

The Truth Is Absolutely Relative

By Attentive Observation to Transcendence of the Self

Ramo de Boer

Uitgeverij MindConsult

Colophon

Cover image: *Scheidung Abends*, Paul Klee, 1922 (part of, rotated a quarter turn)

Other books —

De Kracht van Aandacht – Kleine Gids voor het Trainen van Je Geest (2013)

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For all who devoted their lives to realizing the nature of mind. Without their longing for liberation, their courage, perseverance, and wisdom, the authentic Spiritual Path would have remained impassable.

The Supreme Insight

*This immediate awareness (rigpa), radiant and without any substance,
is the supreme insight.*

*This all-pervading freedom from reference point and concepts,
is the supreme meditation.*

*This uncontrived abiding, free of deliberation and attachments,
is the supreme activity.*

*This original and spontaneous presence, which need not be sought,
is the supreme attainment.*

— Shabkar (1781–1851)

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Introduction

From personal development to spiritual liberation

In our organized society, arriving at a desired destination is almost inevitable. For physical destinations we rely on our memory if we have been there before, a map or GPS app if we do not know the way, or we take transport that, once we have boarded, drops us off more or less at the door.

How different it is to set out on your journey toward personal development and spiritual liberation. To begin with, the destination itself can be hard to determine — it is, after all, a virtual destination — and the route toward it is not unambiguous. The ambiguity arises because it is a dynamic interplay between ourselves and our experiences. This means, certainly on the stretch toward spiritual liberation, that the goal may change as we change our route: by changing teacher, traveling companions, or guiding philosophy.

This fluidity makes our journey exhilarating, but sometimes confusing as well, while stagnation, in whatever form, occurs regularly. Sometimes it is necessary to change route or destination in order to do justice to the insights and experiences you have gained. But, as in other areas of life — such as work, relationships, family — our tendency toward attachment means we cannot easily free ourselves from routes and company that no longer fit. In my life, my first great change took shape when, at 22, I decided to break off my sculpture training at the art academy and go to India, to the teacher Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. The *I Ching*, a Chinese oracle book popular at the time, which I consulted for advice, indicated that ‘crossing the great water,’ the ocean, would be a good thing. And in hindsight it was — a choice that gave my whole life a different direction and content.

I have now been working for over 40 years as a (gestalt) therapist, trainer, and author, and I never resumed my sculpture training after returning. I have never regretted it — though I would note that guilt and regret are two concepts (and experiences) that, in my view, stem from a lack of clarity about one’s own motives and underlying beliefs. Fortunately, I have proved

rather unreceptive to these limiting feelings, and ever since that formative experience in India I have tried to apply *taking responsibility* as my guiding principle.

The concept of ‘personal growth’ covers a wide spectrum of possible meanings. What it must contain in any case, I believe, is the insight that it is an ongoing process. In the theory of the psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), the realization of individual capacities through ‘personal growth’ plays, as one of the first, a major role. He assumed in all human beings a tendency to want to realize their unique potential in their lives. Maslow defines this process with his famous term *self-actualization* as: ‘the desire to become more and more what one is: to become everything that one is capable of becoming.’

Later he added to his classic hierarchy of needs (Maslow’s pyramid, p. 170) the highest level of ‘self-transcendence,’ the capacity to transcend one’s own self. The terms ‘self-actualization’ and ‘self-transcendence’ effectively mark the path from personal development to spiritual liberation. Interestingly, what is at stake here is the realization of capacities and states already present within us. The condition, however, is that we have met the earlier basic needs before we can turn to the realization of the ‘higher’ needs.

According to Maslow, the degree to which people manage to meet their needs in a stable way determines their level of development. This approach to development as the unfolding of capacities already present resonates in various traditions and with various thinkers. William James, a pioneer in psychology, regarded human development as a process in which potential unfolds through interaction with our experiences and choices — a more dynamic perspective but with the same essence: freeing what is already present within us.

In the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, too, we find an intriguing formulation of what personal growth and spiritual liberation can be: “The riddle which man must solve, he can only solve in Being, in being what he is and not something else, in the immutable.” Striking in these perspectives are the paradoxes they contain of ‘doing’ versus ‘not-doing’ (being), and of ‘change’ versus ‘the immutable.’ This apparent contradiction underlies many of the dilemmas the personal grower encounters on the way to spiritual liberation.

Doing and not-doing

At first glance it seems that when you do, you are not, and when you are, you do not(hing). Personal growth, in Maslow's terms, means realizing through Doing that which (already) is. Nietzsche seems rather to suggest that through Being we naturally come to that 'Doing' we came here for: solving the riddle. Development is neither purely active nor passive, but more like a dance between purposeful practice and allowing natural unfolding to take place 'of itself.'

It is a subtle process in which the conscious removal of obstacles plays a central role. This book is about the various aspects, theoretical and practical, of personal development toward spiritual liberation. That development can be summed up briefly and aptly as — from doing to not-doing. It offers you a deepening view of what this adage means in practice. After all, a theory or perspective without practical application has very limited value in your life.

From working on, to transcending, the self

The essence of personal growth lies in developing our 'self,' our potential capacities. Further along the way toward spiritual liberation, the essence shifts to fully including and then transcending that very self, by activating our capacity for transformation. Ken Wilber (1949) uses a handy example to clarify the distinction between apparent and actual transformation: development is pictured as a skyscraper — development here means going from one floor (stage of development) to the next, higher floor (stage of development).

Translation

Wilber calls apparent development *translation*: here you make changes on the same floor in terms of furnishing, the arrangement of objects, and colors. Translation is a form of 'window dressing' that suggests transformation but is not — you remain, after all, on the same floor, with the same perspective. We see this phenomenon frequently in New Age movements: the suggestion of, but no real, transformation.

Transformation

This is actually arriving — through the process of including and transcending — at a higher and more spacious perspective. From a higher floor you have an essentially different perspective, with deeper and more essential insight.

Transformation through including *and* transcending — the *how* of consciousness development — demands far more attention, courage, and perseverance than translation.

It is the practice of transcending the self — that self you have called ‘I’ your whole life. At the same time, real transformation is not without risk: in the process of including and transcending, obstacles will present themselves, and upon arrival you have as yet no experiential knowledge on that floor, with that perspective.

