it a glimmer of truth—it prefigures Unique Self. Our ego bears gifts that require clarification. Clarification can only happen after we break our exclusive identification with the separate self; that is to say, when we transcend the captivating trance the ego holds over us, usurping our true identity and claiming it for itself.⁴² Thus, all the great teachings demand that to realize bliss, contentment, love, and goodness, we must leave behind our limited identity as a separate self. Yet, to leave the separate self behind does not mean to leave Unique Self behind. Unfortunately, many teachers of enlightenment still confuse the notion of “separateness” with the notion of “uniqueness,” throwing an exceptionally important baby out with the bathwater.

Seduced by Our Essence, Shocked by Our Delight

Unique Self is the lure of our own hidden being and becoming. It has been hinted at with the terms *essence* or *diamond body* (Almaas, 2000), and has been alluded to by Tibetan Buddhists as the *Eternal Drop* (Thurman, 1986), by certain Hindu traditions as the *Blue Light* (Mann, 1984), Kabbalists sometimes call it *Soul Root* (Scholem, 1995), and for some it is the personal manifestation of the Absolute. It is the movement from personality to essence, which is the most important driving factor of our emergence as full human beings in my teachings.

To elaborate, personality is not essence; it is, in part, the particular pseudo-story told to make sense of the pain of existence, and it is both necessary to navigate the world and an essential stage of development. Moreover, in personality are glimmerings of Unique Self, which is fully realized when one goes beyond personality. Yet, again, personality should not be confused with the personal—the goal of enlightenment is *not* impersonal. Unique Self is our personal response to the call of the transpersonal, a call that can only be answered from a place of one's personal essence. Essence is our enlightened state expressed in its unique form.⁴³ In other words, Unique Self is not an object; it is the personal beyond personality, the personal face of our essence.⁴⁴

Unique Face and Original Face

Theravada Buddhism, often called the first “great turning of the wheel,” launched a fierce attack on the sepa-

rate self as the source of all suffering. Any expression of uniqueness was seen as clinging to the separate self, and thus uniqueness was seen as the ultimate enemy. The goal was the realization of “no-self,” which is the dominant teaching of most schools of contemporary spirituality. The only problem with this is that it is partially true and hopelessly confusing to genuine seekers. The second “great turning of the wheel” is Mahayana Buddhism, and the great founding teacher of Mahayana Buddhism, Nagarjuna, took it upon himself to thoroughly expose the great fallacy found in earlier Theravadan teaching.⁴⁵ The great Heart Sutra of Mahayana Buddhism teaches “emptiness is form and form is emptiness.” By emptiness, the sutra means the ground of all being that is not exhausted in particular form. Every human being is part of this ground of being, and can feel their actual participation in this ground through the right practice of meditation. This infinite, open, pure emptiness—sometimes called original face, the unmanifest spirit, godhead, I Am-ness, nirvana, *Ein Sof*, *ayin*, or *sunyata*—by whatever name, is beyond any particular idiom or expression. It is pure being. When the world gets too crazy, one can “take refuge in the Buddha,” surrendering to the pure emptiness of the formless, or contemplate, in the words of the famous Zen koan, what our face looked like before our parents were born.

It is to this original face that the Hebrew wisdom tradition points when it mandates the spiritual practice of *Bittul Hayesh*, to nullify our illusory identification with the world of manifestation and identify ourselves with the mystery of pure being. What the new enlightenment adds, based in part on Nagarjuna’s critique of Theravada but also extending well beyond it in the affirmation of the ontology of perspectives, is that there is no Original Face without a unique face. The pure spacious formless never exists in our consciousness outside of the framework of form. There is no consciousness, no perception, and no awareness without form—and form is always unique. In a very real sense, form is not composed of atoms or molecules—it is composed of perspectives. Every person is a Unique Self, which means that every person has an absolutely unique perspective on reality.

Our perspective couches our unique wisdom, and our wisdom yields our Unique Gift. This is where we can find our ultimate love obligation, leading to healing, compassion, and action. We are God’s verb, if you will. And as God’s verb, there is something we can do for God that no one else can do. In the words of Hassidic master Samuel of Slonim:

Every person descended into the world in order to [*tikkun*] evolve/fix one thing... and the chance events of her life give her direction and support in how to fix this one thing. A person can live their entire life righteously—however, if they have not fixed their unique evolution/fixing, then they have not lived their life...⁴⁶

The goal of life in the teaching of Unique Self enlightenment is not only *recaptured goodness* but also *growth to goodness*. The former engages in fixing—this is the source of the translation of the original Hebrew word *tikkun* as repairing—while the latter speaks of *tikkun* in its more profound sense of birthing or evolving something that did not exist before.⁴⁷

The Confusion Between Separateness and Uniqueness

There are many discussions about how we might describe the core human drive. Among the answers offered are power, sex, self-esteem, and meaning. Each holds a part of the story, its own partial truth. For the mystic, however, the drive, which underlies them all, is the drive to sacrifice the self on the altar of a larger reality. The drive to sacrifice is, at its core, the evolutionary impulse of our consciousness struggling to break free. The mystic refuses to be trapped in a body that is already dying from the very second it is born.

When the ecstatic sacrifice of isolated self to the larger body of the whole does not happen, then the need for sacrifice is displaced onto another. As the Hindu Upanishads said long ago, “Where there is other there is fear.” The fear of others encroaching on our existence can only emerge from a narrow experience

of self as an isolated separate ego struggling to survive. Realizing the need for sacrifice, but not wanting to sacrifice itself, the ego violently recoils and declares war upon the world.⁴⁸

Ernest Becker (1973), Norman Brown (1959), and a host of other historians have documented the precise connection between the emergence of the separate self and murder. Murder expresses itself both in religious ritual and in the political ritual of war. Kings begin to list their conquests with special emphasis on the amount of victims brutally butchered on the other side. As one ruler from this period of the separate self's emergence records through his scribe, "As we wound and kill our enemies in the field, our love for each other deepens" (as cited in Wilber, 1981, p. 18). This is the classic horrifying distortion of pseudo-Eros.⁴⁹ Someone is put outside the circle and murdered so we can feel like we are in the circle.

Man desperately wants to love and be loved, but as long as the dignity of existence is not assured, men will continue hating each other. The hatred will persist despite the palpable need for mutual love, because the confusion between separateness and uniqueness remains in place. At this point I want to fully unpack this distinction, which I have alluded to above.

Man senses that his dignity and his very existence are connected with uniqueness. He also senses that his suffering is connected to his self-contraction into an isolated, separate self. But he refuses to uncoil his self-contraction because he associates the sacrifice of his separate self with the loss of uniqueness and hence with his fear of non-existence. This is his great mistake, as it is possible to move beyond separateness while retaining uniqueness—it is *uniqueness*, not separateness, that is man's true source of existence and dignity.

Many spiritual teachers demand that man give up his separate self: where separate self remains, terror, violence, and pain accompanies it. But still, most of world's cultures, despite their best attempts, refuse to heed this perennial teaching. This is not because man is bad or weak; rather, it is because there is something in the teaching or the way it is taught that seems to contradict basic intuition. The result, however, is that man feels like a fundamental failure, which in turn causes the horrific pain of inadequacy and distortion in the personality of the seeker. Inadequate man becomes vengeful man, one who is capable of inflicting untold suffering on himself and everyone around him.

Eros is the desire to awaken to reality and realize the intrinsic wholeness of creation, the ground and substance of all reality. The goal of awakening is reunion, but to achieve this reunion requires death of the *separate self-sense*. Here we find the double bind of every human being, and of humanity as a whole. The human being wants pure existence, value, and transcendence—he does not want to be an ego that is here today and gone tomorrow. He wants to realize his true existence, and give up his sense of being the *exclusive subject*. In order to do that, he has to sacrifice the narcissistic craving of ego, but he is afraid to release it. He grasps his sense of being a separate self because of his terror of non-existence. His most profound intuition tells him that he has a unique value, dignity, and expression to offer.

Once we realize that by giving up our separate self we do not give up our uniqueness—which is both source and substance of existence—the ego is released.⁵⁰ It is precisely the clarification between *separateness* and *uniqueness* that opens the door to the next stage of the evolution of consciousness. This core distinction allows for healing to commence, liberating us from the shackles of the ego, and allowing us to be reborn as the full resplendent emergence of the Unique Self.

The Insight and Mistake of the East

Eastern spirituality by and large rightly sees the separate self as an illusion. The realization of this illusion comes from profound spiritual practices like meditation, which work to open the eye of the spirit. Separate self is seen as an illusion as well as the root source of most human suffering. It is for this most powerful and compelling of reasons that the East devoted an enormous amount of energy to dispelling the illusion of the separate egoic self.

The axiomatic assumption in many Eastern teachings—both ancient and modern—is that to transcend

the separate self, you must leave behind not only the illusion of separation, but also the apparent experience of uniqueness. Much effort was directed to demonstrate that what seemed to be unique and particular was in fact common and universal, and what seemed to be personal was actually impersonal. There was truth in some of this teaching, and it clearly brought immense spiritual depth and some measure of peace to many. And yet the core teaching did not take root among the masses. The problem was not just that the masses were lazy or in lower states of consciousness, as some teachers claimed. The deeper problem was that the masses felt that the teaching violated their basic sense of the necessity, desirability, and dignity of uniqueness. The problem was—and is—that uniqueness will not go away. The majority of people correctly feel that to surrender their uniqueness would be to surrender their life force, as well as their personal value and dignity. The personal is, by its very nature, *unique*. The dignity and value of the personal derives directly from this singularity.

