An autoethnography of spiritual development in an Afrikaner cultural context: A Wilberian perspective

by

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Declaration

I, **Sonja van Wyk**, hereby declare that this thesis titled *An autoethnography of spiritual development in an Afrikaner cultural context: A Wilberian perspective* being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the field of Psychology at the University of Pretoria is my own original work. I have not previously submitted this document to another university or faculty. Where secondary sources were used, they have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the 7th version of the American Psychological Association and the University of Pretoria requirements.

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Ethics Statement

The author, **Sonja van Wyk**, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained the applicable research ethics approval for the research described in this work. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's code of ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

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Abstract

Research has shown that people have increasingly begun to disidentify with organised and traditional religion, and have instead embraced a more personalised spiritual path. The same trend has been seen in the traditional Afrikaner Christian churches, which have seen their numbers of congregants drop in recent years. The implications for the seeker of spirituality is that such personalised paths, in the absence of formal theological guidance and structure, may lead to a sense of loss, confusion, a loss of self-identity and even what Grof and Grof termed 'spiritual emergencies'. Such seekers may turn to psychologists for help to process and integrate these psychospiritual challenges. Psychologists may need an in-depth understanding of the possible varieties of such spiritual challenges, and of the psychological growth and transformation it may require without pathologising the experiences or the client.

To add to the knowledge of how psychology and spirituality intersect in practice, I explored and described a spiritual development process based on my personal experience and from a transpersonal psychological perspective. I also described how spiritual development is influenced or hampered by societal and cultural contextual factors. In search of a theoretical underpinning of this development process, I contextualised and explained spiritual development in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. According to Wilber, spiritual development is a development line similar to, for example, cognitive, moral, and ego development. Using a qualitative approach and an autoethnographical research methodology, I wrote my story about the search for spiritual meaning and growth. I used self-reflection and self-analysis and linked my personal experiences with a wider cultural context of the Afrikaner to illustrate the possible tensions between conventional, conformist societal structures and a personalised post conventional spiritual path. To inform my own perspective and to add to the

rigour of this study, I formally interviewed three members of the Afrikaner community, and informally interviewed several family and friends, and have used their insights as part of my story.

Using Wilber's stages and states of consciousness, I showed that spiritual development can be traced and explained in terms of a stage-like progression, from first-tier structures to second tier structures, and to rare third-tier structures of consciousness. I found through my own personal experiences that such third-tier post-post conventional structures may exist. I also found evidence for Wilber's subtle/meta-mind structure of consciousness. While no claims about generalisability are made, my reflections and analysis may provide other transpersonal psychologists and seekers of spirituality with a deeper insight into the personal spiritual development process. I further provide guidelines for psychologists on the integration of spirituality into practice.

Key words: Spirituality, spiritual development, spiritual intelligence, Ken Wilber Integral Theory

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Spiritual development is a long and arduous journey, an adventure through strange lands full of surprises, joy and beauty, difficulties, and even dangers. It involves the awakening of potentialities hitherto dormant, the raising of consciousness to new realms, a drastic transmutation of the 'normal' elements of personality, and a functioning along a new inner dimension (Assagioli, 1989, p. 30).

PART 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Part 1 of the thesis provides the background and context that inspired the study. It further discusses the research question and objectives. Thereafter, the research methodology and the layout of the thesis are briefly discussed.

Background and context of the study

I am a White Afrikaans speaking South African woman in my early fifties. The fact that I am White and that my mother tongue is Afrikaans partly identifies me as an Afrikaner. However, most commentators (for example, Swart, 1987; Giliomee, 2003; Oliver, 2014) would probably suggest that I include the fact that I am also a Protestant Christian. As I live alone and do not cook for myself, I spend many hours in restaurants. I often overhear dinner conversations, especially when there is a large group present. The lateness of the hour and the copious amounts of alcohol that are consumed often lower inhibitions, which in turn incite people to break one of the cardinal rules of polite conversation: Never discuss religion or politics. These discussions about religion, especially, fascinate me. Invariably, there is one person that challenges the status quo and if this person makes a credible case the conversation usually turns to "I hear you, and I agree to some extent, but "What then? What else?" Often enough, the enquiring person is dismissed or rejected, often with serious suspicions of not being a 'believer', that is, one not subscribing to the Christian religion. Yet, discovering that quite a number of my fellow Afrikaners challenge the conventional and orthodox religious practices and beliefs, as I have in the past, makes me feel not so isolated.

From my own experience, and from conversations with others, the problem arises as to the way forward once we have started to question accepted religious and spiritual beliefs. Are we in danger of losing our faith, and what are the implications should we do so? Is spiritual development

an ongoing process? What if there are growth and developmental stages that we go through of which we are not necessarily aware? And if there is such a spiritual development process, what is the goal? I make a distinction between religion and spirituality: Religion can be defined as organised faith systems (for example, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) with shared traditions, dogmas, beliefs, practices and structures. Spirituality, which is a broad concept, involves an active personal investment in transcendent beliefs and practices. Spirituality can be considered 'the heart and soul' of religion – but can also be expressed and experienced outside formal religion as a personal faith by those who do not consider themselves religious (Walsh, 2010; Van Wyk, 2016).

The above are some of the questions that have haunted me for most of my adult life, and ones I have actively pursued. As my anecdote shows, I am not alone in my questions. Du Toit and Spangenberg (2002) point out that there is a radical difference between the world in which we grew up and the world in which we now live. Post-modern age proponents posit that there is no objective knowledge and no absolute truth. This claim has profound implications for religion, people's belief systems, and foundational writings such as the Bible and other confessional writings. Within this post-modern paradigm, there has been a move away from traditional organised religion, especially in the West where it is evidenced by the collapsing of church structures and the increase in secularisation. Concurrently, there has been an increase in a more personalised, subjective religious experience or spirituality (Fuller, 2001; Kourie, 2009). For example, a 2017 survey by the Pew Research Centre in the US indicated that nearly a quarter of Americans (27%) regarded themselves as spiritual but not religious, an increase of 8% from the previous five years (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). The Afrikaans speaking reformed churches, which are no exception, have not escaped this trend. De Klerk and Von Helden (2011) wrote that, because there was an increase in the numbers of subjectivist believers, there was a decrease in church attendance in the Afrikaans speaking reformed churches in South Africa, as there was greater shift towards individual spirituality: There are believers

who no longer see the church as the authority on religious matters. Rather, they deem that the power of belief resides within the individual.