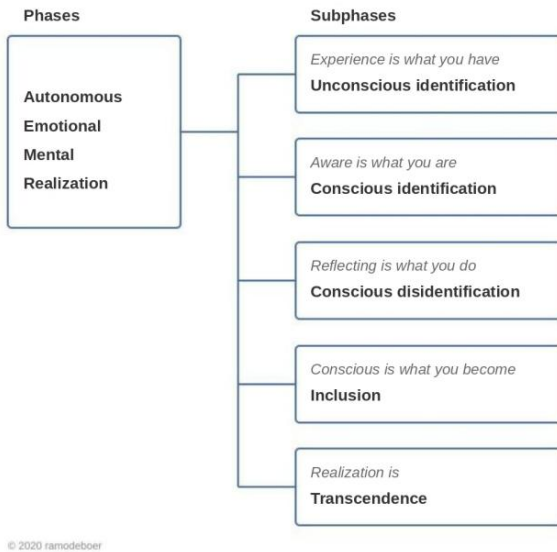
The themes

This book invites you to a deepening inquiry that begins with Perception — how we perceive and interpret reality — and takes you through crucial areas of human development. Via the cultivation of Attention and Awareness and Training Your Mind, we come to the practice of Meditation as a transformative discipline. The theme of the Spiritual Path deepens your understanding of what spiritual development entails, while the themes of Relationships and Reactivity show how this development manifests in our interactions with others.

The theme of Consciousness Development offers a structured framework for mapping your own development. The later chapters on Meaning, Leadership, Wisdom, and Truth complete the circle, as we return to the fundamental question: How can we realize our unique potential while at the same time transcending the boundaries of the self?

Consciousness Development

Our potential Consciousness Development consists of an ongoing process of consciously including a content and then consciously transcending it. In this process I distinguish 4 Phases (chronological) — the *Autonomous*, *Emotional*, *Mental*, and *Realization* Phase — and 5 *subphases* per Phase.



This developmental model forms a common thread throughout the book, even where it is not explicitly mentioned. Each section of the book highlights aspects that are relevant at different phases of development — from fundamental perceptual skills to the highest wisdom.

The paradox of ‘doing’ and ‘being,’ of active development and passive unfolding, finds its resolution in the insight that the truth is absolutely relative — always dependent on the level of consciousness from which we regard it. What appears a contradiction at one level becomes a complementary unity at a higher level.

In that sense, this book is both a practical guide and an invitation to transformation — a journey from personal development to spiritual liberation, in which you are both the traveler and the destination.

The book is structured so that you can read it in one go, but better still in parts — and *do* it. Do, because a number of texts carry applications within them, and every theme concludes with one or more Integration Exercises. I strongly advise you to do the exercises above all, because insights may inspire enthusiasm, but in themselves they bring no change in behavior.

With thanks to Brigitte Hermans for her corrections and suggestions for clear wording and consistent writing.

Have a good heart, Ramo de Boer.

Utrecht, February 2026



Perception

Introduction to Perception

What we perceive is a perception, not the truth

Marcus Aurelius

This statement resembles the title of this book, *The Truth Is Absolutely Relative*. Pausing to consider perception and investigating how it works is crucial if we truly want to develop further and ultimately free ourselves from hope and fear. Looking back on my own development, perception — how it comes about and how I can influence it — has been the common thread in my curiosity and growth from the very beginning. Even as a child I noticed that what I perceived was not the same as what my parents, my sister, and others perceived. In retrospect, I can see that even then I was already rudimentarily aware that I could observe myself.

After all, perception is not only our sensory perception of our immediate surroundings (outside); it is also our sensory perception of ourselves (inside). And not just bodily sensations such as pleasant, unpleasant, or painful, but also feelings and emotions, and images and thoughts (above). In fact, everything we can perceive. Together this constitutes our experience and our perception. Perception is the occasion for meaning and meaning-making. Problems arise because we easily confuse our perception with what we think is the truth.

This happens because our experience arises from our sensory perception. The interpretation of that perception itself (what we make of it) is so fast and automated that we do not perceive it. What we think of our surroundings and of ourselves we do not see as a personal perspective, but as the truth. It is, after all, what we perceive — so that is how it is!

Here lies the essence of the work of a lifetime: through our identification and fusion with our perception — physical, emotional, and mental — we are too close to it. Literally and figuratively, we lack overview and therefore miss the direct insight that perception is not the same as truth. What is needed is to make our perceiving more conscious, so that we can, as it were, see through the foreground and gain more sight of the background.

These texts on perception approach perceiving and perception from different points of view and in different ways. Central is the investigation of the *phenomenon* of perception: how it comes about, and how you can influence it through more conscious observation and intervention. It is a

good starting point for this book, because all the themes that follow also arise from, and are interconnected with, our (conscious) perception.

The aim is to observe more consciously so that, from there, we can broaden and adjust our perception as we choose. In other words, you examine the *emotional/mental algorithms* that have arisen in you for their purpose and their results, and you make adjustments of your own choosing. An important form of freedom — one that, paradoxically, always requires limitation as well.

But more on that later in the book.

Perception – I See, I See What You Don't See!?

As children we often used to play the game 'I see, I see what you don't see!' You had to guess what the other person saw, based on vague hints about what they could see and you (as yet) could not. You won if you managed to keep the hints so vague or misleading that the other person could not guess it and gave up. Or the other person won if they did manage to guess the object. The game was exclusively about the so-called objective properties of what was observed and did not concern itself at all with the psychology of our perception. That, however, is something we quickly (have to) learn as we grow up.

For what I see is not always — indeed very often not — what you 'see.' We may agree on the visual externals of the object — I see what you also see — but we will differ in the meaning we give to, or our interpretation of, what we see. Perception, however simple it may seem at first glance, is a rather complicated process in which both our senses and our mind are inextricably involved. An old and interesting piece of wisdom about our biased perception is this one from *Mullah Nasrudin* (1208–1284), the famous sage of the Islamic Sufi tradition.

The Key in the Dark ¹

Mullah Nasrudin was crawling on his hands and knees, right under the street lamp. Hardly a fitting posture for a man of faith, and at two o'clock in the morning at that. Drinking is forbidden, but if you do it anyway, then surely not so openly. It raises questions. 'Mullah, what are you doing there?' The mullah was looking for the key to his front door. Now, people thought the mullah an odd fellow, but he was popular, so before long half the village was crawling on the ground with him, searching for his house key. Two o'clock became three o'clock, three o'clock became half past three.

Haste and hurry did not yet live in Nasrudin's village, so everyone kept searching diligently. But nothing is inexhaustible, and eventually even the villagers' patience came to an end. After they had combed the entire area around the lamp for the umpteenth time and turned every pebble over twenty times, they had had enough. 'Are you sure you lost it here?' 'No,' said

¹ **Mullah Nasrudin**, The Key in the Dark. Compiled by Wim van der Zwan, Altamira — Brecht 2000

Nasrudin, ‘I lost it closer to home, but it’s so dark there. Here in the light, searching is easier...’

Perceiving and perception

Perceiving and perception are an essential part of our life. In fact, it *is* our life; our consciousness *is* perceiving (what it is beyond that, we still do not really know, despite all our technical and scientific progress). These two concepts are sometimes treated as identical and sometimes explained as different. For this inquiry I use the following definition:

‘Perceiving, also called perception, is the process of acquiring, registering, interpreting, selecting, and organizing sensory information.’