We have a powerful and authentic experience of our own specialness, which remains even after the dissolution of our ego. Many Eastern teachings try valiantly to explain this away by telling us that our lingering experience of uniqueness or specialness is merely evidence that we have not yet evolved beyond ego. But so many of us know in the deepest place that this is simply not true. We experience the reality of our specialness and uniqueness not as an expression of ego, but as a glorious expression of our truest nature; we understand that the seamless coat of the universe is indeed seamless, but not featureless; and we understand that our uniqueness is the highest expression of God looking out from behind our eyes and taking in our uniquely gorgeous perspective and insight. Because Eastern teachings demand that we dispense our uniqueness as part of dispelling the illusion of the separate self, many rebel against this dharma. For many seekers, impersonality feels like a violation of the very quality of humanness that they hold most dear.⁵¹

The Insight and Mistake of the West

Like the spirituality of the East, conventional Western spirituality is motivated by love and the desire to end suffering. However, the West came to essentially opposite conclusions about how to achieve this result. The West saw the affirmation of human individuality as the greatest good of the human spirit. Western spirituality correctly affirmed that our rights and relationships are rooted in the dignity of the separate self. It is the separate self that is in relationship not only with other but also with God. Communion with the divine rather than absorption into the One becomes the good of spiritual practice.

It is the great divine gift to affirm human dignity through the encounter between man and God. For man to be addressed in this encounter, his distinct otherness as a separate self apart from God must be affirmed and supported. In other words, one's relationship with God requires some degree of separation. Two parties can only meet in love and mutuality if they are separate. Man is overwhelmed and at the same time affirmed by the presence as a separate other. In the revelation of the infinite, the finite is held in love, nourished and challenged at the same time. Man's individuality becomes the source of his dignity. Moreover, it is in his individuality that he finds the ability to love, to act in compassion, and to take responsibility for his destiny.

For one who is wholly merged with the infinite, there is no encounter. And if there is no encounter, there is no love, no dignity, no responsibility. If there is no *other*, then man ceases to be a moral agent and a lover. With the total annihilation of the personal comes the end of personal responsibility. Moreover, if human beings are not separate selves with individual rights and responsibilities, then there is neither good nor evil. Good and evil imply a relationship. When there is an identity of subjects, when man and God are one, when we are truly submerged in a condition of *tat tvam asi* ("thou are that"), there can be no relationship. Where there is no relationship there is no love, no good, and no evil.

The miracle of We comes only from the union of I and Thou. What is love without an I and a Thou? Ethics, goodness, and judgment are meaningful only in the realm of the personal. They have no place in a universe of no-selves. Western spirituality, however, made precisely the same great mistake as the East, but in the opposite manner. The West essentially confuses separateness and uniqueness. Western teachers wrongly

assumed that all the virtues of love and relationships required the dignity of individuality (i.e., a separate self). This is simply not true. All of these virtues and more can be had through the Unique Self. That is, we can experience the full dignity, responsibility, and joy of individuality by recognizing our uniqueness. Uniqueness does not require separateness.

The fallout from this colossal mistake in Western spirituality has been that the intuitive spiritual desire to evolve beyond our ego—to transcend the separate self—has been thwarted and even ridiculed by Western spiritual teaching (i.e., the desire to reach for the transpersonal was stymied because it seemed to get there, the personal must be rejected). In other words, Western deification of the personal blocked the gateways necessary for enlightenment. Transcending the separate self was acknowledged as important, but how to do it without losing the critical moral and relational virtues of the personal remained a mystery.

For both East and West, drawing a distinction between separateness and uniqueness allows for the integration of their seemingly disparate teachings. The Unique Self is the fulcrum for this translineage spiritual breakthrough. For the West, the Unique Self is the source of human dignity, love, obligation, and destiny; for the East, it is the transcendence of the illusion of separate self without the wholesale rejection of individual specialness and uniqueness. Spiritual practice moves us to realize our essential enmeshment with the larger Absolute nature of reality, even as we retain the dignity of our distinction.

Unique Self vs. Ego

It is important to delineate the distinctions between ego and Unique Self, as they represent two very different levels of consciousness. At the level of ego we must let go of the illusion of specialness; at the level of Unique Self we must embrace the infinite beauty of our specialness and the obligation that it creates for us to live our Unique Gift. It is important, however, to recognize that ego is not the villain. Indeed, the ego has wisdom to offer because it pre-figures the Unique Self. Put another way, ego holds truths that, in their clarified form, belong to Unique Self.⁵² To live a life of realization and genuine attainment we must be able to discern between expressions of our separate self and our Unique Self. Below I draw out some distinctions between Unique Self and ego in first-person experience. (Unique Self intuitions are often hijacked and misapplied by the ego, so it is important to contextualize their differences.) The dualities offered are not ultimate, but discerning between them is an essential step toward realizing Unique Self enlightenment.⁵³

Action or Reaction

Ego reacts. Unique Self acts. The ego is constantly in reaction to outside stimuli and never thinks a spontaneous thought. The ego acts out of conditioning whereas the Unique Self is moved to action by the power and joy of its own authentic original impulse.

Imitation and Originality

Ego imitates. Unique Self is original. The ego is trapped in imitation because it is a coiled contraction of self. Contraction leads to imitation, which then generates a life of mindless competition, compulsive comparison, and dissatisfaction. The Unique Self is freed from the tyranny of comparison and by its nature is original and therefore self-satisfied. While the ego can never think an original thought, originality is the defining characteristic of the Unique Self.

Satisfaction or Greed

The separate self is driven by greed. Greed is not the want of any specific thing, but rather an insatiable

desire that creates perpetual anxiety. Insatiable want is a structure of the egoic mind that seeks more and more in order to confirm its existence. The ego, by its very nature, can never be satisfied. Satisfaction only comes through the Unique Self because we do our very best in the world of becoming without attachment to outcome. Therefore, for Unique Self, the very best is always good enough, whereas for ego, the very best is never good enough. Egoic greed is not evil at root; the problem is the ego's distortion of the infinite desire for endless creativity, which can only be accessed through the Unique Self.

Unique Self Story vs. Ego Story

The inability to feel safe, valuable, and worthy is a devastating experience for the ego, so it will ward off those feelings at virtually all costs. Thus, the ego often hijacks experience in order to secure a positive self-image. To do this, the ego has a simple, ingenious mechanism. It disguises ambition—its drive for power—and converts it into narrative material that supports its own positive self-image. This is how the separate self story develops, and this is why teachers of True Self enlightenment relay variations of this statement: “To be enlightened, we must let go of our *story*.” In other words, to move beyond the ego's story we must be able to look at the story from the outside (in order to let the story become an object of our awareness). When an egoic story is released, space is opened up for a more authentic story to arise—a story that reflects the resplendent singularity of the Unique Self.

Eros or Grasping

The ego is not erotic. Unique Self lives in Eros. The ego lives with the feeling of always being on the outside. Fragmented and grasping, it never shows up fully present for others. To live in Eros means to live with the fullness of presence and with a felt sense of wholeness—it is to yearn without grasping and to live with a sustained experience of interiority.

Authentic Freedom vs. Pseudo Freedom

Ego is a slave that wants to be free. However, the ego understands and experiences freedom/autonomy as being free from external influence. Unique Self, on the other hand, understands and experiences freedom as the ability to live out uniqueness regardless of external circumstances.⁵⁴

Authentic Player or Victim

Ego clings to every petty detail of our story. From the position of ego, one never lets go of wounds and therefore never can wholeheartedly forgive. If ego does forgive, it is a tactic, not a sacrament. Unique Self forgives freely without giving up its own truth.

From the evolutionary context of Unique Self, one understands the sanctity of their Unique Gift. Unique Self is animated, driven, and drawn by this larger vision and obligation. This allows wounds to be seen in a larger perspective. Unique Self is not a victim; it is an audacious player in the great story of the evolution of consciousness. From the perspective of Unique Self, one is able to intuitively balance outrage at injustice with an intuition about when to give up being right and move on.

Justice or Injustice

The ego is angry at what is done to it. It very rarely feels the same outrage at what is done to someone else. The Unique Self is not merely outraged against injustice done to its own person; it is hurt and outraged by any and all injustice. The ego often fights large causes of injustice as a way to bolster its own sense of grandiosity.

Unique Self fights the battles of injustice in its own backyard even when there is potential collateral damage to its own power and status.

Responsibility or Excuse

When the ego attempts to take responsibility—which it rarely does—it creates a painful contraction in the self. Therefore, the ego becomes the master of the excuse. The Unique Self, on the other hand, is able to take responsibility spontaneously, lightly, and with full gravitas. The Unique Self holds with equal measure its own responsibility and its rightful anger at injustice. Often the ego advises others to “take responsibility” while the ego itself wallows in the real or imagined offenses that have been suffered.

Paradox or Splitting

The ego is always splitting and seeing life through dualities. Because the ego cannot hold paradox or complexity, others are seen as either enemies or friends, and actions are seen as either good or bad. The separate self also has a very hard time holding perspectives other than its own for extended periods of time. The Unique Self can naturally hold paradox because it is in touch with the divine field of transcendent reality, which allows for the holding of opposites.

Present or Past

The ego lives in the past and therefore continually confuses past with present. It is unable to create intimacy because intimacy requires meeting another person in the fullness of the present moment; it requires real contact that is personal and present. Only the Unique Self can make intimate contact because the Unique Self lives in the present moment (while consciously including the past and anticipating the future). When the past comes up in the present, the Unique Self recognizes it for what is: the past coming up in the present. The Unique Self then moves to use the present moment to heal past wounds. The Unique Self recognizes that the patterns of the past have no true foothold in the present.

Love or Fear

The ego is the root cause of virtually all human suffering. The ego feels its own fragility, its limits, and its ultimate powerlessness, which generate a constant state of fear. As a result, the ego grasps for ways to assert power, which causes it to act out of all forms of shadow. When we deconstruct our mistaken identification with the separate self and identify with our distinct path, fear dissipates and love returns. When the contraction of ego uncoils, our Unique Self experiences all of the good that we previously thought was accessible only through our assertion of a separate self—personal love, responsibility, compassion, ethical action, activism, and so on. The choice between personal love and immersion in True Self is a false dichotomy—there is no contradiction between them whatsoever. Personal love does not require two separate selves, it requires only two Unique Selves.