So how can the new demands of believers (for a more individualistic and personal approach to spirituality) be resolved? One alternative is for the Christian church to broaden its approach to accommodate post-modern thinking within traditional theology. Indeed, there are many theologians and writers who posit new approaches within the church (for example, Du Toit & Spangenberg, 2002; Spangenberg, 2004; Spong, 2001).

An alternative approach to traditional and orthodox religions is to pursue one's spiritual needs and spiritual development outside a specific religion. Such individuals, who typically refer to themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', use an eclectic approach and choose from various religions and spiritual practices to fulfil their spiritual needs (Fuller, 2001; Taylor, 2017). This approach comes with its own risks. The spiritual seeker on his or her own personal and individual path has generally eschewed formal theological guidance and structure, and is now alone in seeking alternatives. This situation may lead to a sense of loss, confusion, a loss of self-identity (Oosthuizen, 2018) and even to what Grof and Grof (1989) term 'spiritual emergencies'. Such seekers may turn to psychologists for help to process and integrate these psycho-spiritual challenges. However, psychological help is easier said than done. Psychology has had an uneasy relationship with spirituality ever since some of its founding members such as Freud and Ellis were completely dismissive of religiosity. Psychotherapists often have complex or conflicting attitudes towards religious and spiritual matters. This may be in part due to a lack of training in this area, or their own biases (Barnett & Johnson, 2011; Magaldi-Dopman et al., 2011). I conducted a small study for my Master's degree (Van Wyk, 2016) amongst workplace counsellors who, although they had a positive attitude towards incorporating spirituality into their practices, they felt that they were not adequately trained or prepared to do so.

To assist the psychological profession and combat the pathologising of people with spiritual problems, transpersonal psychologists lobbied for a special diagnostic category, that is, Religious or Spiritual Problem (Code V62.89) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association* (2013) to provide for spiritual and religious problems (Lukoff, 1998).

Psychologists and therapists may need an in-depth understanding of the possible varieties of such spiritual challenges, and their clients' psychological growth and transformation without pathologising the experiences or the client (Bhagwan, 2007). This understanding of spiritual challenges was then the reason for my study. I chose to focus on an individual path of spiritual exploration and thus provide a better understanding of what such a process may entail to assist both the psychological profession and spiritual seekers. I further situated this research within my own Afrikaner context. The Afrikaner, in general, is embedded in a community that subscribes to deeply, orthodox religious views. As such, their identity is influenced by Protestant religiosity (Oliver, 2014; Giliomee, 2009).

Spirituality, as a broad concept, is a widely studied subject and phenomenon, across many fields of enquiry, for example psychology (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Barnett & Johnson, 2011), social work Bhagwan, 2010; Canda & Furman, 2010), and industrial psychology and the workplace (Case & Gosling, 2010; Hudson, 2014). Defining spiritual development, including terms such as religion and spirituality (which are related but not synonymous), is problematic.

Religion and spirituality are not contrasted or in opposition to each other. It is rather a "nuanced continuum reflecting the variety of ways in which individuals experience and express their spirituality" (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2006, p. 1). Or, alternatively, it can be regarded as 2 interlocking circles, where one circle depicts institutional religion with its doctrines, or prescribed beliefs and dogma, and the other circle describes spirituality as an individualistic

endeavour, based on personal beliefs, that is, the 'seekers' (sometimes called the New Age movement). The interlocking area between the two circles refers to an intrinsic religiosity, or spirituality, and highlights the common underlying dimensions of both religion and spirituality, such as the ideas of a search, the sacred, transcendence, and connectedness (See Figure 1 below) (Van Wyk, 2016).
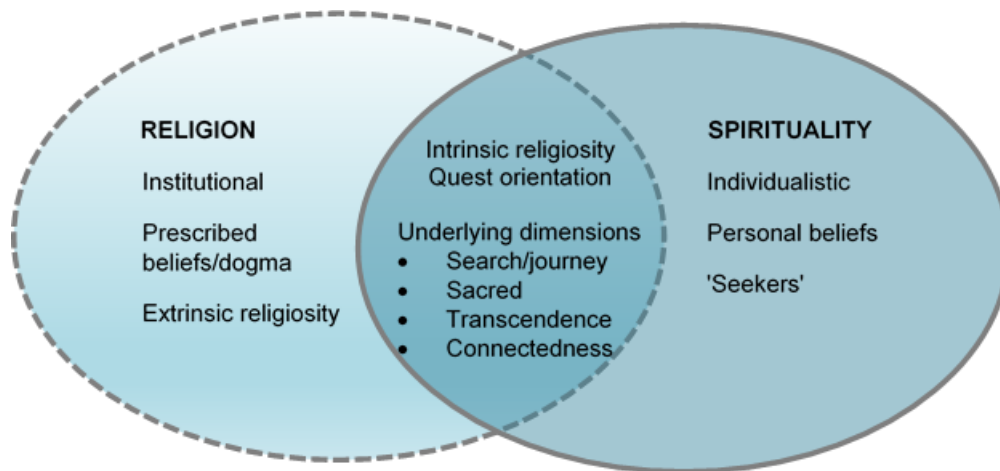
Figure 1: Differentiation between religion and spirituality (Van Wyk, 2016, p. 49)

Benson et al. (2003, pp. 205-206) offer a formative, yet comprehensive definition of spiritual development:

> Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both *within* and *outside* of religious traditions, beliefs and practices (emphasis added).

In Psychology, spiritual development has mainly been of concern to transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology grew out of the humanistic branch of psychology, as did positive psychology. Many psychologists were unhappy with the disease model, and instead pushed

for a psychology that focuses on people's "innate tendency to strive for perpetual growth and development" (Froh, 2004, p. 18). These two streams, transpersonal and positive psychology, developed out of those sentiments. Whereas positive psychology concerns itself with positive phenomena, such as well-being, love, courage, and happiness, transpersonal psychology concerns itself with themes such as spirituality and psychospiritual development. In addition, it investigates and recognises non-ordinary states of consciousness such as peak experiences and mystical transformation. Further, it concerns itself with ultimate values. (Shapiro, Lee & Gross, 2002). Maslow, being one of the founding members of the transpersonal psychology movement, called this the 'fourth force' in psychology, the other previous three being psychoanalytic, behaviouristic, and humanistic psychology (Guest, 1989).

This thesis is predominantly situated in the transpersonal psychology approach, and engages with one of the most influential thinkers and writers of the transpersonal psychology movement, that is, Ken Wilber. He proposed arguably one of the most influential theories when it comes to matters of the stages and states of spiritual development (Walsh, 2016).