Interestingly, perception has both a *technical* and a *philosophical* side:

- *how* does the process take place in which an external stimulus produces an internal image?
- *how* is our worldview connected to our perception — in other words, how is knowledge produced?

To put both in perspective, we take a brief look back at history — noting, for the sake of accuracy, that my view and my choices here are of course only one of the possible ways of looking at it!

Philosophy of science²

One way of looking at history that matters for our subject is a perspective from the *philosophy of science*, and in particular the transition from the Christian-Aristotelian worldview to the worldview of the natural sciences. The Christian-Aristotelian worldview stayed close to the everyday perception and experience of reality — call it our ‘common sense.’ In this medieval perspective, the universe has a number of characteristics:

1. The firmament revolves around the earth;
2. The sun rises and sets;

²**Philosophy of science** is a discipline within philosophy concerned with the critical examination of the presuppositions, methods, and results of the sciences. In addition to the natural sciences, it also counts, for example, the social sciences, psychology, and economics among its fields of study. My favorite branch of philosophy!

3. Only in the superlunary realm (the heavens) does one find eternal regularity; here in the sublunary realm, decay, corruption, and chaos reign;
4. The universe is a round, finite dome;
5. Everything that moves eventually comes to rest again, unless a force is added to it. The only exceptions are the eternal, circular movements of the celestial dome and the planets;
6. Colors, smells, sounds, and tactile sensory experiences have a real, physical existence;
7. The entire cosmos, the planetary system, the earth, the plant and animal kingdoms all have their place, function, and value. They exist in the service of humankind. Not only does the earth stand at the center of the cosmos (geocentrism), but so does the human being (anthropocentrism).

This medieval view of motion and rest is abandoned with a new approach by Galileo and Newton, both of whom dissolve the split between the two spheres by means of mathematical constructions: they want to understand both spheres in the same way — *as above, so below*.

Objective and subjective

Characteristic of these pioneers of the scientific revolution is that they did not believe their own eyes! Through the mathematical tradition of Pythagoras, among other influences, Galileo arrives at a mechanistic philosophy in which the real world is equated with the physical world. Here he arrives at a dichotomy: subjective and objective properties of reality.

- *Subjective*: these consist of experiences, sensory perceptions bound to the *perceiving subject* — color, smell, taste, sound, and tactile properties (in the Middle Ages still regarded as physical realities)
- *Objective*: properties attributed to physical objects (size, shape, motion, and rest)

Descartes develops this further, partly through his investigation of the demarcation between objective and subjective phenomena: he holds that sensory sensations — such as smell, color, and sound — correspond to configurations in the physical world, and are therefore objective properties (as with Galileo), while the perception of them, for Descartes too, belongs to the subjective properties.

Among the subjective properties Descartes also places states of consciousness and activities such as remembering, thinking, willing, and imagining. He calls the objective and subjective properties of reality physical and psychical respectively. Descartes believes that the nature of the relationship between body and soul is beyond the reach of philosophy and arrives at his dualistic philosophy: the human being is a composite of two completely independent substances, body and soul. This makes a causal connection between the two impossible. He therefore had no choice but to conclude “I think, therefore I am” — otherwise there would be no one there!

3

Problems

Philosophical and scientific problems arise here from a natural-scientific worldview with no place for the human mind: attention is devoted exclusively to objective phenomena, while subjective phenomena are ignored.

The problem here is that:

- science itself is based on the *contact* between subject and object (world);
- the human being is body *and* mind — perceptions, experiences, *and* a physical object.

In short, both are *relational*, while no relationship is assumed. The birth of psychology as an independent field of inquiry comes about because Descartes designates the mental — that is, consciousness — as a separate field of study. Two schools of thought then emerge.

Rationalist and Empiricist psychology

Since the scientific revolution, philosophers have tried to answer the question of the justification of knowledge by appealing to the validity of a source of knowledge. Once a source is accepted as valid, all that remains is to demonstrate its correct use. As a rule, two sources of (scientific) knowledge are distinguished:

³**René Descartes** arrived at his famous “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am) through **methodical doubt**. In his “*Meditations on First Philosophy*” (1641) he systematically doubted everything he could doubt — his senses, the external world, even mathematical truths. But he realized that one thing was beyond doubt: the fact that he *doubted* meant that he must exist as a doubting/thinking being.

1. **experience** — the sensory perception of the empirical world > *empiricism*
2. **reason** — the principles of rationality > *rationalism*

The differences between the empiricist and the rationalist approach also affected the psychological mechanism each of them assumed: *how* is knowledge psychologically ‘produced’ by the human mind?

Empiricism

- assumes that the mind is gradually filled with sensory information
- this accumulation yields knowledge about the environment
- these experiences are the building blocks for general insights, which come about through associations between the building blocks.

The central problem here is that the empiricists were never able to answer satisfactorily *how* sensory experiences are converted into concepts (how do warmth and light become fire?)

Rationalism

- assumes that the mind by nature already possesses certain capacities, such as reasoning and imagining.

The problem for the rationalists is that it remains unclear what the connection is between sensory experiences and these innate capacities. After all, they can only establish the existence of these capacities on the basis of the very same facts that prompted them to assume their existence in the first place (a circular argument).

Reflection experiment

We have seen that the old psychological schools of empiricism and rationalism had trouble explaining the ‘production’ of knowledge. How do you see it? What is knowledge, and how do you think you ‘produce’ knowledge — from perception, from reason, from both, or otherwise? Try to argue it out for yourself.

Gestalt psychology – a view of perception

Gestalt is a scientific school in psychology which holds that things are primarily perceived as wholes (gestalts), and not as the sum of elements connected by association. Legend has it that Gestalt psychology was born two years after the psychologist Max Wertheimer’s interest was sparked,

during a train journey in 1910, by the optical ‘behavior’ of the telegraph poles and cables along the track.

When you look from a moving train at the succession of telegraph poles and wires, you do not simply see individual poles gliding past one by one. Instead, you experience a fluid, continuous movement — as if the poles and cables themselves were moving or making ‘waves.’ This is an illusion of movement between discrete, static objects. This phenomenon was problematic for the Associationist school, because they explained perception as a sum of individual sensations — elementary building blocks joined together through association. But what Wertheimer saw was that the *experience of movement* could not be reduced to the sum of the perceptions of individual poles. The movement arises in the perceptual organization itself.

Over the following two years Wertheimer conducted research and came up with a hypothesis about that by which the organism managed to translate individual, successive impressions into a unified perception of constant movement (the *Phi* factor). Although Wertheimer established here *what* happened, there was as yet no answer to *how* it happened. Around the notion that — unlike with the associationists — the subject (the organism, the perceiver) played a more complex role in this process, a new psychological school arose.

