

## Spiral Dynamics

### The Never-Ending Upward Quest

A *WIE* Editor Encounters the Practical and Spiritual Wisdom of Spiral Dynamics

An interview with **Dr. Don Beck**

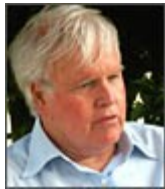
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#### Introduction



[Don Beck](#)

I think I'm beginning to see people as colors! Having just immersed myself for the past three months in Spiral Dynamics—an incisive and far-reaching theory of human development—I can say without exaggeration that Spiral Dynamics is, indeed, one of the major breakthroughs in mapping and managing complexity—that complexity being us. Our diverse worldviews, our beliefs, our very identities, represented by eight "memes," or value systems, which apply as much to individuals as to entire cultures. And, as I am discovering, this dynamic spiral-shaped model of human consciousness, with its hierarchy of color-coded memes, is literally coloring my perception.

I was at a friend's wedding and suddenly realized that I was seeing the BLUE (absolutist) meme in the conservatively-dressed woman wearing a crucifix, the ORANGE (achieivist) meme in the young go-getter with the Rolex, the GREEN (egalitarian) meme in the aging bearded hippie. And not only that—I'm beginning to see just how "GREEN" I am, with my longing for communal living and acceptance, my strong bias against corporations and political conservatives, and my passion for environmental causes, even though I am, admittedly, attached to driving my Audi (ORANGE), fast (RED—impulsive)!

Should I be worried? Am I typecasting other people, and myself, with these



apparently broad-brushed, color-coded characterizations called "memes"? Is the Spiral Dynamics model, comprised of these memes, simply a convenient way to avoid having to grapple with the complexity and diversity of human beings and the challenge to discern who we really are? On the contrary, I have been finding that, rather than a cold analytical detachment or one-dimensional perspective, Spiral Dynamics is giving rise to a profound clarity of insight into the sweeping patterns of human psychologies, beliefs, and values (including my own) that are, often unconsciously, guiding our choices and shaping our very identities. Spiral Dynamics is also resulting in an unexpected and liberating objectivity because it places my own experience in the context of the entire history of human psychological development, the totality of which is present in each of us—from the most primitive survivalist instincts (BEIGE) to evolved spiritual aspirations (TURQUOISE), with, in my case, a good dose of righteous eco-egalitarianism (GREEN) thrown in!

But why a spiral, you might ask? Spirals are a dynamic expression of natural and cosmic forces, a "dominant universal fractal" evident in everything from our DNA code to the spiraling galaxies that inhabit the universe. Spiral Dynamics posits that the evolution of human consciousness can best be represented in this way: by a dynamic, upward spiraling structure that charts our evolving thinking systems as they arc higher and higher through levels of increasing complexity. Certainly, human consciousness has dramatically increased in complexity over the span of millennia, as evidenced by our fast-paced highly interactive world. But, despite any illusions I may have about how far up the spiral I am in my technology-rich postmodern life, according to Spiral Dynamics, we human beings are only just emerging from the first great episode of human history—a 100,000-year epoch defined fundamentally by survivalism: the Spiral's "First Tier."

Dr. Don E. Beck has been developing, teaching, and implementing Spiral Dynamics for nearly three decades. Transmitting the genuinely inclusive or "integral" perspective that is the essence of the Spiral Dynamics model, Beck portrays the vast tapestry of global cultures with the care, insight, and easy familiarity with which one might speak about the members of one's extended family, each with their unique capacities and challenges. And this evolved humanitarianism conveys Beck's passionate and sincere conviction that Spiral Dynamics can resolve the immense challenges and responsibilities we face at this juncture in history.

Indeed, one could call Don Beck a philosopher-activist for the new millennium. As cofounder of the National Values Center in Denton, Texas, and President and CEO of the Spiral Dynamics Group, Inc., a global enterprise, he is, by his own definition, a "Spiral Wizard," employing the Spiral Dynamics model to effect large-scale systems change in and among various sectors and societies of the world. Together with Christopher Cowan, he wrote *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change* in 1996, which is based on and enhances the groundbreaking "Value Systems" theory of human development proposed by the late Professor Clare Graves. Beck's long consulting career has taken him to such diverse settings as 10 Downing Street, to meet with members of Tony Blair's Policy Unit; inner-city Chicago, to address the difficulties faced by educational institutions there; the World Bank, to address the future of Afghanistan; and the boardrooms of major banks, energy companies, airlines, and government agencies.

Don Beck has discussed racial issues with President Bill Clinton and deep reconciliation strategies with President Nelson Mandela, playing a central role in the peaceful creation of a democratic South Africa, for which he received a legislative honor in 1996 in his home state of Texas. More recently, he has joined forces with integral philosopher Ken Wilber and President of the Arlington Institute John Petersen, among others, to make Spiral Dynamics an even more powerful tool "for managing large-scale interventions, change, and transformation"—a new initiative called "Spiral Dynamics integral" (SDi).

Drawing from his vast experience, Dr. Beck illustrates why Spiral Dynamics is invaluable for anyone who sincerely recognizes the necessity for human transformation and global reconciliation at this critical and all-demanding period in history. And indeed, as one becomes familiar with Spiral Dynamics, it easily becomes apparent why this compelling theory is called nothing less than "a new definition of human nature [and of the] evolutionary significance of human intelligence."

Spiral Dynamics

### **The Eight-Stage Spiral of Development**

**Second Tier: "Being" valueMEMES**

#### **TURQUOISE Holistic MEME—starting 30 years ago**

*Basic theme: Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit*

- The world is a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind
- Self is both distinct and a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole
- Everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments
- Energy and information permeate the Earth's total environment
- Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions are to be expected

#### **YELLOW Integrative MEME—starting 50 years ago**

*Basic theme: Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become*

- Life is a kaleidoscope of natural hierarchies, systems, and forms
- The magnificence of existence is valued over material possessions
- Flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality have the highest priority
- Differences can be integrated into interdependent, natural flows
- Understands that chaos and change are natural

**"What I am proposing is that the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating, spiraling process, marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behavior systems to newer, higher-order systems as man's existential problems change."**

Dr. Clare Graves

**First Tier: "Subsistence" valueMEMES**

**GREEN Communitarian/Egalitarian MEME - starting 150 years ago**

*Basic theme: Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community*

- The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma, and divisiveness
- Feelings, sensitivity, and caring supersede cold rationality
- Spreads the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all
- Reaches decisions through reconciliation and consensus processes
- Refreshes spirituality, brings harmony, and enriches human development

**ORANGE Achievist/Strategic MEME - starting 300 years ago**

*Basic theme: Act in your own self-interest by playing the game to win*

- Change and advancement are inherent within the scheme of things
- Progresses by learning nature's secrets and seeking out best solutions
- Manipulates Earth's resources to create and spread the abundant good life
- Optimistic, risk-taking, and self-reliant people deserve success
- Societies prosper through strategy, technology, and competitiveness

**BLUE Purposeful/Authoritarian MEME - starting 5,000 years ago**

*Basic theme: Life has meaning, direction, and purpose with predetermined outcomes*