Ken Wilber (2000d) states that spiritual development can be approached from two perspectives: The first sees spiritual development as the highest stage of all development lines, such as in the higher stages of cognitive, emotional, moral and ego development. A similar approach is followed by the transpersonal psychologists Walsh and Vaughan, who stated that "…psychological development merge into transconventional, transpersonal, and spiritual stages" (1993, p. 110). The second perspective considers spiritual development to be a separate development line, which develops concurrently with all the other development lines, and the human being can be in different stages in different development lines. All of these developmental lines cut across, or intersect with, different levels or stages of development (Wilber, 2000a). This is in contrast to Washburn's view (1998). Washburn, who disagrees with the hierarchical stage-like development, conceives spiritual

development to be in a spiral-like pattern, as development forces us to spiral back to previous unresolved issues.

An evolutionary spiritual developmentalist and an unashamedly mystic, Ken Wilber investigated and integrated over two hundred developmental approaches and perspectives, from the Eastern philosophical approaches to Western psychological developmental approaches. He produced an integrated theory of what, he believed, spiritual development entails (2000d, 2006). Wilber's core idea is that there is a profound evolutionary drive in all humans (as well as all life and matter) toward what he usually calls 'Spirit'. The final destination of all evolution is self-realisation of Spirit in a non-dual, mystical experience (Rothberg, 1998). With his seminal work, *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* (1995), Wilber introduced his Integral Theory, which he considered a metatheory, that is, "a type of super-theory built from overarching constructs that organise and subsume more local, discipline-specific theories and constructs" (Stein, 2016, Chapter 1, para 6). His endeavour was to combine the best of human endeavours across the globe, spanning across cultures and disciplines such as the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2016; Wilber, 2017). Together with Bhaskar's Critical Realism and Morin's Complex thought, Integral Theory is one of the three most prominent contemporary integral theories (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2016). Indeed, Wilber's Integral Theory, which includes and integrates multiple perspectives and disciplines, embraces epistemological pluralism and employs epistemologies and methodologies appropriate to each discipline and domain (Walsh, 2016). Wilber calls it Integral Methodological Pluralism (Wilber, 2006).

Wilber conceives a meta-structure of reality, or simply put, a heuristic device for human disciplines. It consists of four quadrants, which form the foundation of his Integral Theory with its AQAL map/model. AQAL stands for "all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types" (Wilber, 2007, p. 66), dealing with all levels or stages of development, all lines of development, all states of

consciousness, and all types – a category for phenomena that does not fit the other concepts, for example, sex, gender and personality types. The four quadrants refer to the dimensions available to humans in each moment of time, or manifested reality. The quadrants are divided into two quadrants on the left hand side (interior) and two on the right hand side (exterior). It suggests that all human knowledge and experience can be placed in a four-quadrant grid, along the axes of "interior-exterior" and "individual-collective". The quadrants are further divided into two in the upper domain and two on a lower domain. It can therefore be summarised as follows (based on Wilber, 2007):
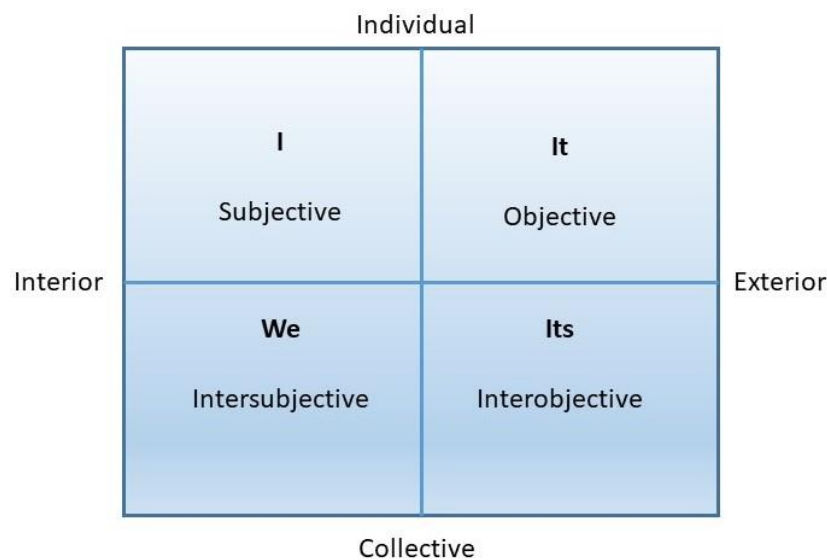
Figure 2: Wilber's four quadrants

- Upper Left (which refers to the interior of the individual, the 'I')

- Upper Right (Which refers to the exterior of the individual, or 'it')

- Lower Left (which refers to the interior of the collective, for example, culture and shared values, or second person, the 'we')

- Lower Right (which refers to the exterior of the collective, for example, systems, societies, the 'its')

The four quadrants are central to the theory, and all other life elements are situated within the four quadrants. "Every holon has four aspects or dimensions, and can and must be studied in its

intentional, behavioural, cultural and social settings (Wilber, 1995, p129). These quadrants, which are all available simultaneously depending on the focus of the discussion or inquiry, are not mutually exclusive. For an autoethnographic study such as the one that I conducted, the quadrants provide a useful and effective heuristic device as Wilber anticipated: A study of this nature focusses on both interior quadrants, the Upper Left and Lower Left (the 'I' and the 'we'). The Upper Left is used to discuss auto-part of the study, which includes the development of interior *stages* of consciousness and various *states* of consciousness, while the Lower Left (as well as occasionally on the exterior Lower Right) is ideal for discussing the culture context (the –ethnography part of the study). In an autoethnographic study "the gaze turns inward toward the self while maintaining the outward gaze and responsibility of ethnography" (Tedlock, 2013, p. 358). In terms of the latter, of relevance here is that Wilber contended that cultures, similar to individuals, go through their own development processes in a stage-like fashion (Wilber, 2005).

Wilber's integral approach and his AQAL model has been used in research across many disciplines, including psychology, psychospiritual development, and business studies (Wilber, 2017). Some studies, which used Wilber's Integral Theory and his stages of consciousness, applied it to spiritual development. Most of these studies used semi-structured interviews with participants from various backgrounds who were considered spiritual adepts and/or teachers in an attempt to provide evidence of such developmental stages. Although a study by Thomas, et al. (1993), who interviewed Indian and English elderly persons had limitations since not all subjects were in the advanced transpersonal realm, it did provide support for Wilber's theory that spiritual development evolves in a stage-like fashion.