The Berlin School

Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka were part of it, and their research focused mainly on perception — with the aim of proving that form is more than the sum of its components. Their conclusions demonstrated that perception is structured according to certain regularities — these are summarized in the so-called ‘*gestalt laws*.’

They explain why a person’s subjectivity, in interplay with simple environmental stimuli, determines perception. According to gestalt theory, the gestalt laws organize perception and make possible the separation between ‘figure’ and ‘ground’ (foreground and background) in the environment. The gestalt laws of grouping also apply to areas of sensory perception other than the visual.

Example

In the perception of music, an instrument or the singer's voice is often perceived as figure while the music continues in the background. Which form becomes figure or ground at any given moment is governed by the person's independent organizing principles (subjectivity). Thus certain preferences and current life themes, but also a number of impediments such as blindness and hearing disorders, determine the nature of human perception.

The Gestalt principle

This principle is a psychological theory which holds that the human mind sees a whole before it sees the individual parts. It is based on the idea that "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (Aristotle). This means that we often see a whole image or idea, even when it is made up of different parts.

Applying the Law of Prägnanz

The Law of Prägnanz applies to various aspects of perception, including visual perception, auditory perception, and cognitive processes.

- **Visual perception:** When we look at a complex image, we tend to see it as a whole rather than concentrating on the individual parts. For example, we see a face rather than separate eyes, a nose, and a mouth.
- **Auditory perception:** When we listen to music, we hear a melody rather than separate notes.
- **Cognitive processes:** When we solve a problem, we often try to gain a general understanding or overview before concentrating on the details.

Prägnanz is a Gestalt principle that describes how the human brain unconsciously simplifies complex information into the simplest, most recognizable patterns. It is also known as the 'law of simplicity' or 'law of good gestalt' and holds that we interpret visual elements in their most logical and complete form. This principle explains why, for example, we see the Olympic rings as five separate circles rather than as a series of complex, overlapping lines.

- **Basic principle:** People tend to see patterns that are regular, uniform, and orderly, because this requires less cognitive effort.

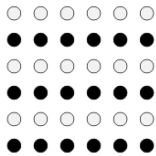
- **Simplification:** Complex or ambiguous visual input is reduced by the brain to a simplified, coherent form in order to process and remember the information.
- **Application:** This principle is widely used in graphic design, user experience (UX) design, and branding to ensure that logos, icons, and websites are immediately recognizable and comprehensible.
- **Translation:** The German word 'Prägnanz' means approximately 'concise,' 'forceful,' and 'meaningful.'

Gestalt laws

The law of Prägnanz is central to gestalt-theoretical research and holds that we tend (unconsciously) to *organize our experience in a way that is regular, symmetrical, simple, and meaningful*. It is assumed that the result of a perception is stable and therefore lasting, to the extent that the stimulus conditions of the environment allow.

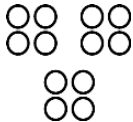
Classic examples of the grouping laws of perception are:

The law of similarity



When a number of things are perceived at the same time, there is a tendency to bring the same or similar things together into groups that are as homogeneous as possible.

Law of proximity



The tendency to see things that are close(r) together as a group, and no longer as separate things.

Law of common fate



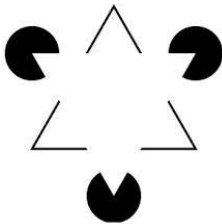
The division into groups is preserved as much as possible through change, so that the groups retain their form even when the individual parts of the group are moving.

Law of continuity



The law of continuity holds that elements of objects tend to be grouped, and therefore integrated into perceptual wholes, when they are aligned within an object. When objects intersect, people tend to perceive the two objects as two single uninterrupted entities.

Law of closure



When a pattern can have either an open or a closed course, the closed course is preferred. We tend to ignore interruptions and complete the figure, in order to create familiar images and forms.

Wholes

Wertheimer argued that it is not the case that the *receiving* organism (that is, we) takes in the constituent stimuli separately, but rather *whole* configurations (gestalts). When the whole (figure) is interrupted or incomplete, the subject (that is, we) tends nevertheless to see the whole, or

to take action to fill in the missing parts. If that fails, we will experience a measurable tension and frustration.

The fundamental problem the early gestalt theorists tackled was thus precisely that question of the organizing principle: *how* do we give meaning to the experiential field so that what we see and know forms a coherent whole, and not an (over)flood of stimuli? Think also of the nowadays frequently used ‘diagnosis’ that we are overstimulated — in other words, unable to make a coherent, meaningful, and purposeful whole of it all!

Their answer was that the fundamental, relevant unit of perception is a significant, meaningful whole. Organization — an organized figure — is the elementary building block of perception, and of the subject’s response to the perceptual stimulus. What remains unclear at this point is whether these organized wholes are present in nature, or in the perceiving organism. The research of Wertheimer and his colleagues ultimately did not reach the level of the ‘hard’ sciences. This is partly due to the tautological nature — a circular argument in which nothing is proven — of many of the laws they formulated. As an example, we take the law of *Prägnanz*.

Good gestalt

We saw above that the *concept of Prägnanz* assumes that the *result* of a perception is *stable* and therefore lasting, to the extent that the stimulus conditions of the *environment* allow. To this is added that these configurations are “as good as circumstances permit” (‘good gestalt’). This gave rise to the idea that the quality of the gestalt is measurable — but unfortunately that turned out to be an illusion.

The dependent variable (‘good gestalt’), which according to the law varies in relation to the independent variable (prevailing circumstances), could only be defined in terms of those very circumstances, and vice versa. In hindsight it seems obvious that the missing element in the prevailing circumstances is precisely the interest, need, or motivation of the subject — of the one who perceives!

Kurt Lewin – development of field theory

Lewin’s great contribution was to bring the gestalt model out of the laboratory and into the far more complex everyday life. It was precisely the limitation of laboratory research with animals that was largely responsible for the missing element: the organization of the field by the organism — the

perceiver — *itself*. The difference lies in our entering, or moving through, an already given, existing field ourselves. We must then use our perception of the field to engage with that field. In doing so, we will simultaneously try to achieve certain desired goals and to avoid bad outcomes.

The need organizes the field

This proposition of Lewin's states that —

‘everything in the field is seen by the organism as important or not, from the standpoint of his or her own needs, depending on its perceived status as a potential help or obstacle in the satisfaction of those needs.’

Lewin arrived at this proposition on the basis of his experiences and observations in the First World War — he argued that a soldier on the battlefield will see what he needs (to see) at that moment. In gestalt theory, the ‘field’ is the dynamic interaction between an individual and his or her environment, consisting of the total situation at a given moment. This field is a complex network of relationships and interactions in which the human being and their environment are inextricably connected and mutually influence one another. It ultimately comes down to this: perception is not ‘receiving’ at all, but an active process — in which we ourselves are the meaning-giving factor. From there — and herein also lies the phenomenological ⁴ aspect of the gestalt view — we can state that there is no *absolute objective truth or reality*, but only a great diversity of *subjective perceptions*.