Are You Special: Ego vs. Unique Self

The rejection of specialness is pervasive in many spiritual circles. One important example comes from the famously popular book, *A Course in Miracles* (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1975):

*The pursuit of Specialness
Is always at the cost of peace*

*You are not special
If you think you are
And would defend your specialness
Against the truth of what you really are
How can you know the truth*

*Specialness always makes comparisons
It is established by a lack seen in another*

*The pursuit of Specialness
Must bring you pain (p. 211)*

The assumption of this passage is that specialness is but an illusion that needs to be forgiven, and through forgiveness dispelled. Lest you think I am misreading the passage, here is another quote from Marianne Williamson's popular book, *A Return To Love* (1996): "... from a course [in miracles] perspective, special means different [unique], therefore separate which is characteristic of ego rather than spirit" (p. 110).

In both citations, and in the larger teachings that these passages represent, the same two mistakes are made. First, there is a complete conflation of uniqueness or specialness on the one side and uniqueness and separateness on the other side. They are all taken to refer to the same thing. The second confusion is the failure to distinguish between different stages on the spiritual path, which are often referred to as levels of consciousness. This is important because ego and Unique Self represent two distinct levels of consciousness. At the level of ego, specialness and uniqueness must be rejected—the feeling that "I am special" is an illusion of the ego. In fact, most of the experiences that we feel are special and personal are really at their core shockingly impersonal. For example, many see sexual relationships as intimate and personal, when in fact they can be viewed as a byproduct of a vast, impersonal current that courses through every being on Earth.

Moving beyond obsession with the personal helps us to wake up. We begin to realize that we are in fact not an isolated or separate part, but rather part of a larger whole. This is an important first step in the move toward realizing our True Self—the self that is part of the larger one of all that is. Once we have had that realization—even just a glimmer of that realization—the personal will begin to come online at a higher level. At this point, the Unique Self, our feeling of specialness, re-emerges, but this time in a far more clean, clear, and crystalline form. As my lineage master, Mordechai Lainer of Izbica, implicitly taught, "When we evolve beyond ego our uniqueness does not disappear, it becomes clarified." Through Unique Self we re-connect to our specialness with the stunning realization that I Am Special! I Am Unique!

The differences between egoic specialness and Unique Self specialness are many, but one distinction stands out as a revealing litmus test. That is, specialness at the level of ego is always at someone else's expense. I am special means that you are not. This is the level of ego that *A Course in Miracles* refers to when it suggests that specialness exists only by comparison. However, specialness at the level of Unique Self is of a different order of reality. Unique Self specialness is an authentic realization of overpowering joy: I am special and so are you. Each of us has a Unique Self. We are not equally talented, wise, sensual, or compassionate. But paradoxically we are all special, each in our own infinitely unique ways. In this enlightened identification we realize our specialness, which is a wondrous expression of our very enlightenment. It is paradoxically that very realization which opens us up to fully perceive and delight in the specialness of another.

Unique Self: Toward the Integration of Personal and Impersonal Man

There are two grand types of human beings living inside each of us—the first we might call Personal man and the second we might call Impersonal man.⁵⁵ In the following section I will try to evoke the broadest

brushstrokes of an internal image of them both. Each speaks with a different voice; each means something very different when speaking of enlightenment; and each is in some way offended by the position of the other.

Personal man views the impersonal understanding of spirit as an escape from reality and people engaged in the pursuit of the impersonal as being *inhuman* in their sensibilities. Sanity for Personal man is defined by personal integrity and equilibrium. Feeling at home in the world is one of his primary values, and it is absolutely core to his sense of self. Being productive and creative is crucial for his self worth. He experiences himself as a unique being with a center of gravity in himself; in his loving, responsible relationships; and in his contribution to the world. When Personal man talks of enlightenment, he is referring to these values.

Impersonal man finds the personal to be offensive. Moreover, he finds the personal to be radically limiting. He lives in the world but experiences it as illusory because of its impermanence. For Impersonal man, enlightenment means the realization of his True Self as unqualified awareness. At its core, this means realizing the illusory nature of the separate self. For him, the ego is seen as the great obstacle that stands in the way of wisdom, bliss, and compassion. He distinguishes between surface structures like ego, which are personal and illusory, and depth structures like awareness, which are impersonal and real. He aligns himself with the impersonal impulses of spirit, which are felt as an ecstatic impulse toward more expansive freedom and transcendence. He is gripped by the urge to merge with an eternal principle that underlies all of reality.

Ego and Unique Self

The primary source of conflict between Personal and Impersonal man resides in the confusion between separateness/uniqueness and ego/Unique Self. Just as Personal man clings to his identification with the separate self and embraces ego as himself, Impersonal man is motivated by love and the desire to end suffering by rejecting the ego. Impersonal man forgets that the ego points toward Unique Self. This understanding, because it violates our intuitively correct yearning to realize post-egoic uniqueness and specialness, continues to be rejected by most of humanity. Moreover, because of its impersonal nature it becomes a major obstacle to intimacy and authentic encounters between individuals. Authentic contact between individuals and intimacy is always the result of a genuine encounter between Unique Selves (who seamlessly merge the life force of the impersonal with the intimacy of the personal).

There are three stages to realizing Unique Self enlightenment. First, we emerge from the pre-personal into the first stage, which is the realization and actualization of our separate self or ego. The second stage requires that we transcend the personal and recognize the impersonal nature of the life force moving in and through us. This is the realization of our essence or True Self. The third stage requires that we undergo a momentous leap in our evolution in order to once again reassert the primacy of the personal, so that Unique Self can begin to come online and express itself as the personal face of true essence.

The Impersonal as Personal

Realization of the relationship between the personal and impersonal is essential to Unique Self enlightenment. For this reason it is worth pointing out some of the necessary discernments between them. At the level of ego we take everything personally. That is why the first step in moving beyond ego is to realize that almost nothing is personal. So much of what we think is personal is happening to everyone in just the same way as it is happening to us, and therefore has nothing to do with our authentic uniqueness or distinction. Virtually everyone has the same kind of reaction to the same stimuli of attraction, desire, aversion, fear, seeking, survival, and so on. To move beyond ego, we have to be able to stop taking things so personally.

However, at the level of Unique Self the personal comes back online. At Unique Self consciousness, we are engaged in Being and Becoming that wells from our singularity and uniqueness. We are responding to the unique clarion call of our life. At this level, all becomes personal again but we experience the personal

from a free and spontaneous place (instead of from a desperately constricted and grasping place).

Learning to discern between the personal at the level of Unique Self and the illusion of the personal at the level of ego is a crucial step toward Unique Self enlightenment. To realize Unique Self, you need to be able to distinguish between these two experiences of uniqueness. One is authentic uniqueness and the other is ego and personality (i.e., a set of reactions disguising themselves as Unique Self). To get to the Unique Self, one needs to move beyond the illusion of the ego's personality (i.e., many desires that are experienced as unique are actually expressions of impersonal forces). The illusion of the personal ego is released, which allows the impersonal realization of True Self. In time, the realization of a higher level of personal or Unique Self, which is characterized by a full integration of the personal and impersonal, comes online.

Choice

A second area where discernment between the personal and impersonal is essential to Unique Self enlightenment is in the arena of choice. We often live under the illusion that we are making personal choices in virtually every area of our lives, when in fact an entire series of impersonal forces come together to create the conditions necessary to make particular choices. For example, most of us are probably not tempted to steal groceries from a market. This is not because we have chosen not to steal, but rather is the result of the cultural, parental, genetic, and religious influences—none of which we chose—that determine the course of our action. In the very same way, these influences will have just as much impact on who we choose as our mate and what career we enter into.

But there are moments in life in which we do exercise personal choice. For instance, we might be powerfully pulled to do something that does not reflect our highest values or self. In that struggle, we have to find the deepest divine point within ourselves that will allow us to choose successfully. There is a very narrow window of real choice that is ultimately and infinitely personal. This is what the mystics call “Our Personal Point of Choice.” Our personal choice points are intensely private and not subject to scrutiny; they are vital expressions of the Unique Self.

Sex and Love

The third area where the personal and the impersonal get confused is in the realm of sex and love. Here, again, everything seems intimate and personal, but upon closer inspection it is not.⁵⁶ The great Kabbalistic tradition of Hebrew wisdom explicitly describes the sexual as the evolutionary impulse that courses through all creation. In Hinduism and other ancient traditions, the sexual spark resulting from the union between the masculine and feminine ignites the initiating energy of the cosmos. It is for this reason that sexuality is such a powerful and potentially overwhelming manifestation of personal choice. How many people have been overwhelmed by sexual desire and chosen against their better interests?

As we contemplate sexuality, we realize that what we thought was always an expression of our personal freedom is in fact very deeply conditioned behavior. As the sexual impulse arises up unbidden and demands our attention, we often find ourselves lost in its throes. Our sexual behavior may even undermine that which we deem essential to our values and life purpose—it virtually never delivers on its personal promise and rarely brings liberation in its wake. While this is far from the final word on sex, at some stage in our development we need a deep consideration of our sexuality and realize the impersonal nature of so many of our sexual choices.

Relationships

Freud pointed out that the unconscious mind organizes itself in patterns. It places people in buckets or catego-

ries and relates to them as part of larger, overarching patterns. That is why a deep consideration of intimate relationships often reveals that we have actually never made contact at all. (We may think that we are talking to our lover, but we are really trying to complete unfinished business with our father or mother and therefore authentic intimacy has never been established.)

Some Unique Self adherents call the idea that we need to get personal and make contact *devekut*. Literally translated from Hebrew, *devekut* means cleaving. A better translation, which captures the Hebrew sense of the word, would be intimate communion. *Devekut* is an intensification of the personal. The original Hebrew text from the biblical myth reads: “A man shall first leave his father and mother; and cleave to his wife...” (Genesis 2:24). The intent of this several-thousand-year-old text is clear. We think we are getting down and personal, but we are not making contact at all. As long as we are still locked in a relationship with someone other than the person in front of us, it cannot be personal. This is the inner meaning of “forsaking” all others in the Christian marriage sacrament. At the level ego we are always reacting to the original players in our script and are therefore blind to the actual person in front of us. To be a true lover, we have to have clear eyes. True love is *always* personal and it is through our Unique Self that we can make contact in a full and personal way.