As for personal accounts and autoethnographies pertaining to religious and spiritual issues, there are a few worth noting. Baker (2016) and Harris (2008), who both documented their spiritual development, used Fowler's stages of faith to make sense of their religious growth and spiritual

development. Cardwell (2014) applied Wilber's AQUAL quadrant model to provide an integrated view of his journey, but focussed on the development of authentic leadership. Ferendo (2004) in an interesting study used heuristics-of-Self, and a hermeneutical method to immerse himself in the writings and lectures of Wilber to experience personal transformation. He found that personal transformation "was messy, mysterious and multi-dimensional" (p. 3). He however did not focus on Wilber's developmental model per se and how it would explain his transformation.

In conclusion, there are several studies that use aspects of Wilber's Integral theory. Also, there are several personal accounts describing and documenting spiritual experiences and growth (see also for example, Poulos, 2010; Pinon, Jr, 2016, Levee, 2015; Porath, 2006). However, there are no studies that provide an autobiographical account, or autoethnography where spiritual growth is explored and explained in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. The closest similar writings are those of Wilber himself: Two notable works by Wilber that can be considered autoethnographic in nature are "One Taste" (2000c), which is a publication of excerpts from his diary, and "Grace and Grit" (2000a) which documents a spiritual journey throughout the process of his wife dying of cancer. Although these accounts describe his own growth and experiences, he is careful not to describe them from a perspective of his own stage of development.

A gap exists in the literature in that there are no autobiographical or autoethnography studies that specifically deal with spiritual development from an Integral Theoretical and stages of development perspective. In addition, there is no literature or studies that address the aforesaid approach within the Afrikaner Christian community.

Research Problem, Question and Objectives

The research problem is the following: There are some individuals who choose to leave traditional, organised religion in search of their own spiritual paths and truths. These individuals may be at a loss as to what such a spiritual process may entail, and may suffer from a sense of loss and

confusion. It seems likely that such seekers may turn to the psychology profession to find help to make sense of new information and beliefs, which are counter to their previously held convictions. Psychotherapists may not necessarily have the training and insight into the challenges of such a spiritual development process even if they choose to incorporate spirituality into their practice. There is a lack of academic literature that provides an in-depth account of the spiritual development process and the challenges that may arise.

I had three main research questions. The primary question was: What does an unique individualised spiritual development process entail considering spirituality as a broad concept that may or may not include religion? The second question, which was more specific, was: What does such a process entail particularly within an Afrikaner context? The third question was: To what extent can such a process be conceptualised in terms of, and mapped onto, Ken Wilber's spiritual development theories?

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1) Explore and describe the spiritual development process on account of personal experience.

2) Explore how spiritual development is influenced by societal and cultural contextual factors, specifically in the Afrikaner context.

3) Contextualise, conceptualise and explain spiritual development in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory.

It was anticipated that this study would provide an in-depth understanding of a spiritual development process to assist those interested in the topic, be it spiritual seekers themselves, or psychotherapists in general who may want to assist clients in need of help and guidance during such a process.

Research Methodology

I used a qualitative approach as it provides for a rich, in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon such as the topic under discussion, as proposed by Fouche and Delport, (2011). To best explore the subject of spirituality and the development thereof in a cultural context, an autoethnographic study was selected. In other words, I used an autoethnographic approach to explore my spiritual development process within an Afrikaner/Christian cultural and religious context. Spirituality does not develop in isolation: The individual's environment, community, culture, and childhood religion (if applicable) all play a part to either enrich or thwart spiritual development (Benson et al. 2003).

Autoethnography, as a research method, is a form of autobiographical writing that "describes and analyses personal experience as a way to understand cultural experiences" (Raab, 2013, p. 2). More to the point, autoethnography is based on three methodological tenets: 1) it is qualitative, 2) it is self-focused and 3) it is context-conscious (Chang, 2011). In general, an autoethnography falls within the ambit of the interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Within the post-modern constructivist paradigm, reality and truth are relative, and knowledge is constructed. Therefore, the story and the experiences cannot be claimed to be true in an absolute sense.

Ellis in Wall (2006) suggested that, in the case of a social scientist who has lived through a difficult experience and who still has burning questions that remain, (such as in my case), introspection can be used as a data source in the study of him- or herself following accepted practices of field research. The power of the autoethnography is that it provides the opportunity "to address unanswered questions and include the new and unique ideas of the researcher" (Wall, 2006, p. 149). The -ethnography part of the autoethnography method acknowledges that there is an inextricable link between personal experiences and the cultural context (Wall, 2006). I, therefore, acknowledged and

often juxtaposed the cultural paradigm of the Afrikaner community, which includes the prominent role of religion (Oliver, 2006; Kinghorn 1994), with my own personal experiences.

Regarding the topic of the research, Chang (2011, p. 11) states that "(a)utoethnography offers a unique vantage point to the understanding of the social through the self, and therefore should be added in the methodological repertoire of spirituality research in higher education". Chang (2011) further suggested that the autoethnography method be used for spirituality research as spirituality is an integral part of personhood and closely connected to the individual's cultural identity. Spirituality does not shape the individual alone, but also impacts on the public or professional self. An autoethnographical study and transpersonal psychology approaches are a natural fit as both require a measure of reflexivity and introspection (Raab, 2013).

Autoethnographic research is not usually characterised by extended methodological descriptions (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). However, the type of data collected in an autoethnographic study is similar to those in other qualitative and ethnographic studies (for example, field notes, personal documents and interviews). For this study, I collected and preserved extensive notes of my experiences during the period of my life chosen, that is, 2004 to 2008, for this research. These notes are replete with self–descriptions, self-references and introspections as I tried to make sense of my experiences, although they are open to re-interrogation after some years have passed as suggested by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013).

I was the main participant in this autoethnographic study. However, I also identified three other participants who I interviewed to confirm, highlight or juxtapose the context of the autobiographical story, as suggested by Raab (2013). I also talked informally to many other people – friends and family. Although not strictly classified as interviews, I was mindful of Chang's (2008) opinion that although the interview is not commonly associated with autoethnography, it is useful to stimulate memories, to fill in the gaps in information, to validate personal data, and to gain others'

perspectives on the researcher. Ellis (1998) endorsed interviews and added that interviews with family and friends help to reconstruct the events.