The aim of Gestalt therapy can accordingly be described as — *discovering the many aspects of our perceptual possibilities in order, from there, to arrive at a more adequate perception of the total relational situation*.

The paradox in formulating laws and principles — of perception, or as below of a field theory — is that they in turn influence our perception!

⁴**Phenomenology** comes from the Greek *phainomai*, meaning to appear. Edmund Husserl, the founder of philosophical phenomenology, seeks the ‘foundation for a well-grounded philosophy in the phenomena, in reality as it appears and presents itself to consciousness.’

Key principles of Gestalt field theory⁵

1. People cannot be understood in isolation, but only as an integral and interactive part of their socio-cultural background and physical environment.
2. The field consists of all the interactive phenomena of individuals and their environment, and all aspects of that field are potentially influential and interconnected.
3. Human behavior cannot be attributed to a single cause but arises from the interlocking forces of the field — or as a function of the organization or constellation of the field as a whole.
4. The field and the forces operating within it are constantly in motion. Individuals continually change their perception of the field as they organize and understand it differently, from moment to moment.
5. People actively organize and reorganize their perception of their circumstances (or field) by constantly making certain aspects of the field into figure (foreground), whereby others become (back)ground, and vice versa — the need or interest organizes the field.
6. In doing so, people give individual meaning to the events they experience.
7. In this way they contribute to the creation of their own circumstances or lived experiences (they co-create the field) and bear existential responsibility for their own lives, or at least for the meaning they give to their lives.
8. Human behavior and experience take place in the present, and a person's behavior can only be explained in terms of the current field.
9. If all aspects of the field are interconnected, then a change in any part of the field is likely to affect the whole field.

Conclusion

If we see the principles of gestalt field theory as a whole, rather than each principle separately, a perception of reality emerges that is above all practical. This pragmatism does justice to the phenomenology to which gestalt psychology is indebted, and to the conclusion that, on the basis of these principles, there can be no absolute truth. Does this somewhat

⁵*Developing Gestalt Counseling*, Jennifer Mackewn

answer the question of how knowledge arises? Yes, somewhat — because the development and qualitative improvement of our worldview is evident. What needs far more attention, in my view, is insight into how individual perceptions become a group, cultural, or national perception, and vice versa.

The question remains to what extent we can gain sight of individual — and group — perception at all. Perception, as we saw above, is a dynamic result of the interplay with the environment. From the expression of a perspective in our behavior, something can indeed be inferred about the active perspective of an individual or group, but that does not offer sufficient insight into the essence of the interaction with the environment. For that, we will have to make contact with the individual or group itself, in order, through dialogue, to shape that essence into a gestalt — a meaningful whole.



The Spiritual Path

Introduction to The Spiritual Path

The field in which I have done practical and theoretical research for decades I call ‘from personal development to spiritual liberation.’ It is the movement most seekers follow, starting with working on our self toward transcending our self.

Personal development can be described as the conscious process of self-improvement in which you work on your skills, mindset, and self-knowledge in order to realize your potential and function more effectively in various areas of life — think of Maslow’s concept of ‘self-actualization.’ This spectrum runs from low-threshold skills training to intensive, confronting therapy.

Spiritual liberation is the transcendence of our inherently limited self, with its inner limitations, illusions, and identifications that have arisen over our life course and that conceal your true nature — through which you experience a deeper freedom, peace, and connection with your essence; think of Maslow’s concept of ‘self-transcendence.’ The practical spectrum runs from training your mind through, for example, compassion practice, via meditation, to nondualistic non-meditation. Although our development can move seamlessly from the phase of personal development into that of spiritual liberation, this is not automatic. Where in the personal phase attention is directed mainly at working on and adjusting our self — for example toward more self-confidence and skill — in the spiritual phase attention is directed mainly at dismantling our deep-rooted identification with the limitations that have arisen within us on the emotional and mental level.

The phases can follow one another chronologically, but the reverse can also occur — starting with spiritual practice and then personal development through, for example, therapy, or in parallel. In my life, both have taken shape in parallel for a long time. The impetus for this was, 45 years ago, my start with the unique and innovative experiment in Poona, India, at the ashram of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. What was unique and innovative here was the integration of therapy forms arising from the human potential movement, such as Encounter,⁶ with dynamic forms of meditation.

⁶Encounter therapy was an intensive group therapy form from the 1960s–70s in which participants were encouraged, in marathon sessions, toward direct, uninhibited emotional

However your transition presents itself to you, it is important at all times to use your common sense and intuition. The transcendence of your self is not a skill you can simply set aside if it does not suit you. Transcendence intervenes in the foundation of your reality — your mind. Dismantling your identification with your limited self (ego) therefore demands realism, knowledge, care, attention, and compassion.

expression and confrontation with one another, aiming to achieve authentic contact and breakthroughs in personal blockages.

Spiritual Development Is Simple, but Not Easy

Our life largely consists of successive processes of development. Until we reach adulthood ($\pm$ 25 years), this happens more or less by itself; after that, development demands the necessary attention and effort. We know different areas of development, such as emotional, intellectual, relational, social, professional, societal, and also spiritual.

This last is probably the most stubborn. That is not only because of ‘false prophets’ — teachers who do not practice what they preach (such as a lack of integrity and forms of boundary violation), or who have too little knowledge and experience (such as New Age, the practice of Magical Thinking) — but above all also because of our own ignorance.

‘In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king’ is a well-known saying that aptly points to where the shoe pinches. We are all, by definition, ignorant at the start of our spiritual path. Besides our common sense and intuition, and possibly some knowledge, we have few means of distinguishing between authentic teachings and practices, and New Age and other limited directions.

These two — ignorance and limited sight — are a breeding ground for problems in our spiritual development. It is easy to see the parallel with our early childhood: at the beginning of our spiritual development as adults, we are just as dependent and vulnerable as we were during our development as a child.

We experience a strong survival drive, then — think of Maslow’s pyramid with its first stages of physical needs, and safety and security — but also now, as we arrive at the higher needs of self-actualization and self-transcendence. This deep need for meaning sends us searching for satisfaction, for answers to our life questions.

Blind trust is not an option

As in a large part of our life, we need others to find answers, to think things through with and to be understood by. This creative space for forming insight, however, is all too easily exploited by others — not to help us find our own answers, but to promote their own, often limited, ideas — the unavoidable tragedy of our youth. Limited because these ideas and instructions do not lead to our liberation, to an expanding perspective.