Shadows of the Personal and Impersonal

The personal affirms and recognizes the infinite value, dignity, and adequacy of every individual. In the personal, the rights of every individual and the rules of fairness that govern those rights are paramount. The full beauty and uniqueness of every story is affirmed and treasured. The personal creates intimacy and reveals the depth of the human heart. In this divine realm, we realize that God knows our name.

Beyond the personal live the infinitely larger principles and processes that govern reality. They disclose themselves when we free ourselves from the trance of the personal. The impersonal reveals the nature of all that is. We are invited to transcend the personal and ecstatically bask in the infinite grandeur of reality, which literally takes our breath away. We are filled with radical amazement and wonder.

The shadows of both the personal and impersonal come not from their essence but from their distortions. The first shadow of the personal is narcissism and egoic self-inflation. Any commitment to another’s well-being or to evolutionary unfolding—basically any willingness to sacrifice for something larger than ourselves—takes second place. The second shadow of the personal is victimology. Herein, the hypersensitive-self that perceives every offense to its small self as abusive is a victim. The third shadow of the personal is a diminished and distorted God, in which the human being makes God a reflection of his small, individual, or communal self. God is hijacked to serve the personal ego and all those outside the personal or communal group are denied spiritual dignity and redemption.

The first shadow manifestation of the impersonal appears when the dignity of the individual is devalued and only the larger principle or process matters. The individual is no longer celebrated and honored for her own gorgeousness, value, or wonder, but becomes merely a means toward the greater end of the impersonal process or principle. The second shadow of the impersonal, a natural byproduct of the first, is oppression and persecution. Inflicting unjust pain and suffering on the individual for the sake of a larger cause or movement is legitimized. Here, principle and process crush the rights of the personal. The third shadow of the impersonal is that God is conceived as a *process or principle* that neither knows our name nor cares about our existence as an individual. The tens of millions killed by Communism in the 20th century in the name of the “principles of evolutionary process and progress” made this all too clear. In the spiritual realm, this shadow face is often seen in the teacher or group that treats individuality as a negative manifestation of ego. This is why there is reason for caution when teachers talk about aligning with an impersonal process or principle without striving to access or transmit the personal face of that process (by affirming the worth of the individual as well).

The Unique Self and Evolutionary Spirituality

From the perspective of the world, before the Big Bang all was quiet and peaceful. Nothing had happened yet. From the perspective of the infinite, of course, everything was already true. Peace and tumult, bliss and agony were all already present in potential. The unfolding of the world of *ayin* (nothing) and *yesh* (something) then took place through the dynamic mechanism of evolution. Schelling and the Hebrew mystics who influenced him taught that evolution seeks the awakening of all matter as spirit.⁵⁷ The goal is for *yesh* to realize that beneath the surface, it is really an expression of *ayin*. This is the radical and wildly audacious endgame of the ecstatic evolutionary impulse that is God—to awaken everything to its underlying nature as spirit. This is the great teaching of Kabbalah called *tikkun*,⁵⁸ best translated as the Evolution of God.⁵⁹

The Sexual Context

In Buddhism there is a beautiful articulation of mystical realization called *One Taste*. One Taste means that underneath everything there is a unified field of awareness. One Taste is not only eternal, it is eternity itself—it is the unchanging radical presence that is both the ground and substance of all that is. Christian mystic Thomas Aquinas reminds us, citing King David in the psalms (34:8), “Taste and See that God is Good.” What does this taste feel like? It feels like peace, stillness, bliss, ease, sweetness, elixir of honey, unconditional love, detachment, profound depth of calm, and richly textured silence.

One accesses the first taste through many of the classical forms of mystical meditation. It is the place of Big Mind, the unchanging Tao, and *atman*. Through meditation, we access the unconditional love principle of eternity. However, in this place, love is not a quality of relationship but a quality of presence as well as perception. In the great traditions, this has been the one face of ecstasy, the ecstatic release as one uncoils the egoic contraction and rests in being. There is urgency in this desire to release and an ecstasy in the release itself; this is the good promised by most guides on the spiritual path. This promise is real and true, but it is not the whole story. There is not one taste but two, which are but two faces of the One. The second taste is not eternal and unchanging; rather, it is dynamic and changing in every moment. The second taste is not just peace, bliss and quiet; it is wild, filled with a cacophony of sound, color, and texture. The first taste is that of Being, the second is that of Becoming.⁶⁰ The principle at work here is not the eternal impulse, but the evolutionary impulse.⁶¹ It is found through the realization of what the Sufi mystics have called personal essence, and what I, speaking for some esoteric Christians and the Kabbalistic lineage, have termed Unique Self.

After the evolution beyond ego and the identification with the impersonal, a new personal essence arises out of the ground of the impersonal. This is Unique Self. This second taste is dynamic, creative, and world transforming. There is urgency to the second taste. The God impulse of second taste is no less surging, ecstatic, and powerful than was the urge to merge in one taste. In second taste, however, the ecstatic urgency is to emerge. It is the same impulse that demands the creativity of the artist and moves the mother to suffer the pain of childbirth.

Evolution: Personal and Impersonal

The demand of Unique Self is to see your entire life, everything that you live, breathe, feel, think, or desire, on all levels of your being, within the larger framework of your direct participation in the evolution of God. This larger context is the key to liberation. The Unique Self mystics have taught for over a thousand years that every human action should be preceded by an affirmative statement of meaning: “I do this act for the sake of unifying and evolving divinity.” When every significant action you take is for the sake of the all, infused with a profound awareness of evolutionary context, you stop reacting from ego and begin acting from the place of a powerful evolutionary integrity.

Renaissance Kabbalist Isaac Luria developed a highly elaborate series of *kavvanot* (intentions). Each was a formal affirmation said at a different moment during the day, in order to awaken and align the intention of the individual with the evolutionary divine context in which he lived and breathed. For Luria, the ecstatic human obligation to awaken to Unique Self is the primary source of joy. It is the giving of your Unique Gift that fills your life with direction, meaning, and delight.

The split between the personal and the impersonal disappears as you awaken to your unique *tikkun* in the larger context of the field of all life that ever was, is, and will be. It is for this reason that there is virtually no talk in Kabbalist teaching of individual enlightenment. The danger of excessive emphasis on the individual is that one becomes a spiritual narcissist, totally focused on the experience of freedom and spaciousness. This is confused with liberation, which it is not. Enlightenment is an embodied activist relation to reality infused with evolutionary integrity that is far beyond the awakening of True Self.

Liberation always requires that you make yourself transparent to self. But it also demands that you realize your place in the larger historical evolutionary context. Your life is never limited by your go-around in this incarnation, at this particular time and place, with these particular people. That realization allows you to relax the usual obsessions with all of life's relational details. And yet you must never so identify with the process that you lose your felt sense of the infinite value, dignity, and adequacy of yourself as an individual—and of every single individual that you encounter in your life. You must engage people personally and not merely hold them as cogs in the cosmic process of evolution.

The Unique Self and the Student-Teacher Relationship

The implications of Unique Self enlightenment affect virtually every arena of life. In my fuller unpacking of the Unique Self teaching, I endeavor to show how the Unique Self teaching effectively revises our core understanding of love, shadow work, joy, parenting, sexuality, death, loneliness, relationships, malice, pleasure, and the student-teacher relationship. Given the space considerations in this article, I will only brief touch upon one of these areas, that of the teacher-student relationship.

Unique Self teaching has two major implications in the spiritual context of teacher-student relationships. First, when a teacher gives his students only impersonal or cosmic love, even when it is genuine, the student cannot truly grow. When the teacher sees the student merely as a seeker whose ego longs for release, something of vital importance is lost in the teacher-student relationship. The student does not need to be coddled by the teacher, yet it is absolutely essential for the student to be seen and valued uniquely by the teacher. When this happens, a deep place in the student begins to stir: the student has been seen and therefore their self-contraction begins to uncoil; their ego relaxes its grip; and their Unique Self begins to emerge through genuine contact with the Unique Self of the teacher. The ability to make contact and be intimate or not is the essential distinction between Unique Self and ego. Unique Self can make contact, ego cannot. Many teachers trapped in ego fail to make contact and therefore keep their students trapped in ego as well, even if their professed goal is to evolve the student beyond ego to True Self.

When a teacher denies Unique Self by confusing it with egoic uniqueness, and thus views the goal of enlightenment as being the realization of oneness with ground of being, in some version of True Self, the result is always apparent in the student. The students may be bright, articulate, and say all the right things and look the right way, but at some core level contact is not made. Images of the old movie *The Stepford Wives* come to mind. In this movie, the men of Stepford consider their wives to be nagging, troublesome, egoic, and generally underdeveloped, so the men kill their wives and replace them, in the same body, with wise, wonderful, devoted, mega-sexy, compliant “Stepford Wives.” The male teacher (in the guise of husband) often kills the Unique Self, by mistaking it for the ego. The authentic divine feminine, in both teacher and student, has also been killed. What emerges is a student who is the perfect, appropriate, articulate, and clean-cut Stepford Wife—but there is something essentially effaced.

This pitfall is why the teacher is obligated to give his students radically personal love, which is the honoring and recognition of the Unique Self of the student. The recognition of the student's Unique Self releases the student's contraction of ego. When genuine contact has been made, there is an experience of the Unique Self being received and witnessed. Like in quantum physics, the process of being seen in and of itself is evolutionary; it invites us into our fullest majesty and reveals our inner splendor.