The participants, as well as the other main role players or 'characters', who played a significant role in my story, were from the Afrikaner community, and thus represented members from the cultural group of the study (as per Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). To this end, and to help me make sense of the experiences within my family and cultural context, I used unstructured interviews, with a reflexive dyadic interview style. In the interviews, I asked questions, but also shared personal details and recollections, thereby evoking similar dialogical responses from the interviewees (as per Ellis et al, 2011; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013).

With regards to the data analysis, an autoethnography is both a methodological process and the product itself. Therefore, the story was not analysed by an 'objective researcher', as autoethnographic analysis involves the 'telling', the conversations with the interviewees, the writing and self–reflection as the process unfolds (Ellis et al, 2011). In addition, I used the works of Ken Wilber, specifically his Integral Theory to help me make sense of, and analyse, my experiences.

Autoethnography provided an opportunity for me to probe in-depth, rich experiences with a unique perspective that may be of benefit for future research in the transpersonal psychology field. In addition, interweaving and analysing the story within the framework of Integral Theory provided a personalised and practical interpretation and application of the said theory.

Structure of the Study

The thesis is structured into five main parts:

Part 1 Introduction to the study

This section provides an introduction to the study, that is, the background and context of the study, the rationale for the study, the research questions and objectives, the research methodology, and the structure of the thesis.

Part 2: Literature review & Theoretical framework

Part 2**,** which provides a literature review as a general introduction and orientation to spiritual development, and specifically addresses the main theoretical framework that was used in the study, that of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory.

Part 3: Research methodology

Part 3 details the research methodology that was used, the participants in the study, and the data analysis process, and ethical considerations.

Part 4: Data presentation, analysis, and discussion

This section, which is the core of the study, comprises the data (i.e. the story), as well as the analysis and discussions both in terms of the findings and the theoretical interpretations of the findings. My story, which I entitled *Travelling Light* is structured into four sub-parts:

The first sub-part is titled *Context* (Chapters 1-3) and provides context and background to my childhood and first phase of my spiritual development. It also describes my cultural background as an Afrikaner, and specifically focusses on Afrikaner religiosity:

- *Chapter 1: The Land of Begin Again*, in which I introduce my family background and attempt to define the Afrikaner identity and culture, and discuss the Afrikaner's religious context.

- Chapter 2: *Growing Up*, in which I discuss my early spiritual development. I analyse this development process in terms of James Fowler's Stages of faith, as per Ken Wilber's

suggestion. I discuss my parents' religious beliefs and the conflicts at home as a result of these beliefs.

- Chapter 3: *Afrikaner worldview: In God we trust,* in which I, before continuing with my own story, analyse the Afrikaner worldview in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. To illustrate, I have discussions (interviews) with two representatives of the Afrikaner.

The second sub-part, which is titled *The Call* (Chapters 4-5), introduces the main part of the story and details the start and call to action of a focused spiritual process and journey that was to last approximately four years:

- *Chapter 4: A Leap of Faith*, in which I describe Wilber's centaur worldview, my existential crisis, and a life-changing conversation. I further discuss the concept of spiritual emergencies and mental health issues that arise from spiritual experiences.

- *Chapter 5: My Blue Heaven*, in which I describe my spiritual experiences in terms of Wilber's States of Consciousness, my meditation technique, and the introduction to my Higher Self.

The third sub-part is titled *The Journey* (Chapters 6-7) and provides details of my experiences within the spiritual process or journey:

- *Chapter 6: My Brother's Keeper*, in which I describe a new relationship that developed with a man with a criminal past, and getting caught up in his legal process and prison experiences. I describe how new perspectives on *inter alia* life, right and wrong, judgment evolved.

- *Chapter 7: Clearance,* in which I made sense of my experiences in the aftermath of the previous months. I briefly took on a school teacher's role, before I applied and received clearance for a position in government.

The fourth sub-part, which is titled *The Return* (Chapter 8-9) details my experiences as I settled back into an ordinary life and reflected on my experiences and what I had learnt.

- *Chapter 8: Goodbye Teachers, Hello Soul*, in which my father died. I further grapple with the concept and experiences of my Higher Self or soul. I investigate Ken Wilber's third-tier structure of consciousness and interrogate spirit guides.
- *Chapter 9: Reflections*, in which I take a step back and reflect on my experiences, and identify main key themes throughout my experiences and the story that I had just told.

Part 5: Conclusion

In the final sub-part, I document my conclusions on my research objectives and questions.

As I have now concluded Part 1: Introduction to the study, I will now continue with Part 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.

PART 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is divided into two sections. The first section provides a literature review as a general introduction and orientation to spiritual development, and various approaches to spiritual development are discussed. These include religious and mystical approaches, indigenous approaches, and psychological approaches. The second section deals with the theoretical discussion: Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. After an introductory discussion, the AQAL matrix is discussed with its four quadrants. Stages and state of consciousness are differentiated and discussed. The focus is on the Upper Left quadrant, as individual spiritual development is located in this quadrant. A further focus is on the Lower Left quadrant, in order to discuss cultural considerations on individual spiritual development. A sample of criticisms and debates about Wilber's Integral theory is provided.

Section 1: Literature Review: General Orientation to Spiritual Development

Spirituality is a widely studied subject and phenomenon across many fields of enquiry, for example psychology, social work and the workplace. Although defining spirituality is problematic, the underlying dimensions of spirituality include the idea of a quest or journey, transformation, a search for the sacred, transcendence, meaning and purpose, and a sense of connectedness (Coyle, 2008; Van Wyk, 2016). Helminiak (2006, p. 202) states, "Although all people live by a set of beliefs and values of some kind of other, spirituality entails, additionally, explicit concern for growth and movement, deliberate commitment to self-transcendence, along the lines of the meanings and values that one holds."

For this research, spirituality can be regarded as an innate capacity which can be realised to different degrees in humans (Hay & Socha, 2005). This realisation provides the core idea in spiritual

development. Human beings can actively engage and pursue spirituality. Spiritual development traditionally falls in the ambit of religion and there are many theological growth models in Western and Eastern traditions (Underhill, 1911; Helminiak, 1987; Wilber, 2000; Friedman, Krippner, Riebel & Johnson, 2010).

Religious, Mystical and Indigenous Approaches to Spiritual Development

Spiritual development is a core idea in organised and orthodox religion, both Western and Eastern. Each religion has its own spiritual goals and developmental paths. For example, the Christian tradition includes celebrated saints such as St John of the Cross and Theresa of Avilla, who stipulated a spiritual development process. The Western religious traditions are dominated by the Abrahamic tradition (Judeo-Christian-Islamic) with an emphasis on a personal divine figure, and therefore they are more theocentric (Underhill, 1911; Wilber 2000d; Friedman et al., 2010).