Because of our inherent dependency and ignorance, this influence cannot be avoided — we do, after all, need direction and inspiration to go our own way, just as before. But it is important, in this vulnerable phase, to prevent ourselves from taking unnecessary detours or getting stuck in a limiting perspective. And that we can now avoid. Blind trust, however, is not an option — we must be alertly present from the very start.

What helps to prevent this, and to be able to effectively distinguish between limiting and expansive perspectives, is adequate knowledge of the whole path of consciousness, or spiritual, development. The paradox here is that, since we do not yet know the path, we are also dependent on others for this Vision to show it to us. With all the risk that entails. Fortunately, there is enough information to be found in the existing knowledge of authentic contemplative traditions and Western developmental psychology to gain a reasonably reliable view of the Path.

Simple, yes; easy, no

The claim in the title of this chapter means that if you understand how the mechanism of consciousness development works, and you know and apply the theory and matching techniques, it is reasonably simple. It is not rocket science, although it is intellectually challenging — but a blend of trust, common sense, intuition, and resonance with your essence. What turns out not to be so easy at all for most of us, let us say difficult, however, is the practice of the spiritual path. And without this practice there is no spiritual path or consciousness development.

What it demands above all — something many of us also struggled with in our youth — is discipline and perseverance. This is often confused with willpower (just as with addiction it is assumed you will never overcome it without willpower), whereas it is mainly the combination of desire, insight, and motivation. Desire for liberation, insight into the Path (theory and practice), enthusiasm for the goal, and the motivation and discipline that arise from these, lead to realization.⁷

Structure and direction

By now I have been actively engaged with (my) consciousness development for more than 45 years, have had three spiritual teachers, completed several

⁷See the chapter From Insight to Realization for more detail.

trainings and studies, and have practiced throughout all those years, from meditation to Dzogchen (nondualism in Tibetan Buddhism). Over the past four decades I have worked with thousands of people, individually and in groups, to facilitate their autonomy and consciousness development.

I have brought together all this experience and knowledge in the model of the 4 Phases of Consciousness Development.⁸ The aim of this model is to offer a realistic guide, a reference for where you are in your own development, and what you can do to develop further. This overview helps you see what and who you need, when, and for what.

⁸See 'The 4 Phases of Consciousness Development' under the theme Consciousness Development.

Open Presence Is Spiritual Meaning

A fine column by Pieter Barnhoorn, ‘Human, dare to live (without a diagnosis)’ in de Volkskrant. It reminded me of an earlier column by psychiatrist Esther van Fenema, titled ‘Happiness is not a product, but a side effect of meaning.’ I wrote a commentary on it, ‘Making Meaning Is a Verb,’⁹ in which I noted that the opinion she formulated — ‘the growing unease calls for reflection, but above all for making meaning’ — spoke straight to my heart, but that she did not offer an answer.

Pieter Barnhoorn, too, observed that a large part of our apparent physical and mental complaints stem from a lack of meaning. He writes, ‘questions of meaning are spiritual questions. Whoever avoids those questions will sooner or later get biological or psychological complaints.’

Certainly, meaning belongs to the spiritual domain. But that does not yet solve the problem, because what is spirituality? Naming questions of meaning as spiritual questions is offering a synonym without explaining its meaning. In recent decades, unfortunately, the term spirituality has in any case become one of the most-used catch-all terms, encompassing all manner of movements that largely promise that if you use their perspective, techniques, or means, you will certainly become happy, healthy, and successful. And who doesn’t want that?

The umbrella term for this is New Age. Through this devaluation, authentic movements too — religions, worldviews, and other sources of meaning — have become suspect. Which, incidentally, stops few people from surrendering, without much consideration, to those sweet promises. Not surprising, since the pressure to make meaning (yes, a verb) is very great nowadays. On the one hand, the old segmentation into ‘bubbles of the like-minded’ is over, but now, through the internet and social media, a multidiversity of ‘bubbles of the like-minded’ has arisen anyway.

It has really not become any easier. By now, upbringing and environment — as a reasonably stable basis for meaning (meaning, you did not need to think about it much further) — have largely had their day, and there is an abundance of possibilities for meaning, or at least so we are led to believe by the strongly commercialized meaning-market.

⁹See this text under the theme Meaning.

The offer promises results (for why else would you start?), speed (short-term results), and usually with little effort. The trinity of liberal capitalism, populism, and marketing. In my experience and knowledge of the spiritual path, the result is indeed named (for example, being able to experience the world free of reactivity and conceptualizing), but it is clear that it costs a great deal of attention, discipline (study and practice), and time. So it is a long-term investment.

Making meaning thus demands commitment to walking a path of deepening, without guarantees of any result. Try finding that in a culture held together by quick fixes, short-term results, and as little suffering as possible. This last is perhaps the most important subject of meaning — why do we suffer? When all goes well and we are healthy and happy, we do not think we are suffering (Buddhists, incidentally, think quite differently about that), so we spend no time or attention on it.

But adversity is inevitable in a human life, so we would do well to prepare ourselves for it. How? By training our mind in attention, clarity, and compassion, for ourselves and for everyone else — we are all in the same boat. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki (1904–1971) taught us:

‘The only way to bear pain is to let it hurt.’

One way of making meaning we see in the Buddhist perspective, which points out to us that everything we go through and experience is material for training ourselves, for bringing our mind to rest, and for seeing how it is. Or, as I rephrased it for myself:

‘Whatever happens, face it, embrace it, and rest in what is.’

What, in my experience, most authentic spiritual traditions have in common is that the ultimate meaning, after a path of purification, lies in being optimally attentive and clearly present in the here-and-now. Resting in awareness, meaning-making left behind. Meaning is.

And that can easily take a whole adult lifetime of effort.

Does Surrender Lead to Liberation?

To be able to free ourselves from our structurally distracted mind, some form of transcendence is needed of who we (believe ourselves to) be, in order to arrive at a complete embracing — conscious, alert presence without any reactivity. In many spiritual and religious movements, surrender is seen as one of the most effective techniques. There are various forms, but a common one is surrender to a teacher, leader, or otherwise charismatic and inspiring figure.

Ecstasy

The idea is that this person serves as a catalyst to initiate the liberation we find so difficult to bring about ourselves. In this asymmetrical relationship, surrender — letting go of your attachment to your identity, ego, self — brings about an experience of freedom, and sometimes ecstasy. This, usually short-lived, experience of freedom and ecstasy is often confused with the stable and unchanging realization of the nature of the mind.

An article about Sadhguru ¹⁰ stated: “At the same time, surrender to the teacher brings about enormous ecstasy. Suddenly life gets a clear and distinct purpose.” This sentence reminded me of the remark by the philosopher Marc De Kesel: ‘When one surrenders to the charisma of the leader, that is not necessarily to become a better person from it: in the moment itself, it is pure pleasure to lose yourself in him,’ from his book *Het Münchhausen Paradigma*.