- One sacrifices self to the transcendent Cause, Truth, or righteous Pathway
- The Order enforces a code of conduct based on eternal, absolute principles
- Righteous living produces stability now and guarantees future reward
- Impulsivity is controlled through guilt; everybody has their proper place
- Laws, regulations, and discipline build character and moral fiber

**RED Impulsive/Egocentric MEME - starting 10,000 years ago**

*Basic theme: Be what you are and do what you want, regardless*

- The world is a jungle full of threats and predators
- Breaks free from any domination or constraint to please self as self desires
- Stands tall, expects attention, demands respect, and calls the shots
- Enjoys self to the fullest right now without guilt or remorse
- Conquers, out-foxes, and dominates other aggressive characters

**PURPLE Magical/Animistic MEME - starting 50,000 years ago**

*Basic theme: Keep the spirits happy and the tribe's nest warm and safe*

- Obeys the desires of the spirit being and mystical signs

- Shows allegiance to chief, elders, ancestors, and the clan
- Individual subsumed in group
- Preserves sacred objects, places, events, and memories
- Observes rites of passage, seasonal cycles, and tribal customs

**BEIGE Instinctive/Survivalistic MEME - starting 100,000 years ago**

*Basic theme: Do what you must just to stay alive*

- Uses instincts and habits just to survive
- Distinct self is barely awakened or sustained
- Food, water, warmth, sex, and safety have priority
- Forms into survival bands to perpetuate life
- Lives "off the land" much as other animals

Interview

Spiral Dynamics

**WIE:** *Dr. Beck, can you begin by explaining the basic concept of Spiral Dynamics?*

**DON BECK:** The concept of Spiral Dynamics is that human nature is not fixed; we're not set at birth. Rather, we have the capacities, in the nature of the mind/brain itself, to construct new conceptual worlds. So what we're trying to describe is simply how humans are able, when things get bad enough, to adapt to their situation by creating greater complexities of thinking to handle new problems.

**WIE:** *Can you elaborate on what seems to be our unique capacity to develop higher levels of thinking and cognition?*

**DB:** Spiral Dynamics is based on the assumption that we have *adaptive* intelligences, "complex, adaptive, contextual intelligences," which develop in response to our life circumstances and challenges—what Spiral Dynamics calls *Life Conditions*. What we're always focusing on are the causative dynamics created by the Life Conditions and then the kinds of coping mechanisms and collective intelligences that are forged in response to those conditions. These collective intelligences are what we call *memes*. \*

**WIE:** *You seem to be pointing to the evolutionary nature of human intelligence, which makes it possible for us to adapt to and survive our existential challenges, or "Life Conditions." Can you speak further about the evolutionary significance of "memes"?*

**DB:** Like genes, viruses, and bacteria, memes respond to the same basic principle in the universe, which is this concept of renewal, this regenerating capacity. Each successive meme contains a more expansive horizon, a more complex organizing principle, with newly calibrated priorities, mindsets, and specific bottom lines. It's a way of solving problems. It's a way of assigning priorities to what's most important and why, formed in response to the Life Conditions. And just like a biological DNA

code, which is a code that replicates itself throughout the body, a meme code is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual DNA-type script, a blueprint that spreads throughout a culture, and plays out in all areas of cultural expression, forming survival codes, myths of origin, artistic forms, lifestyles, and senses of community.

**WIE:** *So, you are saying that as humans adapt to their Life Conditions, this awakens new intelligences, or meme codes, which in turn shape the evolution of culture.*

**DB:** Yes. And cultures, as well as countries, are formed by the emergence of these memes, or value systems, which are the glue that bonds a group together, defining who they are as a people and reflecting the place they inhabit on the planet.

My longtime friend and colleague, the late Professor Clare Graves, sensed that there were deeper patterns in the evolution of human consciousness and identified eight levels of psychological and cultural existence, or value systems, which became the basis for the spiral model. The same principles or levels of existence apply as much to a single person as to an entire society. Graves involved thousands of people in his research and was constantly on the lookout for these deeper patterns, which, he argued, reflect different activation levels of our dynamic neurological equipment.

**WIE:** *Could you outline the spiral model with its hierarchy of eight memes, or levels of existence?*

**DB:** In the language of Graves, the spiral's "First Tier" is a set of six memes characterized by *existence* or *subsistence*. What that means is that we're more like animals than like gods and we have to deal with what are essentially earthbound existence problems. So the First Tier (BEIGE, PURPLE, RED, BLUE, ORANGE, GREEN) clusters together our "subsistence" or survival-level concerns, while the Second Tier (YELLOW, TURQUOISE) works to create healthy forms of all the First Tier systems in the context of an information-rich, highly mobile global community. While Graves identified eight levels of existence, with a ninth on the horizon, the Spiral is expansive, open-ended, continuous, and dynamic. There is no final state, no ultimate destination, no utopian paradise. It's a never-ending upward quest, with each stage but a prelude to the next, and the next, and the next.

**WIE:** *And what drives the evolutionary emergence of these stages, or memes, up the spiral?*

**DB:** Our crises, because they provide the inflection points and the benchmarks that trigger the shift up to the next level of human development. And each level of existence, or meme, is more like an emerging wave, a fluid living system, than a rigid hierarchical step. Once a new level appears in a culture, all of the previously acquired developmental stages remain in the composite value system. In Ken Wilber's language, each new social stage "transcends but includes" all of those that have come before. For this reason, the more complex thinking systems have greater degrees of freedom.

**WIE:** *Why do you use a spiral model to chart the emergence of these evolutionary stages of psychological and cultural development?*

**DB:** A spiral vortex best depicts the emergence of human systems, or memes, as they evolve through levels of increasing complexity. Each upward turn of the spiral marks the awakening of a more elaborate version on top of what already exists, with each meme a product of its times and conditions. And these memes form spirals of increasing complexity that exist within a person, a family, an organization, a culture, or a society. We all live in flow states; there is always new wine, always old wineskins. And you can see that this whole evolutionary process is working because we're still here, because we've been able to survive thousands and thousands of years of coping with what has been quite a hostile environment. So we have a wonderful species that has an innate capacity to renew itself. *That's* what makes us human.

**UNTIL RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN TOO CAUGHT UP** with the technological satisfactions and day-to-day demands of my fast-paced life to even consider what it's taken for evolution to produce, well, me! But thanks to the Spiral Dynamics model, with its evolutionary stages of development, the memes, it's starting to sink in: BEIGE instincts, PURPLE mysticism, RED self-assertion, BLUE conformity, ORANGE materialism, GREEN egalitarianism.... You see, the thing is, I can personally relate to all the memes. And that's how Spiral Dynamics makes human evolution real and makes it make sense. Because the stages of our entire evolutionary history are entirely present in me—a human being living at the threshold of the new millennium, and coincidentally, as I've discovered, at the threshold of the spiral's "Second Tier."

But wait—according to Spiral Dynamics, all the First Tier memes are fundamentally about survival, no matter how sophisticated they may look. Could I be in a merely survivalist mode of living, with my Audi, my cell phone, and my PalmPilot? Well, the fact that I've never really sat down to consider my evolutionary legacy is probably a sign that "making it through the day" is indeed absorbing most of my attention. But according to Spiral Dynamics, whether I'm consciously aware of it or not, the memes—these "complex adaptive contextual intelligences" that have developed over millennia—are my internal palette, coloring my perspectives and giving me the benefit of a spectrum of possibilities.