The second implication of Unique Self in the teacher-student relationship is the natural limitation of the authority of the teacher. If one experiences that the awakening of self beyond ego is the awakening of an activated and engaged, impersonal authentic self, then the teacher's authority is naturally greater than it might be according to one who experiences the awakening beyond ego as True Self and perspective, which equals Unique Self. If the goal is impersonal enlightenment, then the teacher who is more realized than the students might naturally assume an authoritarian approach toward the students. If this authority is exercised with integrity, then this might benefit the student. However, if authority is exercised in a corrupt manner, then clearly it would not benefit the student. The potential shadow of the impersonal in the teacher-student context may therefore be stated as excessive authority exercised inappropriately. If, however, the core teaching being used is that of Unique Self, then even if the teacher has natural authority based on a higher degree of realization, the teacher's authority will nonetheless be limited. While the teacher may have a higher level of realization of True Self, by definition the teacher cannot have a higher level of realization of the Unique Self than the student (for the very reason that the unique perspective of the student is not available to the teacher).

The potential shadow of the personal Unique Self teacher-student model might be excessive love or intimacy with the student as a function of the teacher's desire to radically embrace the student in a love that uncoils their ego.⁶² The potential shadow of the impersonal self teacher-student model might be excessive authority assumed on the part of the teacher while seeking to undermine the student's egoic structures.⁶³

Conclusion

Unique Self is a teaching of enlightened individuality where the core realization of original face is not the goal, but rather the necessary condition to disclose the full splendor of unique face. The core understandings of love, the preferred model for the teacher-student relationship, and the very goal of spiritual life all change once it is understood that essence has a personal face—the face of the Unique Self.

The Unique Self teaching evolves integral teaching toward a fuller integration of Eastern and Western esotericisms. At the core of this integration is the distinction between separateness and uniqueness, which allows for the higher embrace of Eastern and Western approaches to enlightenment. At the same time, Unique Self effaces the sharp demarcation between the personal and impersonal, merging them into a higher typology of integrated consciousness. Above all, Unique Self accentuates the personal face of the evolutionary context, which sets the stage for the emergence of a genuine evolutionary mysticism rooted in human dignity as the expression of divinity.

NOTES

¹ It also appears in spiritual liberation traditions like Hinduism, mystical Judaism, and Christianity as the communion of the separate self with the divine. Similarly, the Western enlightenment tradition, which affirms the separate self in some versions, affirms the goal of the communion of the separate self with the divine.

² The mystical understanding of enlightenment, East and West, focuses on what Integral Theory has referred to as *states of consciousness*. That is, it is a state of consciousness that is at once always already present and at the same time requires realization. In the exoteric Western deployment of the idea and term, *enlightenment* refers not to a state but to a structure-stage of consciousness. By structure-stage, we mean an internalized worldview that represents a particular level of development (e.g., magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic). These levels of consciousness have been exten-

sively described in the context of developmental psychology and Integral Theory. The West has pressed into rational structure-stages of consciousness (see Graves, 1974), which express themselves in areas like representational democracy and human rights. The Eastern traditions (and some Western mystical lineages) have pressed into higher states of awakened consciousness expressed in different forms of satori, awakening, communion, and so on. While the West acknowledges states and state-stages, they are not part of what might be termed a “formal” Western orientation.

³ Unique Self is both a state of consciousness that is available at any level or structure-stage of consciousness (e.g., a flow state) and a structure-stage revealed in and as the expression of higher consciousness.

⁴ Unique Self realization in this sense—of the unique being the portal to the universal one—undermines the post-modern rejection of all universals. A first-tier pluralistic stance recognizes only particulars. It cannot see patterns that connect and create what Wilber has called “good enough universals” (personal communication, January 30, 2011). As Wilber has pointed out elsewhere, we recognize universals all the time in the physical world (e.g., 208 bones, two kidneys, two lungs, one heart, etc., in the human body). This is not an imperialistic colonial statement; it is simply the truth.

⁵ For an in-depth description of the Giocametti sculpture nature of the modern predicament, see Barrett (1958).

⁶ On the Great Chain of Being, see Lovejoy (1936) or Smith (1976, p. 4). It would not be unfair to summarize Integral Theory as a significant post-metaphysical update of the Great Chain of Being that includes both evolutionary development and a four-quadrant model of reality (which stipulates that every event has an interior and an exterior). Wilber began as a perennialist and has transformed into a post-metaphysical pandit who poignantly seeks to reclaim the core insights of the great traditions in an evolved post-postmodern context.

⁷ Taylor (1992a) has already noted some affinity between certain dimensions of Romanticism and the Hasidism of Eastern Europe, with which it temporally overlapped (pp. 375, 377). For a fuller treatment of Romanticism and the work of Mordechai Lainer of Izbica, see my other article in this issue (pp. 140-142).

⁸ Wilber discusses this in many places in his *Collected Works*. It first appears as an article (Wilber, 1980). Independent of Wilber, who I first discovered in 2002, I taught for many years a three-level unfolding of layers of consciousness based primarily on the three-level teaching of Baal Shem Tov. Submission, Individuation, Sweetness very roughly approximates some version of the pre-personal, personal, and transpersonal (à la Wilber). A very brief exposition of this appears in Gafni (2002) and in more detail in a forthcoming book. The key to my understanding is that level one and level three appear to be similar—even as a substantive look at their interiors reveals them to be profoundly different levels of consciousness. My first meeting with Wilber was, in part, based on his reading of an article I wrote for *Tikkun* magazine (Gafni, 2003), which alluded to one expression of this trinity: prophet, pagan, prophet/pagan. Wilber’s take on the pre/trans fallacy has significantly reinforced and deepened my original level one/level three distinction.

⁹ See also Wilber (2000b, pp. 478-519).

¹⁰ For a Western restatement of the no-self teaching as it relates to contemporary notions of selfhood, see Engler (2003).

¹¹ Isaac Luria was one of the seminal teachers of Kabbalah (see Luria, 2003). For a discussion of the Lurianic one-letter tradition and its influence on Unique Self, see Gafni (In press a).

¹² For an intellectual history of Unique Self within Hebrew wisdom, surveying Talmudic, Zoharic, Lurianic, and Hasidic sources, see Gafni (In press a).

¹³ My thinking on Unique Self, drawn from Hebrew mystical sources, originated in 1989, which was the first time I taught about what I termed then *Soul Prints*. I still have the video of the first time the term *Soul Prints* “went down” in a teaching, when I was 26 years old giving a Hebrew “dharma” talk at the Kol Emet Synagogue in Delray Beach, Florida. There were 500 senior citizens at the talk. I was seeking to communicate to them the Hebrew mystical intuition that their lives were infinitely and uniquely significant and that therefore they should not spend the last decades of their lives adrift in a regressive atmosphere of mah jong and card games, which dominated the culture of Delray Beach. I said to them, “Not only do you have a fingerprint, you have a soul print,” and at that moment something shifted in the subtle energy in the room and many of us in the room knew that some deep knowing had been named. This

evolving knowing became a core part of my teaching for the next 10 years. In *Soul Prints* (2001), I formally coined both the term *Soul Prints* and *Unique Self*. For more on the term *Unique Self*, see Gafni (2001, p. 160): “The address of the divine commands us each to realize our Unique Self.” In context, this referred to the internal divine voice that lives in and as the interior face of consciousness. The second mention refers to Unique Self as the expression of the human being living in an evolutionary context. I label Unique Self as the core human evolutionary mechanism: “The only path to survival is the path of the Unique Self” (p. 164). The third usage of Unique Self is in the context of the obligation to presence; one’s Unique Self in what is termed a *Soul Print* or *Unique Self encounter*. The ethical question in such a meeting is framed as “Have I brought my Unique Self to the table?” (p. 301). In *Soul Prints* and teaching the enlightened nature of post-egoic individuality as an expression of nondual realization, there is an explicit number of passages (e.g., pp. 49-50), although they were not yet fully evolved in my own consciousness. It was my further immersion in Kabbalistic teaching on *ayin* and the teaching of Mordechai Lainer, as well as my discovery of Eastern traditions, where the Unique Self teaching deepened. In what was originally my doctoral dissertation on Unique Self and nondual humanism in the teachings of Mordechai Lainer of Izbica and in the Talmudic, Kabbalistic tradition from which he emerged, the distinction between egoic and enlightened uniqueness became more dominant as one of the pivotal points of the Unique Self teaching. For Lainer, an essential part of the process of what he termed *berur* might well be understood as precisely this clarification of uniqueness (i.e., beyond egoic separate self). See my discussion of Berur in Gafni (In press a) and *Soul Prints* (2001). When I sent this work to Wilber the night after our first meeting, he deemed it a “significant new enlightenment lineage” (personal communication, May 1, 2005) that has much to offer the contemporary teaching of enlightenment. He invited me to address a group of 50 leading spiritual teachers at the Integral Spiritual Center (ISC) in early 2006. In a series of conversations between Wilber and myself, as part of the preparation for the ISC teaching, we sharpened the distinction between egoic individuality and post-egoic individuality. The e-mail correspondence below was a letter I wrote to Wilber after much conversation at his home and over the phone, out of which I formulated the core understanding of Unique Self and perspective (which I referred to at the time as “Soul Prints”). The letter is from July 2005, well before the ISC teaching in February 2006. I have quoted extensively from this e-mail to provide additional historical context and clarification for how Unique Self integrates with Integral Theory.