Experience is primary

In the article, based on an interview and a gathering with thousands of people, in which Casper Luckerhof tries to interpret the phenomenon ‘Sadhguru,’ ‘experience’ emerges, in my view, as essential. Experience, consisting of sensory information from body and mind, can be influenced. We have been trying that for centuries, from meditation to specific activities to the use of all manner of substances. Ecstasy is a strong, direct change of experience that is usually very much desired, and for which we have a deep longing, whether spiritual, relational, material, or sexual. An important aspect is the loss of control that occurs, or the ever-present urge for control

¹⁰Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (1957), or Sadhguru for short (“true guru”), is an Indian spiritual thinker, speaker, and author.

(a survival reflex) diminishing very strongly, which brings about an unprecedented experience of relaxation and acceptance of what is. Experiencing satisfaction is the absence of desire.

Cause and trigger

Nothing wrong with that. It becomes more difficult when the cause of the experience of ecstasy is attributed (cause instead of trigger) to the charismatic leader or guru.¹¹ If we do that, we end up in a dependency relationship that leaves room for all kinds of undesirable side effects of power inequality. We all know the examples.

The possible catalyst function of the teacher or guru then becomes counterproductive (regardless of the amount of satisfying ecstasy that occurs), because we place the cause of the surrender outside ourselves and do not recognize it as an inherent function of our own consciousness — to transcend our ‘self’ and realize the ever-present nature of our mind.

This phenomenon can occur regardless of the integrity of the teacher/leader, as soon as their behavior gives occasion to the projection of power. The one who projects remains responsible for their projection at all times, however strong the occasion in the other’s behavior may be!

¹¹This phenomenon is not exclusive to the spiritual domain — we unfortunately currently see it spreading across the whole world in the form of populism and fascism. Here the great leader, who claims to be our voice and will quickly solve all problems, plays an essential role. Unfortunately, these leaders do not lead us to the transcendence of our self, but to more (ego) suffering.

The Trinity of Spiritual Development

In my life, studying, reflection, and practice have become a common thread. In my early twenties I left for my first spiritual teacher, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, in India. Why, actually?

Until then I had, for years, had only traditional teachers, from kindergarten to the Art Academy I was attending at the time. For much longer already I had experienced dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, the consensus reality, as it had been held up to me by precisely all those people — and my parents, of course. My puberty and adolescence of rebellion and resistance had, almost unnoticed, turned into the realization that it was up to me to bring about the changes I wanted! Oh dear, now what?

I felt a deep, driving urge for space and freedom (lucky me), a longing I could barely put into intellectual terms. I did delve into philosophy, but that brought no adequate, experienceable answers. Now, after more than forty years of study, reflection, and practice, I still experience, in essence, that same intention, and that is what keeps me going with ever less effort — precisely also in periods of adversity.

Truth

The concept of truth has long played a large role in my research, study, and reflection. This is partly due to the meaning attached to it — knowing the truth would, after all, bring about freedom. After long hesitation, and facing a fundamental fear (what if I'm wrong?), I have come to see that the concept of 'The Truth' is in contradiction with what I experienced, saw, and studied over those years.

It has proven not to be a sustainable concept, and it does have unpleasant side effects. After all, until you have realized that particular Truth, you cannot check whether it is indeed of the promised quality and will indeed yield what you are looking for. In this way you remain dependent on the supposed vision of the other, and that is, with all respect, often how the spiritual teacher–student relationship is filled in.

Dismantling

More realistic than striving for the realization of The Truth — a hopeless mission — is the steady dismantling of everything that obscures 'that which is.' Precisely because we do not perceive the 'nature of the mind' ourselves,

we need others to draw our attention to it. Unfortunately, this often comes bundled with some form of ‘The Truth,’ which often stands in the way of direct recognition itself. Ken McLeod ¹² holds that the genius of Buddhist practice lies not so much in proclaiming Truths (of which there is no shortage), but precisely in dismantling our reaction patterns that arise from survival, attachment, and identity.

Attention, intention, and balance

To be able to truly free ourselves, regardless of the Path we follow, three things are necessary:

1. Attention — if you do not have a stable, clear awareness (trained), then you are at the mercy of all the impulses, thoughts, and emotions that pass by. Precisely, the source of all reactivity! This is a necessary condition for progress on your path.

2. Intention — is the inspiration you experience rather than think up in order to realize something (motivation is what you need to actually realize your goal, and to generate discipline). Without the right intention, the Path becomes leaden, if you even set out on it at all.

3. Balance — the capacity to cut through, the capacity to open, the capacity to see, and the capacity to let go, are all equally important and must remain in balance.

Ken McLeod here describes four essential capacities that together form the complete path of spiritual development:

Cutting through

refers to the capacity to cut through illusion, conceptual construction, and the stories we tell ourselves. This is the sharp, direct quality of insight that goes straight through self-deception and confusion — what in the Tibetan tradition is often associated with *prajña*, the sword of wisdom.

Opening

is the capacity to make yourself vulnerable, to let go of the armor of protection. Without this capacity, spiritual practice remains an intellectual

¹²Ken McLeod (1948) is a respected Western teacher, translator, and author in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

exercise. It requires the willingness to be touched by your experience, by others, by life itself.

Seeing

concerns clearly perceiving what is really there — not what you think should be there, or what you hope or fear. This is the contemplative capacity to be present with what presents itself, without immediately interpreting or reacting.

Letting go

is the capacity not to hold on to what you see or experience — not even to insights, not even to special experiences. Every experience, however profound, must be released again.

McLeod's point that they are all equally important is crucial: cutting through without opening becomes cold and distant; opening without seeing becomes sentimental; seeing without letting go becomes fixation; letting go without cutting through becomes avoidance. They work as an integrated whole.

Integration Exercises

Attention, intention, and balance

The text ‘The Trinity of Spiritual Development’ states that three aspects are a necessary condition for progress on the Spiritual Path. They are Attention, Intention, and Balance. Examine them using this exercise, and see what you need to do to facilitate your progress on your Path. Be honest with yourself and answer sincerely.

1. Attention — if you do not have a stable, clear awareness (trained), then you are at the mercy of all the impulses, thoughts, and emotions that pass by. Precisely, the source of all reactivity! This is a necessary condition for progress on your path.

1.a

To what extent are you able to perceive impulses, thoughts, and emotions without being distracted by them? And to what extent is this stable?

1.b

What training have you done, or are you doing now, to obtain a stable, clear awareness?

- Is this, in your experience, sufficiently effective and progressive? And what shows that to be the case?
- Is it necessary to use or add other techniques?
- If you have not yet done or are not doing any training, choose a form with which you can start training this, such as meditation and/or the first 5 attention exercises you find under Integration and Practice of the text Attention and Awareness.