\*The concept of "meme" was first proposed in the mid-1970s by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who believed that the evolution of culture should be considered as independent from genetic or biological evolution. Dawkins' "memes" refer to specific "units of cultural transmission," examples of which could be songs, ideas, clothes fashions, to name just a few. However, in Spiral Dynamics, these are called "little memes." When Beck uses the word "meme," he is speaking about a "core value system," or "value meme." These act as "organizing principles" that express themselves through little memes and that are so central to the way we think that they can "reach across whole groups of people and entire cultures, and begin to structure mindsets on their own."

## The "Memes"

### BEIGE ■■■■

**WIE:** *The Spiral Dynamics model charts our evolutionary development beginning 100,000 years ago with the appearance of the first "level of existence," the BEIGE meme. What defines this first stage of human development?*

**DB:** BEIGE is a virtually automatic state of existence, driven by the imperative physiological needs that trigger the very basic survival equipment with which we are born. In its original form, starting 100,000 years ago, the BEIGE level of existence was the first step that made us human. It is humans simply struggling to survive in environments where there are other animals. Yet we are more sophisticated and seem to have more conceptual skills for bonding into protective clans to preserve what we have and fend off predators. The father in the survival clan eats first because if the strongest dies, the family has no hope. So, the key to BEIGE is survival using instinctive intelligences, with a more heightened sensory system with which we can see better, hear better—we can sense things with the hair standing on the back of our neck. Simply staying alive is more highly valued than anything else.

**WIE:** *Are there any remaining examples of BEIGE in the world today?*

**DB:** The only real BEIGE that exists today in its pristine condition is hidden away in Indonesia and parts of Africa. We've studied bushmen for some time, and it's quite clear that they have an uncanny ability to recall where the water is buried, and the ostrich eggs, and can sense weather changes. So we don't equate primitive with being primitive and "dumb" because there are possibly sixteen different senses, including a remote viewing capacity, that are activated at this level. But today, most of these senses have atrophied and have been overwhelmed by our more complex conceptual systems.

**WIE:** *Do Life Conditions sometimes force people to exist at the BEIGE level, even though they may not actually be primitive or represent the "pristine" form of this meme?*

**DB:** Oh, one can find pieces of BEIGE in street people who are basically hunter-gatherers, who get what they eat where they find it. You can certainly see it in the horrible conditions of extreme poverty in Somalia or Ethiopia, where it's a hand-to-mouth existence. And also, it's evident in newborn infants, who eat when they're hungry. And some people, when exposed to a catastrophe, may regress to BEIGE. Higher-order priorities suddenly vanish in the midst of personal tragedy, extreme suffering, or deprivation. There's a kind of emptiness, which is certainly fear-driven, because boundaries and expectations have suddenly dissolved and one is on one's own footing, living by one's own wiles. It's that feeling that we have when we have to do something entirely different, something that we've never done before and are not sure that we even can do. I think that after September 11, we saw some people temporarily go into BEIGE because the crisis put them in a very different psychological condition.



## PURPLE ■■■

**WIE:** *The second level up the spiral is PURPLE. What evolutionary developments characterize the shift from the primitive existence of BEIGE to this next level of existence, the PURPLE meme?*

**DB:** PURPLE is animistic, tribalistic, and mystical. In this world of PURPLE, we tend to have the first evidence of human bonding—the sense of a kindred spirit, that "I'm someone because I belong to a certain clan or certain tribe." During the Ice Age, the world became overpopulated. There were more humans per acre than there had ever been before. We had clans in the BEIGE system beginning to bump into other clans, with a sense of competition for niches starting to appear. Suddenly a clan, which is loosely structured, solidifies into a tribe of, say, four to five hundred people, so that the previous clan can now survive in the midst of competition with other clans. So one of the Life Conditions changes that led to the shift from BEIGE to PURPLE had to do with territoriality and access to resources.

Now, at the same time, a mutation occurred to awaken in the brain the first real ability to assign cause and effect. This was the first sense of the metaphysical. In the BEIGE mind, events seem to be scattered, each one unto itself, without much predictability. But, for example, in Africa, if the moon is full and the cow dies, the PURPLE mind connects the two events, one causing the other. So the awakening of the metaphysical system, together with the capacity to work more firmly in a team arrangement, occurred in the transition from the Dawn People (BEIGE) to the Mystical People (PURPLE), precipitated by the changing Life Conditions that occurred during the Ice Age, about fifty thousand years ago.

**WIE:** *It seems that the emergence of the capacity for bonding and working together, would literally improve one's chances for survival.*

**DB:** You're absolutely right. Literally. And because these stages of existence, or meme levels, represent bio-psycho-social systems, they indicate the evolutionary emergence of biological and physical capacities and abilities. For example, we know that the level of the brain chemical oxytocin, which has various health-giving benefits, is higher when humans eat in a group. And so eating together, breaking bread together, feasts of various kinds, all raise the oxytocin level in the brain and improve survival. Another thing that developed at this time was whatever it is in the brain that chemically enables the person to hear inner voices, the voices of spirits. The PURPLE meme is heavily laden with such so-called right brain tendencies as heightened intuition, emotional attachments to places and things, and a mystical sense of cause and effect. I have a well-developed PURPLE sense myself, having spent so much time with the Zulus in sacred places.

## RED ■■■

**WIE:** *With its tribes and rituals, PURPLE seems to have been quite a leap from the primitive existence of BEIGE. How did the next meme level of the spiral—RED—arise out of PURPLE, and what are its defining characteristics?*

**DB:** In the RED zone, we have the first raw, egocentric self. *I am somebody*. Beginning approximately ten thousand years ago, what began to cause the change in Life Conditions that led to RED were not failures, but rather successes. In PURPLE we had become very successful. We had found food, we had stabilized our lifestyle, we had conquered what we thought were the dragons in our life. Everything was smooth, boring. So many of the youth became discontented. They saw that there was something about their essence that, rather than being protected, was being contained, limited. Then RED strides forth. Now we have an elite individual beginning to move away from the bonding element in PURPLE, which had become overplayed. So what PURPLE produced, through its success, was the need for strong individuals who ascend to power, who dominate, for example, in a military environment where we don't have the time to vote whether or not to "take yon hill." What begins to spring free is the assertion of raw self—the renegade, the heretic, the barbarian, the go-it-alone, the power-self, the hedonist.

**WIE:** *It's more difficult to see the positive attributes of the RED meme. PURPLE definitely seems more appealing to me, with its emphasis on human bonding and the sense of the metaphysical.*

**DB:** There are both positive and negative expressions to all the memes, including RED. In RED, we see high crime rates, we see all kinds of rage and rebellion, but we may also see wonderful spurts of creativity, heroic acts, and the ability to break from tradition and chart a whole new pathway. And RED rebellion and impulsiveness could only happen because PURPLE, through bonding, stabilized things. And also, RED was a rebellion against the rituals and sacrifices forced on the youth by the PURPLE system, in painful rites of passage, for example. So that's why RED follows PURPLE, and why PURPLE set the stage for RED.