In terms of Soul Print/Unique Self, it is very important to understand that Soul Prints do not emerge from the world of ego or soul but rather from radical nonduality. Soul Prints is an expression of the Self with a capital S. The way I teach it to my students is: story and non-story are one. Or in the expression of the great vehicle of Buddhism, “Emptiness is form and form is emptiness.” Or in classic Kabbalistic expression, “Keter is Malkhut and Malkhut is Keter.” This is nondual humanism in the fullest sense of the phrase. To explain what I mean, let me offer a simple map of the three classic levels of transpersonal consciousness that you have pointed out show up one way or another in virtually every system. We can call them Communion, Union, and Identity. Communion, which Scholem felt was critical in Hebrew mysticism, is ultimately dual. It is God in the second-person. Union moves toward nonduality and full nonduality is achieved in Identity. We can also use the more classic terms that you deploy in your wonderful essay, “The Depths of the Divine,” in which you speak of the psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual. We might also call them Ego Soul and Self, or *ani* and *ayin ani*. We also might use Eastern terms in which psychic and subtle might be roughly equivalent to *savikalpa samadhi*. At the highest edge of *savikalpa samadhi*, in the way I understand it, there is already a glimpse of the formless void of the next stage. This next stage of formless union, what for some Kabbalists would be called *ayin*, the realm of the impersonal, approximates the Eastern state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. This is a stage of formless awareness that is beyond the personal. You call this stage the casual state. The highest and deepest stage is, however, beyond even the formless state of *ayin*,

nirvikalpa samahdi; this is the nondual, which is the very suchness of all being. It the suchness of both emptiness and form; both personal and impersonal. This is the world of One Taste, *Sahaj* in Eastern language, or the Shma declaration of Hashem Echad, “God is one,” in Judaic consciousness. The way to reach the ultimate nondual realization—for example, according to Mordechai Lainer of Izbica—is through the prism of Soul Prints or Unique Self. Soul Prints is the absolute and radical uniqueness of the individual and its expression of emptiness in form; it is *Ein Sof* revealing itself in the only face we know—the face of unique form. It is not only that there is absolutely no distinction between the radically personal and the radically impersonal; is also that the in terms of stage of unfolding the radically personal is the portal to the embrace and identity of the absolute one. Moreover, the absolute one only expresses itself through its infinite faces or what I have called its infinite Soul Prints. Another way to say this might be to borrow the image suggested by the Midrash in this regard: that of the ascending and descending ladders on Jacob’s ladder. For the Kabbalists, this is the ladder of nonduality. On the ladder are angels of God. *Angel* in biblical Hebrew refers to a divine entity or to a human being. What they share in common is that each is a radically unique messenger of God. Or said differently, each is a radically unique perspective. One ascends to the divine through Soul Print and the divine descends into the world through Soul Print. Indeed, all of human reality as we know it is Soul Print. But even this language is insufficient, for in the experience of nonduality Soul Print is the divine. So one ascends to the divine through the divine Soul Print and divinity descends to divine world of form through the divine Soul Print. What the sages of old called *Nashkei Ar’a VeRakia*—the kiss of heaven and earth. Another term for Soul Print might be perspective. As we have pointed out many times, the classic image for unique form or Soul Print in Hebrew consciousness is *panim* (face). Face is an expression in Talmudic language for what we moderns and postmoderns might call perspective. This is what the ancient sages meant when they taught: “They are seventy faces to Torah.” The Torah can only be read through the prism of perspectives. Ultimately, in Hebrew mysticism each human being is a bearer of a unique face, which is by very definition a unique perspective. This is a radically particular perception of the world that is shared by no other being. In this sense, each person is a unique set of eyes of *Ein Sof* (of the absolute). The person is the eyes of the absolute in a way shared by no other being on earth. This is the source of our grandeur, our infinite adequacy and dignity, and occasionally our almost unbearable loneliness, which for this very reason can only be ultimately quenched in the caress of the divine. How does one get there, to the soul printed merger with the absolute? In Hebrew mysticism, it is through erotic merger with the *Shekinah*. This might take place through many methods of practice, including the concentrated study of sacred text; the intense meditation of sacred chant and song; the rigorous and uncompromising process of introspection and dialogue called *Berur* (with results in the clarification and purification of motive and desire out of which the Unique Self naturally emerges); classical mystical techniques of letter combination, soul ascent, crying and more...

This note clarifies both the post-egoic nature of Unique Self (i.e., that Unique Self is fully realized only after or as an expression of True Self) as well as the identification of Unique Self with a unique perspective. At Integral Spiritual Experience 2010, Wilber and myself gave keynotes on Unique Self in which we crystallized many of our conversations, and for myself, 20 years of writing and thinking in this regard. Wilber’s wonderful formulation in his keynote was: True Self + Perspective = Unique Self. In the months after ISC, a number of teachers began to incorporate this equation into their teaching (e.g., John Kesler, Vidyuddeva, Sophia Diaz, John Forman). It was, however, my good

friend and occasional teaching partner Diane Musho Hamilton who began to facilitate the voice of Soul Prints/Unique Self as part of the Big Mind process developed by her teacher, Genpo Roshi. Hamilton, in conversations with Wilber and myself, was pivotal in the full transition from the term *Soul Prints* to *Unique Self*. Genpo Roshi, following her lead, integrated the voice and term Unique Self into the Big Mind process and into his official Big Mind book (Merzel, 2007, pp. 122-124). During a call with Wilber in January 2006—before the ISC meeting—he suggested that I deploy the Unique Self over the Soul Prints terminology in my upcoming presentation so that the Unique Self teaching would not be confused with the separate self teaching of exoteric Western religion. Other teachers, especially my good friend and occasional teaching partner, Swami Sally Kempton, helped identify in their traditions similar teachings that resonated with the core intuition of Unique Self.

The distinction between Unique Self and other teachings (e.g., the Authentic Self teaching of Andrew Cohen) were clarified in a number of direct engagements with Cohen, beginning with a shared public teaching in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 2006. In a recorded teaching in front of a packed auditorium, Cohen elegantly but categorically rejected the spiritual validity of the concept of uniqueness at the level of enlightened consciousness, asserting that uniqueness is about the level of ego. I replied to Andrew with the core teaching of Unique Self. This debate between us has continued for years. In a 2010 dialogue between Andrew and myself, as part of the Future of Love Series hosted by iEvolve and Integral Life, we returned to the topic of Unique Self vs. Authentic Self. By this time Andrew's position had considerably softened even as real distinctions remained. I half joked to Andrew in that dialogue and at a later meeting that he himself, Andrew Cohen, was the best evidence of the Unique Self teaching. Andrew's personal uniqueness is clear and does not seem to be merely an awakened impersonal function of Authentic Self, as his teaching would seem to suggest. In the introduction to the new edition of his teachings in *Being and Becoming* (Cohen, 2010), which I saw right before this journal went to press, I noticed that the introduction casts the teachings in the book as Andrew's "unique perspective," which is core to the teaching of Unique Self. This dialogue is slated for publication in *Future of Love: Evolutionary Integral Relationships* (Eds. Gafni and Hamilton, In preparation). For an in-depth dialogue I had with Cohen regarding Authentic Self vs. Unique Self, see the dialogue printed elsewhere in this issue.

After the ISC gathering, Terry Patten and his collaborators added a chapter to *Integral Life Practice* (Wilber et al., 2008). The chapter is entitled "Unique Self" (pp. 373-381). Unique Self further evolved in 2010, when I was privileged to lead an effort—with Ken Wilber, Robb Smith, Diane Hamilton, and Sally Kempton—to reinvigorate the Integral Spiritual Movement. The focal point of the effort was a series of Integral Spiritual Experiences. Because Unique Self had by that time begun to emerge as a new chapter in Integral Theory, we held the event around the teaching of Unique Self. In a series of dialogues both public and private leading up to the event, the teaching on Unique Self evolved even further. For some of these conversations with myself, Ken Wilber, Sally Kempton, Diane Hamilton, Lama Surya Das, Jean Houston, and Alex Grey see the Integral Life website (integrallife.com). During the months leading up to the event, I wrote the "Eight Stations of Unique Self," which were featured in the attendee guide for the conference and are drawn from a forthcoming book on the dharma of Unique Self. At this event, in a series of keynote presentations given by myself and Wilber, and through Big Mind/Unique Self facilitations by Hamilton as well as a True Self/False Self plenary by Kempton, the Unique Self teaching deepened once again. For a sampling of these presentations, also see integrallife.com.

¹⁴ Wilber, in the final discussions before Integral Spiritual Experience 2010 (ISE), and in his keynote at ISE, deemed Unique Self an "evolutionary emergent." In earlier discussions in 2005-2006, Wilber and I talked about Unique Self as resonant, even if not identical with, the Buddhist image of enlightenment captured in the tenth Ox Herding picture (see Hixon, 1978, pp. 60-92). As noted, my teaching on Unique Self developed from Talmudic and Kabbalistic traditions. A.H. Almaas (the Diamond Approach teaching) describes "personal essence" in terms that are remarkably close to my Unique Self teaching. Having said that, the full implications of individuality have evolved with the advent of modernity and postmodernity, particularly in light of the dignities of modernity (foremost among them being democracy and its socio-political implications as well the contextual realizations of self in postmodernity). The heightened appreciation of the post-metaphysical "ontology" of perspectives that characterizes postmodernity, which I imbibed from Wil-

ber, needs to be taken into account in the formulation of Unique Self.

¹⁵ An earlier version of this section also appeared in the form of a short guide for the participants of the first ISE, where I co-led an intensive teaching on Unique Self with a group of 500 participants. This material emerged in part from a dialogue between Robb Smith and myself on the Kosmic address of Unique Self and out of the joyful, spirited, and creative process of preparing the first ISE.

¹⁶ My own perspective is never absent, even as it is progressively clarified and deepened through the evolution of self to Self.

¹⁷ At second and third tier, perspectives are inherent in awareness. It is an inherent aspect of what emerges at turquoise and indigo altitudes. So even though Unique Self was present from the earlier stages of consciousness, it can seem to emerge at second and third tier.

¹⁸ It is for this reason that the conveyor belt of structure-stages is essential to the development of religion. For discussion, see Wilber (2006).

¹⁹ See Gafni (In Press b) for more discussion of the eight stations of Unique Self.

²⁰ Cook-Greuter was an early challenger of the Unique Self teaching. In a dialogue that appears in this volume, I showed Cook-Greuter that she herself had deployed an intuitive understanding of Unique Self in her own writing and even, unconsciously, used the term “unique self.” Cook-Greuter and myself had a great laugh about this after our dialogue in this regard.

²¹ Here also is a potential distinction between the pre-modern realization and post-postmodern realization that Unique Self suggests. For much of the pre-modern world (excepting many of the great realizers and their inner circles who founded new schools of thought), Unique Self was a deduction that went something like: “Since we all view the mountain from a different perspective, we all have a unique perspective.” At the post-postmodern second- and third-tier consciousness of indigo altitude, Unique Self is not only a deduction but a realization. Every person at indigo altitude has direct access to what only the great realizers were able to access in the pre-modern world. The four stages that I discuss below refer to state-stages. People can still awaken to a fairly profound understanding of Unique Self without developing into second or third tier. But it is naturally much better, and it comes as part of the natural territory, if a person’s structure development is as profound as their state development. Unique Self of course starts before indigo altitude, but at indigo it takes its most crystalline form.