In the Eastern traditions it is difficult to generalise, but they seem to be more focused on self experiments and self assessments for gauging spiritual development. There are several paths to encounter an impersonal divine or to realise non-dual awareness – the complete collapse of the distinction between subject and object. There are traditions, however, that are more theocentric, such as Shintoism and forms of Hinduism (Wilber, 2000d; Friedman et al., 2010).

Related to religion is the idea of mysticism, which deals with transcendental experiences:

True mystical experience is characterised by a sense of an immediate contact with the transcendent. Such an experience often exhibits a feeling of timelessness, bliss or serenity, union with the Divine, or the Ground of Being, or Ultimate Reality, depending on the type of mysticism under investigation, and whether its predilections are theistic or monistic (Kourie, 2016, p. 1).

All the great religions has had their own group of adherents who focused on transcendent realities and experiences. For example: Christianity (Christian mystics), Islam (Sufis, whirling

dervishes), Judaism (Kabballah) and Hinduism (yogis) (Wilber, 2011; Dupré, 2013). However, mysticism is not exclusive to orthodox religion. For example, Maslow (1970) describes 'peak experiences' which leave the individual with a sense of awe, joy or ecstasy. Sam Harris states that spirituality must be distinguished from religion – "because people of every faith, and of none, have had the same sort of spiritual experiences. While these states of mind are usually interpreted through the lens of one or other religious doctrine, we know that this is a mistake ... A deeper principle must be at work" (Harris, 2014, pp. 8–9).

Volbracht (2008) distinguishes between different types of mystical experiences, which span the experience across humans:

- Natural, spontaneous mystical experiences, which include religious and non-religious types of mystical experiences that naturally and spontaneously occur – including Maslow's 'peak experiences', experiences of being one with nature, an opening up to Oneness with the nature or the universe, and feelings of happiness, bliss and overwhelming joy.

- Situational mystical experiences, such as in childbirth, sex, extreme trauma, near-death experiences, and deep appreciation of art and music.

- Intentional mystical experiences, which include spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer, body work such as yoga and martial arts, and psychedelics that trigger mystical experiences.

Indigenous approaches to spirituality vary around the world to the extent that it is difficult to provide a definition that encompasses all situations. "One of the main distinguishing features of Indigenous religions are that group identity is formed by kinship and ancestor relations tied to a particular place and shared traditions*" (Canda & Furman, 2010, p. 168). There are a variety of indigenous religious practices, beliefs and models of spiritual development. The latter is commonly referred to as shamanism, or in the South African context, traditional healers – for example,

isangomas. It is a diverse range of healing traditions which incorporates practices of spirit-guided people in the context of beliefs about the spirit and ancestor world (Canda & Furman, 2010; Singh & Bhagwan, 2020). Rather than the focus of individual spiritual growth, the goal for a shaman is to gain much knowledge and skills to assist his or her own community with, *inter alia*, counselling, disputes and healing. Therefore, a shaman's goal is not focused on self-improvement, and his or her success is gauged by how much the community is helped (Friedman et al., 2010).

However, spiritual development does not necessarily take place in the context of religion. Many people have never practised religion, or have left the religion of their childhood to embrace a more personal or individualistic approach to spirituality (Elkins, 1998; Taylor, 2017).

Spiritual experiences vs Spiritual development

Spiritual change can include a dramatic, abrupt moment, but can also be experienced as a process of development (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2016). As Poulos states:

> …[W]e humans may find ourselves wrapped up in a moment in which something sacred, something mysterious, something numinous (i.e., the divine) is showing itself to us. This is the kind of experience some of us *seek*, and some of us just *stumble* upon. I have found myself betwixt and between these two poles (Poulos, 2010, p. 49).

Taylor (2018) suggests that experiences of sudden spiritual awakening may occur in two major forms, or modes. Taylor conducted a study of 19 cases of self-reported sudden spiritual awakening and he found such cases could be ascribed to a sudden collapse of the ego system, or an explosive type of energy. "It may also seem that these types of spiritual awakening appeared to be most frequently induced by intense forms of psychological turmoil, such as bereavement, depression, addiction, and intense stress" (2018, p. 131).

A spiritual or transpersonal experience can in itself provide the impetus and motivation for spiritual development leading to personal transformation. For example, Helm (2018) found that near-

death experiences have a profound impact on 12 participants that he interviewed: They became less religious and more spiritual, believing they have become better persons through the awakening of feelings of empathy and love for humankind. Porath (2006) investigated 9 participants who experienced unintentional, unexpected mystical encounters and how they made sense of it. She found that that the experiences allowed the participants to connect to a larger reality, but that they also had difficulty processing and articulating the experiences. Yet, following the experiences, there was a process of self-redefinition in terms of worldviews, religious practices, and lifestyle or career changes. A chance transpersonal encounter, or an unexpected mystical moment, or peak experience, can therefore lead to a new self- or spiritual development process.

However, very few studies have "directly addressed the question of how the process of spiritual change is experienced. Experiences of the change process often appear to be associated and even merged with the experience of the transformative trigger itself" (Russo-Netzer & Mayseless, 2016, p. 2). Grandi (2003) interviewed seven spiritual practitioners/teachers to discover how spirituality changes over time, and to assess Ken Wilber's model of stages of development. Some limitations with some of the questions were discovered as it seemed too abstract for the participants to understand. The researcher found some evidence of stage development, but the study was inconclusive. Wink and Dillon (2002) found that spirituality develops over time as the individual's experiences increase, and their search for spiritual meaning develops. They also found that "spiritual development tends to occur in individuals who are psychologically minded, invested in the world of ideas, and who tend to experience adversity" (2002, p. 93).

One of the few studies that focused on spiritual development per se, and not just spiritual experiences that may trigger spiritual development, is that of Russo-Netzer and Mayseless (2016) who investigated 27 adults to explore their experiences of spiritual change after a triggering event. The main finding was that the participants experience spiritual development as 'work', that is, inner

work on the self (both spiritual-psychological and spiritual-transpersonal), and that spiritual development is a work in progress as a non-linear process with no specific end-point.

We therefore deal with 2 different approaches when it comes to spiritual change: first, a sudden onset of a spiritual experience, which can be transformative in itself, and second, a gradual change and growth. Spiritual development emerges over time.