This is very important—I want you to see the interconnection. Memes are not free-floating entities. RED is not better than PURPLE. It's different. So you have to ask, first and foremost, what are the Life Conditions? If the Life Conditions require you to be strong and self-assertive, or to fight your way out of a horrible situation, then the RED meme is the way to be. RED is not an aberration, but a normal part of the human meme repertoire. This perspective is fundamental to Spiral Dynamics: you accept that the memes do not represent a hierarchy of "better," but rather that each can be expressed in a positive and negative way, and that the whole spiral with its assortment of meme codes is inside the person and may be called upon in response to the demands of their changing Life Conditions.

## **BLUE** ■■■■

**WIE:** *And now to the fourth meme level of the spiral. Could you begin by speaking about the Life Conditions problems produced by RED individualism and egocentrism, which ultimately required a shift up to the next level, BLUE?*

**DB:** In BLUE there is a search for a transcendent purpose, a recognition of the importance of order and meaning, a universe controlled by a single higher power. Society could no longer function with the constant presence of RED, with its war-like, gang-like, warlord-like entities, so we have to grow up, to solve the problems created

by RED success. Here for the first time is the capacity to feel guilt (RED feels shame, but not guilt). In the BLUE system, people gladly accept authoritarianism and self-sacrifice for the common good.

When BLUE first develops, it has to handle RED. And that's why in the Old Testament you have such punitive measures as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." If there is a heavy RED component, then you have, in religious systems and legal systems, the very heavy punitive form of BLUE. It's designed to address the threat of RED, so as long as the RED threat is there, the punitive expression of BLUE will continue to exist. But as BLUE moves away from having to contain the violence in RED, it goes on its life cycle toward its own healthier version, taking the form of more institutionalized systems, in which righteousness, discipline, accountability, stability, perseverance, and order prevail.

What also seems to occur in the brain is a heightened capacity for abstraction, and that abstraction ability attaches itself to a cause, *a cause célèbre*, an "ism"—for example, the Buddhist's Eightfold Path, or the idea of Islam, which are both abstractions. So once again, we're into a metaphysical zone, but this time the PURPLE spirits are organized into "a mighty fortress is our God ..." And thus we have the birth of monotheism and Zoroastrianism and all the "isms" that suddenly started emerging about five thousand years ago. And while they had different content, the mode of thinking for all of them was identical.

**WIE:** *I had never considered the world's religions from that point of view, that despite differences in "content," they are expressions of the same evolutionary stage of development.*

**DB:** Yes, because these meme codes are like a blueprint, or like magnets. The meme code we designate "BLUE" finds a transcendent purpose. What is that transcendent purpose? It could be Buddhism, or Judaism, or Islam. These religious expressions are what that meme code has attached to as a way to express itself. Therefore we can have holy wars between "isms," both of which are in the BLUE code. Because there's a difference between the surface-level manifestations of a core value system, or meme, and the core system, or meme code, itself.

## ORANGE ■■■■■

**WIE:** *How does institutional, disciplined, absolutist BLUE give rise to the ORANGE meme, the fifth level of the spiral model?*

**DB:** ORANGE is about advancement, improvement, and progress. Once again, you play out the BLUE theme to its ultimate. You make it very, very successful. And then what happens? The individual gets restless. "But I'm an individual. I want to assert my personal autonomy." "No," BLUE says. "You must stay in line and conform to the dictates of the system. Don't you want to go to heaven? Don't you want to have a retirement?" And ORANGE says, "Yes, but I think I can produce a heaven on earth. I think I can increase the size of the cake." Thus we had the great Enlightenment, which is simply the individual spirit breaking free from what had become very restrictive forces.

Now the BLUE system, when it first appeared, was relevant, was necessary. But ORANGE individualization began to appear about three hundred years ago, when the sacred leaders became too punitive and also became discredited because they could not protect people from the plagues. And thus we had the birth, thank goodness, of the scientific method. We also had a growing belief in optimism, in changeability—a belief that we can indeed shape our future, that we are the stewards of the universe and therefore have dominion over it. We can carve out a good life for ourselves. And again, some fascinating things happened in the European brain that seemed to occur for the first time in the 1700s—the mathematical sense, the sense of cadence, the linear sense that made possible written music, that made possible quantification and measurement. These classical left brain capacities uniquely developed in the Western brain in the ORANGE system. That entire wonderful movement is begrudgingly classified as "Western," but that's really what it is.

**WIE:** *It's refreshing to hear you speak about ORANGE in these terms, because I was reflecting on the many negative effects of this particular meme, for example, the ecological devastation that ORANGE industrialization has given rise to.*

**DB:** That is why we have to look at three things: the Life Conditions, the meme code itself, and the way that meme code is being expressed in a certain context. If we don't like capitalism or consumerism, which are *expressions* of the ORANGE meme code, it's not the same thing as the meme code itself, which is the capacity to engineer things, to make things better. The creativity and ability to engineer that are inherent in that same ORANGE meme code can now be used to clean up the environment. That's why we can't afford to bash any of these memetic systems. We can challenge a manifestation of it, but without the ORANGE thinking system, we couldn't solve medical problems, we couldn't figure out how to clean up the water or the air, and we would sink back to the myth and mysticism of BLUE. I don't think anybody wants that to happen.

## **GREEN** ■■■■

**WIE:** *The GREEN meme is the final level of the spiral's First Tier. Can you speak about the GREEN meme, how it emerged out of ORANGE and the role it plays in human emergence up the spiral?*

**DB:** At its peak, GREEN is communitarian, egalitarian, and consensual. Without ORANGE we wouldn't have GREEN, because in ORANGE the inner being was bypassed and ignored. Our science left us numb, without heart and soul, and with only the outer manifestations of success. The "good life" was measured only in materialistic terms. We discover that we have become alienated from ourselves, as well as from others. So GREEN, this fairly recent memetic code, began emerging about 150 years ago, out of the Ages of Industry, Technology, Affluence, and Enlightenment, to declare that in all of these undertakings, the basic human being has been neglected. The focus shifts from personal achievement to group- and community-oriented goals and objectives—for GREEN, we are all one human family.

GREEN begins by making peace with ourselves and then expands to looking at the dissonance and conflicts in society and wanting to make peace there, too, addressing

the economic gaps and inequities created by ORANGE, and also by BLUE and by RED, to bring peace and brotherhood so we can all share equally. Gender roles are derigidified, glass ceilings opened, affirmative action plans are implemented, and social class distinctions blurred. Spirituality returns as a nondenominational, nonsectarian "unity."

**WIE:** *And since GREEN is the final meme level of First Tier, it must be preparing us to make the transition up to the "Being" levels of the spiral's Second Tier.*

**DB:** Yes, because what GREEN has accomplished, in a very positive sense, is the cleansing of the spiral, declaring an equality of all the different experiences of life. It weakens the control of BLUE and ORANGE, allowing the PURPLE and RED indigenous people to have their place in the sun and their time on CNN. It works, you see, to find equality and sameness and sensitivity. And it is doing so for a very good purpose: because without GREEN, we could not go to YELLOW and Second Tier.