Unique Self is both a state and a structure-stage. It can appear as a state, for example, in the sense that it is the true nature of the True Self. There is no True Self in the manifest world without Unique Self. Whether we are talking about the prehension of an atom, whose little bit of consciousness is nonetheless an expression of divine consciousness, or the True Self, it is still an expression of the Unique Self.

²² In Unique Self teaching, false self or shadow emerges through unlived or distorted Unique Self. Said succinctly, shadow is Unique Self distortion. This is discussed extensively in the shadow chapters of *Unique Self: The Future of Enlightenment* (Gafni, In press b). To the extent that masculine and feminine in their uniquely individuated expression within a person are not properly calibrated, integrated, or lived, they will result in shadow as well.

²³ For an extended discussion of false self, see Wolinsky (1999). Volume II contains exercises, demonstrations, and protocols for dismantling the “False Self Complex.”

²⁴ See Wolinsky (1999), who cites the work of Oscar Ichazo and George Gurdjieff.

²⁵ Naturally, there can be healthy and unhealthy prisoners in the cave. The West focused on making the prisoner in the cave healthy by clarifying the false self, taking back shadow projections, etc., in order to have a healthy separate self. The problem with this approach is the prisoner is still in the cave, which is the source of suffering. The East focused on getting the prisoner out of the cave by moving from separate self to the realization of True Self. The problem with this approach is the realization of True Self does not heal all of the neurosis or pathological dysfunction of separate self. It is only in Unique Self that we embrace both the individual uniqueness of the self, which naturally requires clarification, and at the same time realize the nature of the individual both as an indivisible part of True Self and as the whole itself.

²⁶ Any experience of formless True Self, when it manifests as any object at all, manifests as Unique Self. So to repeat, there is no True Self anywhere in the manifest world. Unique Self is the source of awareness “all the way up and all the way down,” to quote Wilber (2000b, p. 210). Of course, Unique Self is always present as the witness of consciousness at all levels of awareness (because awareness or consciousness is always embodied in form and therefore always has a perspective). We might say that True Self exists in the manifest world as a “component” of the Unique Self that is purely formless. And as I have said, in this sense there is only one True Self. So when one is experiencing a pure formless state, and a deep formless sleep is taken as an example of that, then this is True Self because there’s no perspective. It’s the only time that perception is pure. Every other time, when perception is of an object, it’s always a perspective. So when a person is in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, that is formally True Self. But the intriguing thing is: when I remember my state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, then that is Unique Self. Any reflection on *nirvikalpa samadhi* is done by Unique Self. That’s the paradox of it. This is a source of confusion for many people (i.e., that *nirvikalpa samadhi* is formless, the infinite unmanifest). But the second you reflect on it in any way, it is Unique Self. Thus we might say that the only time Unique Self is without any perspectives at all is when it is without any objects whatsoever (consciousness without an object).

²⁷ With the emergence of second-tier and particularly third-tier structure-stages of consciousness, perspectives themselves become noticed. So at this stage the conscious realization of Unique Self fully emerges. It was of course present all along but tended to be confused with True Self because perspectives were not yet fully conscious. When the full awareness of perspectives emerges, the awareness of Unique Self emerges.

²⁸ Postmodernism uses “perspective” in a very loose sense and often identifies multiplet perspectives to support relativism; hence my reference to post-postmodernism. Clint Fuhs, in a yet unpublished work on perspectives (personal communication, November 19, 2010) is focusing on the developmental research of the 1970-1980s and the connections buried deep in systems theory literature and semiotics; see also Wilber (2000b, p. 170) on aperspectival madness. See Wilber (2000a) for a more extensive discussion of validity claims, judgments, and absolutism.

²⁹ In the words of Wilber:

Before continuing, let me first give you some of the context for the evolution of these teachings within the Integral context. These teachings on Unique Self were originally evolved by Marc Gafni over three decades, drawing from his own realization, insight, and the enlightenment lineage in which he stands. In Gafni’s reading of this lineage, brilliantly articulated in his three-volume opus Radical Kabbalah, *Unique Self and Non-Dual Humanism, The Teaching of Hasidic Master Mordechai Lainer of Izbica* [in development], which I read in several highly excited nights, Unique Self is a nondual realization of one’s unique perspective that one has evolved beyond ego, which expresses itself both as one’s unique perspective on a text and as well as the unique perspective of the realized individual in any situation. This Unique Self realization is what Gafni terms, in Lainer’s thought, the *Judah Archetype*, whose perspective is a unique incarnation of unmediated divinity and therefore overrides all previous law including even the law of Torah itself. In essence, the realized individual whose True Self has been disclosed expresses that True Self through his or her unique perspective, what Gafni originally called *Soul Prints*. In this realization the person incarnates through their unique perspective what the Kabbalistic tradition might refer to as the “word of God.” Hence, one might say that the nondual humanism of Unique Self is rooted in the equation of True Self + Perspective = Unique Self. (Gafni, In press b)

³⁰ Including the great teachers of True Self who were not conscious that the true nature which they realized was filtered through their unique perspective.

³¹ For a discussion of the distinction between ontological, epistemological, and methodological pluralism when it comes to the hermeneutics of sacred text, but also in regard to broader issues, see Sokol (1994, pp. xxiii-xxxv) and Rosensweig (1992, pp. 93-122). For a discussion of these forms of pluralism within the Integral model, see Esbjörn-Hargens (2010).

³² On this dictum, see Heschel (1970) and Tishby (1975).

³³ There are three stages of mystical legal hermeneutics that I linked in order to uncover the lineage of Unique Self within the Hebrew tradition. In unpublished writings I have developed an analysis of the relationship of these three stages, namely of the older Talmudic and post-Talmudic teaching on hermeneutics and uniqueness in relation to the later Lurianic teaching on hermeneutics and uniqueness, and then how these sources form the matrix of Mordechai Lainer’s nondual humanistic teaching of Unique Self.

³⁴ The one-letter theorists were essential to my unfolding of Unique Self from within the folds of the original Hebrew mystical texts. I have written about this extensively in my work on Isaac Luria and Mordechai Lainer as Unique Self mystics. The idea that a person has their own unique letter in the Torah is a textual-mystical frame for the notion of perspectives. Once the mystic or Talmudist has realized True Self, even if it is a temporary realization, they are able to speak the “word of God” through their unique perspective in reading the sacred text. It is from this matrix that I drew when I first suggested to Wilber that we identify Unique Self with a post-egoic perspective.

³⁵ Unique Self, when deployed by different systems of thought at different levels of consciousness, will have a different Kosmic addresses. For a post-metaphysical perspective, see Wilber (2006, Chapter 1 and Appendix 2).

³⁶ For a basic overview of the Integral map, see Wilber (2000b, pp. 1-56).

³⁷ It is like the story told by Sally Kempton (personal communication, November 1, 2010) of the biker who irrationally picked a fight with someone who touched his bike. When pressed afterwards to explain himself, he said: “When you touch my bike, you touch me.”

³⁸ This realization of love as the motive—as the very feeling and glue of the Kosmos—is the underlying enlightened realization of Unique Self mystics like Isaac Luria and his school. Luria’s schools are perhaps the most profound and influential teachers of Western mysticism, who later inform the core teaching of evolutionary spirituality that emerge in the writings of the great German idealist Schelling and his colleagues. This mystical insight is slowly finding its way into the leading-edge discourse of science and spirit.

³⁹ Once, I shared this understanding of love with the Dalai Lama. “Beautiful!” he exclaimed with sheer and utter delight. He was particularly excited to shift the understanding of love from an emotion to a perception. This understanding arose in my conversation with the Dalai Lama about the biblical commandment to love. How can you command an emotion? And yet in the evolutionary mysticism of the Unique Self teaching, the old biblical aphorism to “Love your neighbor as yourself” takes on a new layer of meaning. “Love you neighbor as yourself” is the seemingly impossible demand of the biblical book of Leviticus, echoed in the New Testament in the book of Matthew. But often left out of the passage are the three last, and perhaps most crucial, words. The complete verse is, “Love your neighbor as yourself, I am God” (Leviticus 19:18). To love your neighbor is to know that the “I am” is God. It is in this sense that Hindus talk about a form of love called *bhakti*, to truly see the other bathed in their divine radiance.

⁴⁰ Human beings used to think we were directly engaging reality as it is. This is why every spiritual system thought that it owned the truth, that it was seeing reality itself. But this was only half true. At some point we began to realize that there is no reality without perspective. To put it another way, reality itself is fundamentally constructed from perspectives. In the old, dominant paradigm, the assumption was that perception was a faculty that showed each of us the same picture and revealed the true nature of things. The new paradigm is informed by deconstructive insights of philosophers from Hume to Kant to Saussure and everyone who wrote in their wake, including ideas of relativity, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, multiculturalism, and much more.

⁴¹ For example, see Shatz (1968).

⁴² The clarification of uniqueness after contact with the transcendent is termed by Luria and Lainer as *Berur*. A careful study of Lainer led me to understand that the process of *Berur*, which yields a correct understanding of one’s Unique Self, was understood by Lainer to be the path to the ultimate realization of nonduality, beyond the stages of communion, union, and even identity with the divine.

⁴³ Essence in the way I am deploying it here is the fullness of what the Buddhists call emptiness and the Kabbalists call *ayin*. In Unique Self, samsara and nirvana, emptiness and form meet in a seamless realization.

⁴⁴ On personal essence as a form of what we are calling Unique Self, see Almaas (2000).

⁴⁵ For a full explication of Nagarjuna's teaching in relation to the Buddhist doctrine of no-self in Integral terms, see Wilber (2000b, pp. 717-734).