2. Intention — is the inspiration you experience rather than think up in order to realize something (motivation is what you need to actually realize your goal, and to generate discipline). Without the right intention, the Path becomes leaden, and possibly counterproductive, if you even set out on it at all.

- With what intention are you walking the Path? Is your intention pure (your attainment is in service of others), or does it serve an ego goal — do you want to prove something, or show off?

- With what inspiration — teacher, tradition, philosophy — do you inspire yourself, and make sure your intention is, and remains, pure and effective?

3. Balance — the capacity to cut through, the capacity to open, the capacity to see, and the capacity to let go are, according to McLeod, all equally important. And they are fairly concrete actions you can use as reference points: to what extent do I master this? What needs more attention, and why?

3.a Cutting through

refers to the capacity to cut through illusion, conceptual construction, and the stories we tell ourselves. This is the sharp, direct quality of insight that goes straight through self-deception and confusion.

- If you recognize this capacity, describe what it looks like in practice. If you do not recognize it, look into it further, inform yourself.
- How do you cut through your self-deception and confusion? Give a few examples.
- How do you train this capacity in yourself?

3.b Opening

is the capacity to make yourself vulnerable, to let go of the armor of protection. Without this capacity, spiritual practice remains an intellectual exercise. It requires the willingness to be touched by your experience, by others, by life itself.

- If you recognize this capacity, describe what it looks like in practice. If you do not recognize it, look into it further, inform yourself.
- How do you open your self-protection so that you can be touched? How do you usually prevent this?
- How do you train your capacity for real contact with yourself, your surroundings, and life? Take stock of both formal practice and informal, spontaneous ways.

3.c Seeing

concerns clearly perceiving what is really there — not what you think should be there, or what you hope or fear. This is the contemplative capacity to be

present with what presents itself, without immediately interpreting or reacting.

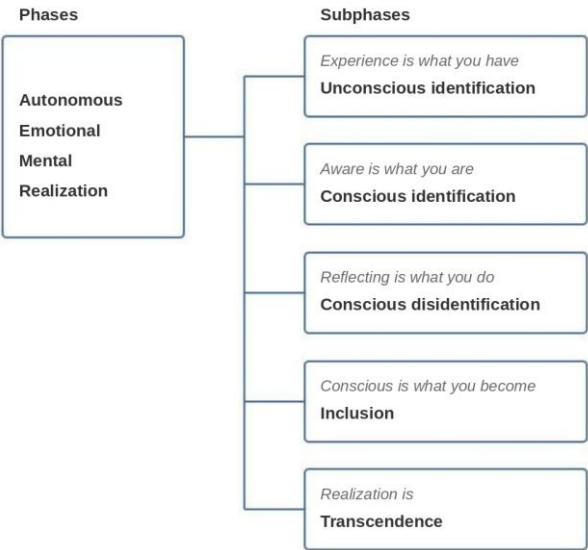
- If you recognize this capacity, describe what it looks like in practice. If you do not recognize it, look into it further, inform yourself.
- How do you perceive clearly, without immediately interpreting or reacting? Give a few examples.
- How do you train your capacity for clear seeing — perceiving what is really there? How do you prevent your projection of hope and fear?

3.d Letting go

is the capacity not to hold on to what you see or experience — not even to insights, not even to special experiences. Every experience, however profound, must be released again.

- If you recognize this capacity, describe what it looks like in practice. If you do not recognize it, look into it further, inform yourself.
- How do you let go? How do you overcome the tendency of attachment and aversion, of hope and fear, of addiction and allergy?
- What do you find especially difficult to let go of — possessions, people, ideas, beliefs and convictions, (bodily) experiences? Take stock and examine what exactly makes this hard to let go of. What hope and fear play a role here?

The 4 Phases of Consciousness Development



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12. Clear Light	Superconsciousness		Realization Phase		Dzogchen [nondualism]	Always-Already Truth nondual	
11. Ultraviolet	Overmind	Self-transcendence	Beyond the self	Waking Up States of Consciousness	Vajrayana		
10. Coral	Intuitive / Meta Mind						
9. Indigo	Illumined Mind Transglobal						
8. Super Integral global – holism	Higher Vision-Logic Higher/Global Mind	Self-actualization	Mental Phase Beyond thoughts		Mahayana	Causal conscious existence, subject-object dichotomy	
7. Integral systemic – synergy	Lower Vision-Logic Paradigmatic						Integral
6. Pluralistic Postmodern relativism / community	Pluralistic Mind	Self-esteem	Emotional Phase Beyond emotions		Hinayana	Subtle internal visions, auditions, mystical experineces	Pluralistic
5. Rational Modern strategic – success	Formal Operational Rational Mind						Rational
4. Mythic meaning – order	Concrete Operational Rule/Role Mind	Belonging		Growing Up Structures of Consciousness			Mythic
3. Power Gods egocentric – power	Preoperational Conceptual	Safety	Autonomous Phase Beyond dependency			Gross Physical food, money, sex	Magic
2. Magic Tribal clan – security	Preoperational Symbolic						
1. Archaic instinctive – survival	Sensorimotor	Physiological					Archaic
Spiral Dynamics	Piaget/Aurobindo	Maslow	Ramo de Boer	Ken Wilber	Tibetan Buddhism	Adi Da	Jean Gebser

Phases, Structures, and States of Consciousness

The figure above is one table; left and right belong together. I made this table years ago while preparing the book *Enlighten Your Life — From Personal Development to Spiritual Liberation*. That book has not yet been written, but I have already used its subtitle in the title of the Introduction to this book. It summarizes our entire potential consciousness development.

Over decades of study, practice, guiding, training, and writing, I have encountered multiple systems of Consciousness Development — traditional, contemporary, psychological, holistic, archetypal, Buddhist, philosophical, dualistic, and nondualistic. The models seemed to differ considerably, while in my perspective they were all mapping parts of the same spectrum.

Because they did so from different perspectives, fields, and disciplines, apparent differences arose, which did not make things any clearer. In my experience it is important that the compass by which you navigate on your Path of Consciousness Development be as clear and unambiguous as possible. A model is a representation of a reality, one we use here to navigate the unknown territory of our own mind, of our consciousness.

To examine how the models most important to me related to one another, I made this chart. At the same time I was able to place my own model of the ‘4 Phases of Consciousness Development’ among them, and see whether the Phases I distinguish in it could be found in the other models, and whether they had more or less the same content. Making this metamodel has given me a great deal of insight into our potential path of consciousness development.

You may already have enough background information or experience with one or more of these models to benefit from it on your Path.

My plan is to further elaborate, in that as-yet-unwritten book, my own model of the 4 Phases of Consciousness Development in relation to this model. Whether that book will ever be written, I do not know, but it is in any case my intention to make that deepening and clarification.