**AM I GREEN? WELL, AM I A GOOD EXAMPLE** of someone who's environmental, egalitarian, sensitive, spiritual, open-minded, and culturally aware? You better believe it! Has being GREEN given rise to a passion for spiritual transformation (YELLOW/TURQUOISE)? Yes. Has my GREENness also seriously impeded spiritual transformation? Absolutely! It all started with my very GREEN parents—cultured, intellectual, left-wing types. Both Ph.Ds. Both teachers. They divorced when I was six. At that time divorce was rare—I came from the only "broken family" on the block. In fact, both sets of grandparents—divorced too—were also well ahead of their time. A photograph of my father in an anti-Vietnam War demonstration appeared on the front page of the New York Times in 1970. My first experience of smoking marijuana was with him—he grew it! My mother always complained bitterly about Republicans (BLUE/ORANGE), as well as about my father. She worked with young children, many of them disadvantaged. She was their tireless advocate and railed against the schools that consigned them to failure.

In my family, there was more than a fair bit of indulgent, narcissistic behavior (RED) and not a whole lot of discipline (BLUE). Sometimes, I wistfully imagined growing up with the neighbors—one particularly close-knit family who were regular church-goers (definitely BLUE). I longed for some structure and role-modeling, but then quickly felt suffocated by the thought of it. My musings concluded with choosing the family I had. In the end, despite the lack of cohesion and, dare I say, character, I somehow sensed that my family set me on a road of more open-ended possibility. And it was true. My spiritual journey started young, fueled by my parents' evolved appreciation of things cultural, humanitarian, and philosophical. I grew up reading the theologian Martin Buber, the existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the novels of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce. And now, in my forties, on the path of transformative spiritual possibility (Second Tier)—thanks in large part to the early inspiration they gave me—I'm also beginning to realize that growing up GREEN can have its downside, and that my spiritual path is strewn with the wreckage of that legacy: narcissism, arrogant individualism, and a resistance to hierarchy and authority.

But getting back to my family, now that I think about it, all this GREENness actually

started with my grandmother. On cold rainy days, she would comment: "Jessica, this is Nixon weather—nasty and rotten!"

### **The "Mean Green Meme"**

**WIE:** *Dr. Beck, my memetic "center of gravity" is most certainly in GREEN. And I'm not alone: the GREEN meme is both the leading edge of Western culture at this time and is for many, like myself, the dominant conceptual and psychological paradigm. As I have learned, each meme, including GREEN, has both its positive and negative manifestations. So what I would like to know is how the GREEN meme is currently creating Life Conditions problems that we must respond to in order to evolve up the spiral.*

**DB:** As I said, GREEN is an essential step to YELLOW and Second Tier, but it's so expensive—it absorbs rather than contributes.

**WIE:** *Why do you say that GREEN is expensive?*

**DB:** Because it is expensive to provide for everyone without requiring some kind of contribution other than being present for the handout. Most noble "Great Society" programs have not worked, and those who have tried socialism as their version of GREEN are finding that that is not the answer either.

**WIE:** *And what do you mean when you say GREEN "absorbs rather than contributes"?*

**DB:** It uses the resources that ORANGE has built, but because it dislikes ORANGE, it backs away from growth. Growth and consumption are bad. It wants to use resources already available and redistribute them so everybody can catch up. GREEN is a wonderful system, but ironically, it assumes that everyone enjoys the same level of affluence that *it* has.

**WIE:** *I certainly recognize that in my own experience: my high standard of living allows me to be very self-satisfied and very egalitarian, all at the same time!*

**DB:** Right. Only those people who have been successful in ORANGE—who have good bank accounts, who have some guarantee of survival, who don't have the wolf at the door—will begin to think GREEN. But unfortunately, when GREEN starts launching these attacks on the BLUE and ORANGE meme levels—the nuns with rulers and the fat cats in corporate suites—it's like a person who climbs to the top of a house and then throws down the ladder that got him up there.

**WIE:** *What effects are we seeing from the negative expression of the GREEN meme?*

**DB:** Unhappily, what this negative version of GREEN does is to destroy the capacity of ORANGE and BLUE social and economic systems to actually *address* the gaps that GREEN itself has identified. It destroys ORANGE economic structures. And it also destroys BLUE authoritarian systems, which are necessary to control RED, as we

can see all too clearly in the example of Zimbabwe today. It therefore becomes counterproductive. It makes things worse. It relieves RED of the responsibility to learn discipline and purpose in BLUE-ORANGE, because it loves the indigenous people but tends to read into them greater complexity, as it sees them as "noble savages." And in destroying the authoritarian, purifying systems in BLUE and ORANGE, there's the flooding of the RED undisciplined, egocentric, impulsive behavior into the GREEN zone, both in one's self and in societies. And it is this unhealthy meshing of RED and GREEN, in which strong egocentric narcissism combines with pontifications about humanity and equality, that becomes the breeding ground for what Ken Wilber and I call the "Mean Green Meme," or "boomeritis," so called because the boomer generation was the first to enter the GREEN meme *en masse*.

**WIE:** *Ken Wilber's book, Boomeritis, certainly made me realize that I was, indeed, infected with this postmodern "virus"!*

**DB:** You see, the whole idea of the "Mean Green Meme" is a rhetorical strategy. Ken and I asked: How do we uncap GREEN? How do we keep it moving? Because so much of it has become a stagnant pond, in our view. So we said, let's invent the Mean Green Meme. Let's shame it a bit. Let's hold up a mirror and show it what it's doing, with the hope that it will separate the Mean Green Meme from legitimate healthy GREEN. Let's expose enough people to the duplicity and artificiality and self-serving nature of their own belief systems around political correctness to finally get the word out that there's something beyond that. It is a drastic measure, a rhetorical strategy to create a symbol that will hopefully give people an understanding that what they are doing is actually destroying the very thing they want to accomplish.

**WIE:** *What are the spiritual and psychological implications of the Mean Green Meme?*

**DB:** GREEN starts with the search for self. "I want to get to know myself. I want to deal with the hidden child in me. I want to make peace, I want to find tranquility." So I go into a sensitivity training session, where I get feedback; I go downward, inward, to look at all my life experiences and try to remove the guilt. GREEN hates guilt. And it wants to deal with the rage, from what happened to it, as a victim. But GREEN is a relativistic system. And much of GREEN is so naive, thinking, "All people are good people. It's society that makes them bad. There are no bad people! There is no evil. That's all a myth. Everyone is going to love us." Well, September 11 was a wake-up call, and for the first time GREEN began to see the ugly face of RED/BLUE. Ever since that point, a lot more people are becoming interested in the work we are doing.

**MY MOTHER WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR A NOT INSIGNIFICANT NUMBER** of transcendent moments in my life, mostly associated with music and dance. She frequently took me to New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, often to see the Russian dancer, Natalia Makarova. Makarova's interpretations of the great balletic works were so sublime, so transcendent, they brought you to tears. In the final moment of a particularly extraordinary performance of Romeo and Juliet, the entire audience—perhaps four thousand people—simultaneously rose in one collective expression of awe. It was nothing less than a spiritual experience. My mother turned to me and said, "Jess, you are witnessing the greatest dancing that ever

was, and maybe ever will be."