⁴⁶ As cited in Rabbi Shalom Noach Barzodsky, *Netivot Shalom (Vol. 2)* (1990).

⁴⁷ The word *tikkun*, which to a certain degree has become common parlance, is generally understood as meaning "fixing," "repair," or "emendation." This usage is most likely based on Lurianic writings, or possibly on the Talmud, where the phrase *tikkun olam* is used to describe rabbinic edicts that were not necessarily based on *halakha*, but rather to ensure the general well-being of society. In the *Zohar* (Matt, 2009), however, the meaning of *tikkun* is generally quite different (although there are instances of the more familiar usage). Particularly in the epic Sifra deTzniuta, Idra Rabba, and Idra Zuta sections, there are lengthy discussions on the *tikkunim* of Atiqa Kadisha, the Holy Ancient One, who is the first and most elevated manifestation of the godhead (who is perfect unto himself and certainly not in need of repair).

The Aramaic word *tikuna*, which is the Zoharic way of saying *tikkun*, means either "garment" or "adornment" (jewelry). For example, in the Idra Rabba section (*Zohar*, Vol. 3, p. 132b) we find: "The beard of the High Priest is set in eight *tikkunim*, which is why the High Priest had eight garments (*tikkunim*)." Yet another example, also from Idra Rabba (140b): "These are the honored garments (*porfira*) of the king, as is written (Psalms 104): 'You wore glory and beauty,' [that is] the garments (*tikkunim* that You wear)." I would also note that the root *t'k'n'* is also used as a verb (e.g., *lehatkin* or *itkan*). In a strange twist of fate, the best possible translation of this verb might be "to install," in a computer sense, as it refers to introducing some new factor into the greater system, either to the aspect of the divine or to that of humanity. Thanks to Avraham Leader for this point.

⁴⁸ This is a major theme throughout Wilber (1981), where he both culls and evolves this insight from the writings of Campbell, Becker, Brown, and others.

⁴⁹ On pseudo Eros vs. Eros, see Gafni (2002, pp. 12-80). My understanding of the term *pseudo Eros*, written well before I encountered Wilber or his work, is roughly approximate to Wilber's usage and the term he deploys for it, *Atman Project*.

⁵⁰ An example of mistaking the move beyond separateness with a rejection of uniqueness would be the statement, "There is no such thing as a unique spiritual experience." For an example of the desires to affirm the unique dignity of the individual that fails to distinguish between separateness and uniqueness, and therefore winds up reifying separateness and rejecting the Eastern call to move beyond separate self, see Berkovitz (2002, pp. 215-235). In the ancient texts of Buddhism, the rejection of uniqueness as part of the rejection of separateness is commonplace, and in the exoteric Christian and Judaic texts, the affirmation of separate self as part of the embrace of unique dignity is commonplace.

⁵¹ To be clear state development, from separate self to True Self is insufficient to heal suffering. We also need structure-stage development to higher stages of consciousness.

⁵² The Unique Self teaching understands evolution beyond ego as the evolution beyond exclusive identification with ego. Developmental researchers confirm that the ego does not disappear but remains even at the highest levels of consciousness (personal communications with Terri O'Fallon, Susanne Cook-Greuter, and Don Beck available at iEvolve.org). See also the work of developmental psychologist Jeffrey Funk on the distinction between ego as a process, which never stops, and ego as a representation from which eventually a fluid disidentification may occur. For discussion, see Funk's (n.d.) "Unanimity and Disagreement Among Transpersonal Psychologists." The role of ego in higher states of consciousness will be an important thread in Susanne Cook-Greuter's forthcoming book (see also Cook-Greuter, 2000).

⁵³ It is the nondual tantric teachers of both Kabbalah and Hinduism who dedicated their esoteric teachings to undermining these dualities. However, even for these teachers the dualities cannot be undermined until they are first discerned and internalized. On Hindu tantra, see Feuerstein (1998). For an example of Kabbalistic tantra undermining dualities, see (Gafni, In press b).

⁵⁴ Let me offer one example of a first-person exercise so that the reader can get a sense of how these distinctions might apply in a lived life. Perhaps you are in a relationship that you want to leave. As you contemplate this, stay in the discomfort that you can palpably feel—discomfort that lies at the root of this desire. For now, do not give the feeling words. Instead, feel the quality of the emptiness that arouses the desire. If you stay with this feeling long enough, the emptiness may begin to fill up with being and presence—with your unique being and presence. What happened? You have discovered that the root of your desire to be free was your own disconnection from your personal essence, your Unique Self. When your Unique Self fills the void, the desperate desire you felt to leave the relationship (or the marriage or the job) fades away. This application is drawn from the work of Almaas (2000).

⁵⁵ I was not sure whether to use the word *man* or *self* or alternate genders. In the end, after consulting with gender-wise colleagues, I preferred the simplicity of *man* over the awkwardness of gender-correct language. I am not sure, however, that I made the right choice and we clearly need to evolve the language in this arena.

⁵⁶ In this section I use *impersonal* in two slightly different ways: 1) as a level beneath my awareness (e.g., the neurotransmitters in my limbic system are impersonal), and 2) in the sense of True Self as something that I can be aware of directly.

⁵⁷ See Jacob Agus' (1946) biography of Abraham Kuk for a discussion of the Kabbalistic influence of evolutionary spirituality on Schelling.

⁵⁸ In Kabbalah, *tikkun* has an explicitly sexual resonance that has been pointed out by Kabbalah scholars like Liebes, Idel, and Wolfson. For the Kabbalist, the creative explosion is ongoing, with the human being acting as nondual extension of the divine in the creative evolutionary process of *tikkun*. The moment of creative explosion from nothing into something is characterized as a sexual moment not just in Kabbalah, but in many of the great traditions. To see a snapshot of this dynamic, simply note your own desire to *emerge*, to individuate into higher and higher levels of authenticity and accomplishment. This is followed by a desire for ecstatic *merging*, be it through sex, food, music, or some other method. As your level of emergence evolves, so too does the level of consciousness that characterizes the convergence. Each time the cycle takes place, it can potentially occur at a deeper level of consciousness.

The move from *ani* back to *ayin*—when the coiled ego realizes the spaciousness of its true nature—is achieved by meditation, chanting, or other spiritual practices. The movement from *ayin* back to the higher *ani*—the revelation of Unique Self—is achieved by prayer, chanting, meditation, analytic work, ethical mindfulness and activism, and full-bodied loving embrace of life in all of its manifestations.

⁵⁹ The core Kabbalistic category of *tikkun* is usually translated as “to fix” or “to heal,” yet it is actually better translated as “to evolve.” Kabbalah interprets all of life as taking place in an evolutionary context. For those who know how to read the sources, this is the very lodestone on which Kabbalah rests. In the Kabbalistic realization, the entire world exists within the divine—every human act is for the sake of *tikkun*; every human action is for the sake of the whole and impacts the whole; and every human being is born to fulfill a particular function in the evolution of all that is. The Kabbalists had significant influence on Fichte and Schelling, who are often listed as the originators of evolutionary spirituality. For an additional source on the influence on Kabbalistic sources on Schelling, see Wolfson (2004, p. 392).

⁶⁰ The dialectic between Being and Becoming is a perennial philosophical theme running back to Zeno of Elea and Heraclitus. It also figured prominently in the philosophy of Plotinus. Kant, Hegel, and Marx took up the issue, as did Emerson and the American transcendentalists. More recently, Whitehead provided a history of the debate by way of distilling the main theological implications of an evolutionary worldview. Whitehead talks as well in what he terms the “primordial nature of God” and the “consequent nature of God,” which are close to what I refer to as Two Tastes in this article. The specific term *ecstatic urgency* I first heard from enlightenment teacher Andrew Cohen during a talk at Foxhollow Center. It is my delight to credit him with the term. The root source of Andrew's teaching, beyond his own realization, seems to be at least in part the Hindu mystic Sri Aurobindo. The source of my teaching, beyond my own humble realization, is the Kabbalistic lineage in which I live. Some of our differences in nuance and emphasis, particularly in terms of the relationship between the relative and the Absolute or the personal and the impersonal, may be rooted in the different original sources of our teaching.

⁶¹ It is worth noting that the distinction between Being and Becoming shows up in the premodern world differently than it does in the modern and postmodern worlds. In the pre-modern world the distinction between Being and Becoming appears as the distinction between emptiness and form, with the core understanding of the relationship captured by the Mahayana teachers: “Emptiness is form and form is emptiness.” However, in modernity there is a new understanding of evolution that places the evolutionary context front and center as the reigning cultural paradigm. Modernity and postmodernity, in particular, understand for the first time that the world of form is actually evolving. It is worth noting that some of the earlier mystics, notably the Kabbalists who formed the essential core of Western esotericism, had a profound and highly radical sense of the evolution of emptiness—what has been called the evolution of God. This understanding was central, for example, to the thought of Kabbalist Isaac Luria, who is probably the most influential Kabbalist of the past 500 years.

⁶² Sexual intimacy in the context of a relationship between teacher and student—when specific contexts and conditions are met—may well be appropriate and ethical. This point was made by Wilber as well in a recorded dialogue at the German Integrales forum in 2010, and has been made by numerous feminist writers including bell hooks, Christina Hoff Sommers, Laura Kipnis, Daphne Patai, and many others. I discuss this issue in a forthcoming article in *Integrales Magazine*, “Spiritually Incorrect, Sex Ethics, and Injury” (see <http://marcgafni.com>). It is also important to note that sexual intimacy between teacher and student may potentially endanger both parties. It requires a particularly evolved student (and a particularly evolved teacher) to successfully navigate this territory. In this sense, one might argue that if the Unique Self teaching is to be lived out in its entirety, both student and teacher must be able to hold the complexities of dual or multiple relationships without falling into classical egoic traps. It is for this reason that I generally recommend proscribing sexual relations between student and teacher.

⁶³ Evaluation of claims of excessive intimacy or excessive authority requires a case-by-case investigation of both the goodness and shadow of the teacher as well as the goodness and shadow of the student.

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