

Wilber's AQAL Map and Beyond

Rolf Sattler

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401—66 Greenview Drive
Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7M 7C5
E-mail: rolfsattler@beyondwilber.ca

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Prologue

I begin this book with an exposition of Wilber's innovative AQAL Map of the Kosmos (Like Wilber, I write Kosmos with a capital K to indicate that it refers not only to the physical cosmos but to all domains of existence from matter to spirit). It seems to me that Wilber's map is an excellent point of departure for a further exploration of new ways of thinking because it is very comprehensive and easily accessible, has been worked out in considerable detail, and has the potential to fundamentally affect in a very beneficial way all aspects of our lives and society (see, for example, his *Integral Operating System* [2005d] and *The Life Practice Starter Kit* by his Integral Institute [2006]). His map has, however, limitations. Many of these limitations have been pointed out by Frank Visser, Jeff Meyerhoff, M. Alan Kazlev, Hugh & Amalia Kaye Martin and others in Frank Visser's comprehensive website <http://www.integralworld.net> and elsewhere. In the first part of this book I focus on some of the most fundamental limitations and show how they can be overcome by new and old, even ancient, ways of thinking that have been ignored or neglected in Wilber's map.

In the second part of this book I present a new map in the form of a dynamic mandala that can be interpreted and transformed in many ways. Since each transformation is another mandala, this map is a mandala of mandalas, or a map of maps, or a set of maps, each of which can be interpreted in different ways. Since one of these transformations and interpretations is Wilber's map, his map is a special case of the more inclusive map of maps that integrates all the ways of thinking I present in the first part of this book.

Why are maps important? The function of a map is to guide us. If a territory is not represented on a map, it fails to guide us to this territory. For example, if Kingston in Ontario is not represented on a map, this map cannot help us to find Kingston. Similarly, if certain ways of thinking and being are not represented on a map, this map cannot lead us towards these ways. For example, if a map is based solely on either/or thinking, it cannot help us to discover Yin-Yang, continuum, and network thinking, and thus vast areas of thinking are excluded. Or if transpersonal states and stages are excluded in a map, this map fails to draw our attention to these important realms of being.

Now, since each single map is limited one way or another, a multitude of maps obviously is much more encompassing than any single map. One of the novelties this book offers is such a multitude of maps that are integrated in a dynamic map of maps or mandala of mandalas.

Conceiving and accepting a multitude of maps is important in many ways. It develops and cultivates in us a flexibility of thinking and being that brings us in tune with the fluidity of the Kosmos. It teaches us the art of letting go, that is, not clinging to only one view and experience, while resisting or rejecting other complementary views and experiences that can be enormously enriching and thus can create deeper understanding, tolerance, and peace in our world that is dangerously torn apart by antagonistic modes of thinking and being. In general, contemplation of the plurality of maps (that are mandalas) can lead to profound insights into ourselves, the world, the Kosmos, reality. And thus it can contribute to liberation from many misconceptions, misunderstandings, suffering, sickness, and can lead to a more profound happiness (see, e.g., H.H. The Dalai Lama and Cutler 1998).

Both Wilber's AQAL map and the mandala of this book acknowledge transpersonal states and stages in which the thinking mind has been transcended to reveal no-mind or Big Mind (that is beyond the thinking mind). At times we reach such states spontaneously, but more often through prolonged and regular contemplation and meditation. Contemplation of the mandala can lead us to its center, which represents the unnamable, the mystery of our personal existence and the Kosmos, or emptiness in the Buddhist sense (see, e.g., Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama 2005). Meditation can liberate us from the limitations of the fragmenting thinking mind—meditation in its various forms ranging from sitting to standing meditation, and from walking to dancing to laughing meditation.

In Western culture that has been so deeply entrenched in the mental, rational structure of consciousness, any attempt to go beyond the thinking mind is often met with suspicion, if not total condemnation. However, sages and seers, and even some philosophers and scientists, have always been aware of realms beyond the thinking mind. For example, Albert Einstein, the great physicist and philosopher, wrote: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science... To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness" (Einstein, quoted by Ravindra 2000).

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