But the legacy of my unstructured GREEN upbringing is one of contradiction: high aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities married to the narcissistic need for security and emotional affirmation. It's the kind of situation that leaves you at odds with yourself, and you don't quite know why. By fourteen or fifteen, the gnawing hunger that had been floating in my experience for quite some time was magnetized to something outside myself: guys. Could relationship bring ultimate fulfillment? I certainly hoped so, and I definitely gave it a good shot—actually, a lot of shots.

Soon after turning thirty, I met my first spiritual teacher, a Korean Buddhist monk. One afternoon he said to me, "Jessica, everything about you is beautiful, except your choice in men." After a long line of relationships, I couldn't help but acknowledge the truth of the second half of that sentence, and the first half really appealed to me. A powerful yogi, he had unusual healing and intuitive abilities (PURPLE). "I'm the best health insurance you can have," he reassured me. "I can cure you of anything." Talk about security. I wanted it! Plus, I could learn how to meditate and be spiritual too. The perfect combination. Early one morning, practicing the meditation technique he gave me, high up in the mountains of South Korea, all my thoughts suddenly dropped away, and what was left was the unconditional Oneness of everything. As time went on, he suggested I move to Korea, begin long-term training at his monastery, and become ... a nun (BLUE). A nun? Those experiences of Oneness had revealed the true nature of things. Korea was fascinating and colorful. I was captivated by this teacher's unusual abilities and powers. But becoming a nun was quite a leap. I got cold feet. Was it my unstructured liberal upbringing (GREEN) with its narcissistic impulses (RED) that made me feel stifled by the prospect of this lifelong commitment (BLUE), even if it was spiritual? I couldn't tell, but one fateful day in Seoul, after much soul-searching, I decided to look elsewhere for a path to Second Tier.

### **Life Conditions**

**WIE:** *You said earlier that new intelligences—new meme levels—are formed in response to our Life Conditions. No one can deny that the Life Conditions that now confront us as a global human community are more challenging and dangerous than those of any previous moment in history. Could you speak about these Life Conditions and the role they play in our next evolutionary transition?*

**DB:** What seems to have happened in our lifetime, for good or ill, is that we have learned the basic codes and principles of life itself. We are confronted with mind-blowing choices—everything from shaping natural habitats to gene splicing to using science in various ways to alter the human experience. I don't think any of us realize yet what that's going to mean. So we're now in this position: we act like gods. We can change the future, and we have never before had this capacity as a species. So once again, we find that, not through our failure but through our success, we are confronted with extremely dangerous conditions.

And furthermore, power in the form of nuclear weaponry developed in the more complex ORANGE meme, which has the stabilizing influence of the previous BLUE code in it, is now under the control of a RED meme that has no BLUE influence, no discipline and accountability, no sense of the potential for mutual destruction that emerged in ORANGE along with that particular technological development. RED has



a short time-frame about power and that's one hell of a problem. That is, is it not, one of the primary risks that we face as a species.

**WIE:** *Adding to this pressure is the fact that life is changing at an ever-increasing rate. The quote I'm about to read you, by inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil, conveys the enormous change that we, as humans, are both precipitating and simultaneously trying to adapt to:*

Centuries ago, people didn't think that the world was changing at all. Their grandparents had the same lives that they did, and they expected their grandchildren would do the same, and that expectation was largely fulfilled.... What's not fully understood is that the pace of change is itself accelerating, and the last 20 years are not a good guide for the next 20 years. We're doubling the paradigm shift rate, the rate of progress, every decade. This will actually match the amount of progress we made in the whole 20th century, because we've been accelerating up to this point. The 20th century was like 25 years of change at today's rate of change; and the next 25 years we'll make four times the progress you saw in the 20th century. And we'll make 20,000 years of progress in the 21st century, which is almost a thousand times more technical change than we saw in the 20th century.

[Leap into the Future: Andrew Cohen and Don Beck on Authentic Leadership](#)

**DB:** Oh, that's an awesome quotation. But it assumes that our biological genetic systems have the complexity of codes in them to support that amount of change that quickly. There is already beginning to be some doubt in the minds of those who study our immune system as to whether or not we actually have a capacity to handle the complexity that's being demanded of us, even physically. So that quote presumes an organism that is able to assimilate that amount of change. I don't know if that's the case. I do know that today we are subjected to *unbelievable* change because there are billions of people who, from my perspective, are passing through different layers and levels of the spiral simultaneously. So rather than our species moving in a singular advance along a horizontal line, it turns out that multiple changes are happening up and down the spiral. Many are now moving into zones that we vacated three hundred years ago.

Then you add in other things, like the impact of the microchip. Furthermore, as we learn more about ourselves in studies of molecular biology, we are uncovering the so-called mystery of our genetics. We can do cloning; we can do gene splicing—but what if we mess it up? What if we release biogenic agents, or bugs, that attack all carbon life? When we begin to play around with the deepest codes in our biology, no one can foresee what the flutters of little butterfly wings\* in Chaos Theory will produce down the line. That's why there's so much stress on us, which also means we might be looking for new organizational forms—more ensembles of people—because no single person is going to be able to keep all these things in mind.

**WIE:** *Evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris has said that "stress is the only thing that causes evolution." Is there a relationship between the increasingly greater levels of stress we are experiencing in our current Life Conditions and the potential for a significant percentage of us to evolve up the spiral?*

**DB:** Well, evolution does take crisis. It does take wake-up calls. But that, in and of itself, does not guarantee there will be upward movement. If the Huns are at the gate,

literally, for people, or if they're suddenly under threat of losing their job because of downsizing or economic collapse, the energy and the capacity for more complex thinking actually begin to erode, and an earlier, or lower, priority suddenly dominates.

So in addition to the crisis, there has to be some stability in the basic memetic systems. And there has to be the capacity to create new conceptual systems, because just being exposed to problems may regress the whole society. This is exactly what happened in Zimbabwe, which was a very richly endowed place. Now there is the virtual starvation of millions there. That's why stress in itself is not the key. As Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigogine would say, when previous systems start to dissipate, we reach that zone where there will either be an upsurge to a more complex system or a downshift to a less complex one. It happens in that critical zone, that tipping point. Though stress crises are certainly necessary to break out of a memetic paradigm, that in and of itself is no guarantee that we'll make the kind of emergence that is necessary. So far, we have.

**the MEMES:** worldviews and realities

**TURQUOISE MEME**

An elegantly balanced system of interlocking forces

**YELLOW MEME**

A chaotic organism forged by differences and change

**GREEN MEME**

A human habitat in which we share life's experiences

**ORANGE MEME**

A marketplace full of possibilities and opportunities

**BLUE MEME**

An ordered existence under the control of the ultimate truth

**RED MEME**

A jungle where the strongest and most cunning survive

**PURPLE MEME**

A magical place alive with spirit beings and mystical signs

**BEIGE MEME**

A natural milieu where humans rely on instincts to stay alive

A Spiral Wizard at Work

**I MADE OVER SIXTY-THREE TRIPS** to South Africa between 1981 and 1999, launching the South African initiative first called "Strategic Evolution." During that

period, my basic role was to reshape the definitions the various sectors of society were using to stereotype each other, replacing the usual racial/ethnic categories with an understanding of these value system or memetic differences, all of which were alive in that global microcosm. The complexity of the South African situation had been simplified down to what is morally right or wrong along race lines, and that was a grave mistake. Much sympathy was lavished on the black "struggle," and rightfully so. But getting rid of what they didn't want—apartheid—was not the same thing as getting what they did want—a just and prosperous society. In the final analysis, a black, one-party-state doctrinaire nationalism (as in Zimbabwe today) would be no better than an Afrikaner version of the same.

So, rather than attack the Afrikaners and their rather rigid, exclusive belief system around race, I simply challenged them to develop technology and agriculture in Africa—as their highest calling. As Franklin Sonn, the South African ambassador to the United States, said, my work "helped educate white people that there was a life, and even a life abundant, beyond apartheid." To get this message out, I appeared on television, on radio, at academic institutions, and in open sessions all over the country. A series of six articles of mine, which appeared in all the South African newspapers in April of 1989, was influential in convincing Afrikaner political leaders in Pretoria to release Nelson Mandela and start the peace process.

But I paid a heavy price and was severely criticized for my work in South Africa. Clare Graves had warned me to plan for a personal attack from the GREEN egalitarian system for even being in South Africa in the first place, "selling out to the white, racist, apartheid regime." I was advocating a different solution than what GREEN demanded, which was the instant redistribution of power because, according to GREEN, the only reason for the gap in development between European and African was blatant racism. The unhealthy expression of GREEN egalitarianism is to "deconstruct" the BLUE and ORANGE social, economic, and political architecture since that alone is supposedly the cause of human suffering. But those in the "struggle industry" had little idea of the scorched earth they were to inherit if their tactics for disinvestment, sanctions, and Western isolation were to succeed. In fact, sanctions cut both ways. Jobs were lost, never to return. The medical establishment was severely crippled. Much of the essential infrastructure disintegrated. Many good people with high skill levels have left the country and, alas, the AIDS pandemic is sweeping the *veldt*. I think there was a much better way to transform that whole society in a healthy fashion, and many who backed sanctions in South Africa have told me they now realize what deep and permanent damage was done to the country.

I believe that if they started over again, South Africans would do a number of things differently. And yet, the fact that the society emerged without a civil war is simply remarkable. But to me, apartheid was not the problem; it was a symptom of the inability to figure out the meshing of European and African modes of thought, to stitch together a new South African fabric. I went to South Africa because I believed that something entirely different, yet just and democratic, was waiting to be discovered, managed by new, more complex levels of thinking that would appear, driven by the Life Conditions they all faced together. If the social mosaics could successfully work together for the common good, I believed that South Africans could point the way for the true integration of the entire planet. I felt that if I could discover the nature of the deep conflict, perhaps I could work behind the scenes in empowering

them to bridge their own great divides. There were many, many South African heroes who were involved; I was simply a pathfinder, a map-maker, and a cheerleader. The Zulus named me "Amizimuthi," which means "One with Strong Medicine."

\*The "butterfly effect" illustrates the essence of Chaos Theory. It is the notion that the flapping of a butterfly's wing will create a disturbance that, amplified by the chaotic motion of the atmosphere, will eventually change large-scale weather patterns, so that long-term behavior becomes impossible to forecast.

**IF THERE EVER WAS THE PERFECT GREEN EXISTENCE** that simultaneously answered every First Tier need for security, I had found it at forty. In the "Green Mountain State" of Vermont, no less, surrounded by organic farms and neighborly folks! After spending ten months driving forty thousand miles, literally, all over the state, looking for the perfect place, my partner and I bought it: a magical, quintessentially postcard-perfect New England farm, complete with a country farmhouse, barn, maple sugar house, pond, fields, and 180-degree views of Vermont's magnificent mountains. The soil was so fertile that everything in the compost pile took root. A photograph from the 1940s showed a farmer standing next to the barn with a fifteen-foot corn stalk. Our plan was to start a small organic farm, to create a haven for life, including our own. And as if that wasn't enough—through my partner's inheritance, I would never again have financial concerns or have to worry about making a living. What could be better...?

Well, spiritual transformation—my own. As the flush of our new farm wore off, I was haunted. In fact, I had been haunted long before we bought the farm, but had gone ahead with it anyway. (First Tier dies hard.) I still thought I could find what I was looking for in personal relationship—a decision ideologically justified by the eco-driven dream described above. (GREEN and relationship get another chance.) So I raked, I mowed, I weeded, I tried to find ultimate meaning with my partner, but nothing seemed to appease this inner restlessness. One afternoon, I drove to Boston to hear spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen speak. The haunted, restless part of myself rejoiced at what was revealed: a higher purpose and untold possibility. And back at the farm, I became even more unsettled. One morning, I was standing in the kitchen next to the maple syrup cans and had a vision: a funnel of pure energy was pulling me headlong into it. I looked out at the trees. Nothing could be more beautiful than our new farm. But no matter how pristine was my own small corner of paradise, no matter how wonderful were the personal Life Conditions I had created for myself, the world was in desperate shape, and those larger Life Conditions seemed to be generating an undeniable calling, a higher purpose that was coming from way beyond all my GREEN ideas, from way beyond my relationship, from way beyond the maple trees, and from way beyond the mountains. No matter how beautiful this place was—and it sure was beautiful—it simply wasn't enough. Having turned forty, my midlife crisis took the form of an inner imperative: I had to follow this calling, for the sake of life itself. When, a month later, I decided to leave to pursue spiritual transformation for real, my dad was surprisingly even-keeled. A seasoned philosophy professor, he remarked lovingly, "Jess, of all my kids, you're the one who makes me glad that I'm a philosopher." An evolved response if ever I heard one, which made it just that little bit easier to take the leap to Second Tier.

## **The Leap to Second Tier**

**WIE:** *Your colleague, the late Clare Graves, had a prophetic sense of the evolutionary transition we would be called to make. Thirty years ago he said, "Humans must prepare for a momentous leap.... It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence but the start of a new 'movement' in the symphony of human history." Can you speak about the transformation that is required for us to survive our current Life Conditions, and evolve to Second Tier?*

**DB:** In the late 1970s, Graves began to find, in his research and through observations, thinking patterns that he could not explain. He began to observe, in certain people he was testing, an extraordinary quality and complexity in decision-making and other aspects of cognition. They seemed to have different kinds of minds. They could find more solutions more quickly. They seemed not to be driven by status. There was the dropping away of fear, which is perhaps the most significant marker. Fear seemed to have vanished. Now caution didn't, but fear did. Tribal safety (PURPLE), raw power (RED), salvation for all eternity (BLUE), individual success (ORANGE), and the need to be accepted (GREEN) all diminished in importance. Instead there was a growing curiosity about just being alive in the expansive universe.

**WIE:** *The dropping away of fear would certainly signify an enormous shift in human consciousness and in the motivations that shape our human existence. Did Clare Graves find any other indications of this approaching evolutionary transition?*

**DB:** I believe he had early evidence of minds that were becoming aware of the problems we are facing today, long before these problems became visible to the rest of us. He used to tell me that he felt that probably one in ten thousand brains is produced with different biological features and frequencies. And those individuals don't conform to the norms of society because their minds are already set for a different paradigm. He finally came to the conclusion that something unique was happening here that didn't appear to be just the next step up from the GREEN level. It seemed to be a new category. Life Conditions that would require this new thinking complexity that he observed three decades ago have finally appeared on the scene. But his observations were way before the microchip, before the end of the Cold War, and before the discovery of DNA and molecular biology.

So Graves sensed that a change of a profound nature was occurring, one that was beyond the sum total of the first six memetic systems combined. Now that, of course, was a theory. But as we look at the extraordinary complexity we are facing, this theory seems to gain more and more credibility. Because now we can see the planet from the moon, and now we have these wonderful scanning devices and satellites that can even penetrate beneath surfaces, and for the first time we can begin to understand the planet itself as a total ecosystem in a way that was never possible before. Together with that, the world in which we now live is struggling with the appearance of all of the memetic cultural expressions at once—ethnic tribes, egocentric warlords, both dangerous and redemptive "isms," a whole plateful of opportunists and materialists-in-the-making, and a host of postmodern egalitarian political, religious, and professional structures—oh my, it makes a grown man want to weep. What do we do?

**WIE:** *Right—that's the big question. How will the leap to Second Tier answer this question?*

**DB:** At this point, all of the old memetic systems have been weighed in the balance and have been found wanting. While the full display of the YELLOW meme, the first level of Second Tier, is years in the future, keep in mind that the ultimate texture and capacity within this next memetic level must match and/or exceed the complexity of the Life Conditions that it confronts. It must sense the big picture and the interconnection of everything. So YELLOW will have an enhanced vertical perspective with the ability to transcend *and* include and value what came before, and also to anticipate what will be next.

I believe that the eighth meme code—TURQUOISE— will rise in conjunction with the seventh, YELLOW. You could think of YELLOW as "left brain with feelings" and TURQUOISE as "right brain with data." TURQUOISE will focus on the larger waves and energy flows and will work on behalf of the Life Force itself, in its many manifestations in life-forms on the planet. The Second Tier thought structures will combine elements of YELLOW and TURQUOISE in searching for the quality and depth of thinking that can deal with complex problems. And with this is the recognition that the whole spiral itself is spiritual and that we're on this upward ladder of human emergence. *That's* spirituality.

But since memes are not types *of* people but forms of adaptive intelligences *in* people, YELLOW and TURQUOISE rarely exist in full measure in any person alive at this time. Different people possess different fragments, or components, or even versions, and this makes the formation of what I would call "creative brain syndicates" with insightful interactions and dialogues even more important. So it ought to engender some serious talk for the first time, and not just in isolated conferences where everyone does their own thing. It's going to require some deep dialogue. And whether or not, once again, humans can rise to the occasion is the existential question of the age.

### The Leap to Second Tier

*"The present moment finds our society attempting to negotiate the most difficult, but at the same time the most exciting transition the human race has faced to date. It is not merely a transition to a new level of existence but the start of a new 'movement' in the symphony of human history."*

Clare Graves

*"Like everything around us, we are in a state of constant motion. We are shaped by the Code of the Spiral. In short, we can change our own psychology. The brain can rewire itself. Society is not static. Today's problems are yesterday's solutions. Evolution and revolution are part of our nature. We are on perpetual treks of the mind. Many believe we are passing now through such a momentous transformation, a major turning point, a history-making sea change. A new and entirely different pattern of thought is beginning to emerge world-wide and in various fields of human activity."*

*This surge into the Second Tier involves a shift into a totally new dimension of thinking, a new conceptual order. The supreme issue is restoration of the world so*

*that life may continue—not just human life, but life itself. For the first time man is able to face existence in all its dimensions. grounded in a value system rooted truly in knowledge and cosmic reality instead of delusions brought on by animal and social needs. The mind is suddenly open for cognitive roaming over the entire human tapestry and up the evolutionary Spiral."*

Don Beck & Graham Linscott  
*The Crucible: Forging South Africa's Future*

**MY LIFE FLASHED BEFORE MY EYES.** It didn't matter that I had given up the farm in Vermont, become a student of a spiritual teacher, and joined a community of students who were genuinely dedicated to spiritual transformation. My GREENness hadn't gone anywhere. (Nor had the rest of the First Tier memes, for that matter.) Terri, a friend, said to me one day, "Jessica, you've been complaining about how we, as a group, are not environmental enough, but just look back on your own life. Despite your eco-image, you were consuming a lot more when you were living in Vermont than you are now!" It was true: My Audi was sitting in the driveway. Shopping sprees were infrequent. Living and working with many others, I was using less electricity, oil, gas, and water. If I let my GREEN self-righteous self-importance drop away for a minute, I had to admit that, objectively speaking, I was actually more environmental than I had ever been in Vermont. How illuminating, and ironic! And together with my long-held GREEN identity, all sorts of other ideas and ideals were exposed, and the First Tier memes fell out like a deck of cards.

In light of these new glimpses from a higher perspective, I now realized I really had been at odds with myself. My GREEN eco-consciousness was always in conflict with my ORANGE materialism. My RED independence was in opposition to my GREEN need for acceptance and communality, and the "Mean Green Meme" was hell-bent on pitting itself against Second Tier, luring me with its righteous idealism and narcissistic demands so I wouldn't have to meet the evolutionary challenge to trust, let go of fear, and actually transform.

Now, getting back to enlightenment, well, as we've been finding, "Everybody wants to get enlightened but nobody wants to change." But, to be honest, I didn't think that applied to me. I mean, I was spiritual. I was serious. I had made sacrifices. But somewhere deep down, evolution was evolving my perspective and I realized: Clare Graves was right, the leap to Second Tier is "momentous," because it's pointing to nothing less than the difference between inner conflict and profound inner resolution between all the parts of myself, all the memes. As Don Beck pointed out, it is the dropping away of fear. And that's no small thing. It means being completely at home in the universe.

And in that shift in perspective, I discovered more: the whole spiral is necessary. It's what got me to where I am today, and to the iota of humility required to recognize that I really am part of the "never-ending upward quest" that Don Beck describes. And this is only the beginning. Because freedom from fear and irresolution means freedom to stand in awe of this miraculous, ever-ascending spiral of human emergence. And freedom to stand in awe of the cosmic order that creates it. As depths of insight and vast realms of consciousness glint from the upper reaches of the spiral, the real possibilities begin.

Excerpts and supporting material used with author's permission from Beck, Don E. and Cowan, Christopher, *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Inc., 1996); Beck, Don E., "The Search for Cohesion in the Age of Fragmentation," (article written for the 1999 State of the World Forum); Beck, Don and Linscott, Graham, *The Crucible: Forging South Africa's Future* (Denton, TX: New Paradigm Press, 1991). Richard Dawkins quote from Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1989), taken from the website, [www.unblinkingeye.com](http://www.unblinkingeye.com); Clare Graves quotes from Graves, Clare, "Human Nature Prepares for a Momentous Leap," *The Futurist* (1974); Ray Kurzweil quote taken from the website, [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org); Elisabet Sahtouris quote as told to WIE editor, Carter Phipps, Spring, 2002.

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