The issue of spiritual experiences as opposed to spiritual development is of relevance to this study, especially where Ken Wilber's Integral theory is discussed a little later in the thesis. He differentiates between spiritual growth (Growing Up) and spiritual awakening/experiences (Waking Up).

Psychological Development Approaches to Spiritual Development

In the discipline of psychology, spirituality is mostly studied in the domains of the psychology of religion and transpersonal psychology. The psychology of religion focuses on studying the experience of religiosity in humans. With transpersonal psychology, it is "… the area that focuses on the study of transpersonal experiences and related phenomena. These phenomena include the causes, effects and correlates of transpersonal experiences and development, as well as the disciplines and practices inspired by them" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 203).

In addition to the psychology of religion and transpersonal psychology, spiritual development theories rely greatly on developmental psychology, which studies human development across the life span. Human development is often conceptualised in stages within which personal development occurs, for example, in the work of theorists such as Erikson, Piaget, Loevinger and Kohlberg (Cunningham, 2010).

Ken Wilber states that spirituality (and spiritual development) can be approached from two perspectives. The first sees spirituality as the highest stages of all development lines, as in the higher stages of cognitive, emotional, moral and ego development. Spirituality embodies, "the very highest

capacities, the noblest motives, the best of aspirations; the farthest reaches of human nature; the most highly evolved …" (Wilber, 2000d, p. 130). Furthermore, "Psychological development merges into transconventional, transpersonal, and spiritual stages" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993, p. 110). This approach can therefore also be regarded as transpersonal development, with its emphasis on development beyond the conventional accepted stages, and which falls in the ambit of transpersonal psychology.

Alternatively, Ken Wilber proposes a spiritual development 'line' (Wilber, 2000b). Spiritual development can be seen as a separate development line, which develops concurrently with all the other human development lines from childhood to old age not just the later post-conventional stages (often the focus of transpersonal theorists). Such a separate line is simply one of the psychological development 'lines' – for example, cognitive development, ego development, emotional development, and moral development. Therefore, this perspective focuses solely on spirituality and the development thereof. This separate development line can develop into transpersonal or post-conventional aspects or stages, but it remains within the spiritual development line.

These two perspectives – transpersonal development and spiritual development – are often confused and are used interchangeably, so I want to make the distinction very early on in my discussion. I take the perspective that spiritual development is a separate development line as per Wilber's suggestion. This allows me to focus on exploring spiritual development models in and of itself, whether they focus on transpersonal aspects or not.

In conclusion, spiritual development, as I will be dealing with it in this thesis, is examined in the context of human development and as a psychological concern outside of a theological context (Cunningham, 2010).

Spiritual Development Goals

The question can be asked, where does spirituality develop *to*? What is the goal? Related to these questions is the nature of what is developed — what is the 'spirit' that develops over time?

Most of the world's religions and quasi-religious philosophical systems share a common notion that there is a spiritual aspect or dimension to human personality, and sometimes a connection to a divine reality such the psyche, soul, Higher Self, Atman, Original Self, Oversoul, or Spark-soul. However, we cannot assume they all mean the same thing, although a distinction is commonly made between mind, soul and spirit. As our human capacities for thinking and reflection progressively increased through the ages, and as we have begun to incorporate more sophisticated psychological capacities, we have begun to entertain the idea of 'higher' modes of thought and consciousness (Daniels, 2005), and the idea of a transpersonal self persists.

Daniels (2005) points out that it is important to recognise the various metaphysical assumptions of transpersonal theorists, even if subtle, as the assumptions tend to influence theories. Because of the religious-like or metaphysical nature of some of the transpersonal theories, many transpersonal psychologists – and to remain true to the data of the experience at the level of psychological explanation – prefer to talk about the transpersonal *self* or *identity*, rather than use the term soul (Daniels, 2005). Helminiak criticises efforts in psychology that confound a theistic viewpoint with spiritualty. He regards any God-talk or God-substitutes, for example the divine, the sacred or the ultimate, as unwarranted, and such should rather belong in the domain of theology. He contends that if we want a legitimate psychology of religion and spirituality it should be able to stand on its own as a separate process intrinsic to the human being. Thus, spirituality stripped of it religious influences can be more accurately investigated and the mechanisms at play can be analysed (Helminiak, 2006). It is best to state upfront the underlying metaphysical assumptions (Daniels, 2005).

In transpersonal psychology, and as it relates to spiritual development, there are two main philosophical approaches or paradigms: Perennialism and the Participatory paradigm. In its basic form, the Perennialist philosophy proposes that a single truth underlies all spiritual and religious paths and there is only one goal to all spiritual paths. There are many roads up the mountain – but only one summit. A more complex form of Perennialism allows for more complexity – there may be many paths and many goals, and yet there is only one Ground of Being or ultimate reality. In Perennialism's structuralist form, it postulates that there is a deep structure underlying all, but it allows for diverse surface structures that are evident in various cultures and spiritual traditions (Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Hartelius, 2017). To counter the Perennialist position, which has been the dominant philosophy for 30 years, others (mainly Ferrer, 2011, 2015) proposed the Participatory approach. This approach reframes transpersonal and spiritual events as pluralistic events and denies any privileging of religious tradition or paradigm. Spiritual experiences, insights and phenomena are cocreated events, with the mystery or generative power of life. "[T]the participatory approach aims at the emergence of a human community formed by spiritually differentiated individuals" (Ferrer, 2011, p. 5). The relationship between these two paradigms is contentious and will be discussed below in the section on criticism and debates.

The different development goals and the nature of spirit are closely related to the different spiritual development models, which are discussed below.

Spiritual Development Models

In psychology, some of the most prominent spiritual development theories have drawn from developmental psychology and focus on a particular kind (faith/religion/spirituality) of development process. In a seminal work, **James Fowler's** *Stages of Faith* (1981) mapped a faith development and maturation process in six stages. It was based on Erikson's epigenetic principle, Piaget's cognitive stage development theories, and Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Fowler defines faith very

broadly, and therefore is compatible with the concept of and writings on spirituality. In a seminal work, **James Fowler's** *Stages of Faith* (1981) mapped a faith development and maturation process in six stages. It was based on Erikson's epigenetic principle, Piaget's cognitive stage development theories, and Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Fowler defines faith very broadly, and therefore is compatible with the concept of and writings on spirituality.

Fowler's (1981) stages are as follows:

- Stage 0, which is a pre-stage of Undifferentiated Faith of the new-born until the age of two. The young child has the potential for faith but is still undeveloped.

- Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith in early childhood (ages two to six or seven) and is characterised by a mix of fantasy and reality, as children cannot yet think abstractly.

- Stage 2: Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith (ages 6 to 12), at which point the child starts to begin to differentiate between fantasy and facts. Children think concretely and literally and their faith consist of religious stories and rituals.

- Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (from ages 13 to 18). Formal operational thinking starts to develop in the adolescent, which allows for abstract thinking and meaning-making of their religion. Stage three is the stage of conventional, conformist faith development. Authority is located externally to the self – in parents and people in authority.

- Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith. This stage usually starts in late adolescence (18 to 22 years old). The late adolescent or early adult leaves the confines of his or her familiar background and is often exposed to people with different ideas and convictions, which may then challenge tacitly held values and beliefs. This stage requires that the individual question and examine, and they reconstitute beliefs and values formed up to that point. Greater maturity is gained by rejecting some parts of their faith while affirming other parts, but people may also leave their faith at this point.

- Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith. Usually starting in the thirties, which is a stage where polarities or opposites are integrated and where paradoxes are embraced. People are more open to other people's faith perspectives and they realise that other people's faiths might inform and deepen their own.

- Stage 6: Universalizing Faith. According to Fowler, this is a rare stage, where the self is decentred and the individual acquires a universal perspective. There is an increased capacity for universal love, care and justice.

Not too dissimilar from Fowler, **Daniel A. Helminiak** (1987) states that spiritual development is an adult affair. Spiritual development "entails self-critical and self-responsible growth" (1987, p. 38). He also draws on developmental psychology and builds on Fowler's theory, and incorporates other developmental theorists such as Loevinger and the ego development stages. For Helminiak, self-transcendence is the goal of spiritual development: "The human spirit is a structured open-ended, dynamic dimension of the mind. The human spirit is inherently self-transcending, geared to reach beyond itself" (2006, p. 211). Spiritual development only starts from the conformist, conventional stage (as per Fowler's Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional). Thereafter, Helminiak's stages are: Conscientious Stage, the Autonomous stage, and finally, the Cosmic Stage.

Not all approaches centre on structural developmental stages (that is, hierarchical, sequential and irreversible). For example, Streib (2001) criticises Fowler's over-reliance on cognitive developmental stages as the driver for faith development, and proposes the inclusion for life history and life world in the developmental process of faith.

> Religious development is a complex process of entangled factors: of structural development, of *schemata* of interpersonal relationships, and of *themata,* which are presented to the individual by experiences – and sometimes traumas – in earlier life history and that may

change and vary as the interpersonal, social, and societal relationships change over a lifetime (Streib 2001, p. 146).

Streib advocates a multi-layeredness of different religious styles that accumulates over a life-time and creates a plurality in the individual.

The spiritual development models of Fowler and Helminiak feature strongly in the psychology of religion. When it comes to transpersonal psychology, on the other hand, there are other prominent models. I briefly discuss some of the most important models below, but this is not an exhaustive list. The first prominent and influential model is that of **Abraham Maslow**, who was also a founding father of the transpersonal movement. Maslow identified an integrated hierarchy of needs, with 5 levels: (1) Physiological needs; (2) safety and security needs, (3) love and belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualisation. The first five stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs have very little to do with spirituality, but with the satisfaction of deficiency needs (fulfilling a lack). It is only at the fifth stage, that is, self-actualisation that growth or meta needs come into play. Some of the characteristics of self-actualisation are the seeking of truth, to accept oneself, having a purpose, to be authentic, having good moral intuition, peak experiences, having a concern for humanity, having a creative spirit, and the cultivation of equanimity (Maslow, 1968; Kaufman, 2020). Traditionally, "the pinnacle of human development, according to Maslow, is self-actualising: a person has reached his or her own full human potential" (Moore, 2003). However, in the last years of his life Maslow added an additional stage, (6) self-transcendence. Previous elements which he attributed to the self-actualising person, he then moved to self-transcendence. Here he specifically focuses on what he calls Being-needs (for example, Being-values and Being-cognition) and peak experiences. Peak experiences are transformative for the person experiencing it, and are "unusual moments of heightened joy, serenity, beauty, or wonder" (Kaufman, 2020, p. 193).

Maslow also differentiated between "practical" self-actualisers and "transcending" self-actualisers. Maslow saw the motivation of some self-actualisers to transcend the self, as being individuals who were motivated by meta-motivations – devoting themselves to callings or vocations beyond themselves (Maslow, 1968).

For **Carl Jung** with his individuation process, and **Roberto Assagioli,** an Italian psychiatrist and a contemporary of Jung, s/Self-realisation and –discovery are the goal.

Jung's theory of psychological development is specifically psychological and not metaphysical. His concept of the collective unconsciousness, that is '*überpersonlich'*, or 'above the person', has been interpreted as transpersonal, hence his importance to transpersonal psychologists. Jung's theory proposes two development paths towards the goal of individuation, a process by which a person becomes a whole, unified individual: First the aim is to adapt to an outer reality and to create the ego (self-sense) and the persona (patterns of adaptive behaviour). Second, usually in the second part of life, the individual turn inwards to realise the larger, whole Self where the archetypal realities are acknowledged and are adapted to.

For Jung, the unconscious is divided between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious refers to that which has passed through the ego consciousness. It contains memories of past events and is accessible to consciousness if stimulated or recalled. Within the personal unconsciousness are complexes, which are groups of associated ideas, containing an emotional charge, and which are split off from the ego due to possible trauma or incompatibility with the ego.

The collective unconscious contains the instincts and archetypes or universal potentials for all lived experiences. Jung regards these archetypes, or organising principles, as *a priori* fields or patterns of information. They manifest, depending on the individual personal experiences and external or cultural factors, in dreams, symbols and myths. Transpersonal experiences, including experiences of

God, belong to these collective archetypes. Jung identifies 4 main archetypes: 1) The shadow, which carries rejected or disowned aspects of the ego 2); The soul-image (animus and anima) which is the representation of the inner personality, usually contrasexual; 3) Mana personalities, which represent "the archetypal personification of the extraordinary inner power found deep within the unconscious" (Daniels, 2005, p. 201), and 4) The Self, which is the main archetype. The Self represents both the primal ground and the totality and union of both the unconscious and conscious psyche. The Self is therefore something that in theory can be realised, although in practice never fully know because of the unconscious aspect. The Self acts as inner guiding and organising principle. Jung also identified and discussed other archetypes, inter alia, the Father, the Mother, and The Old Wise Man.

The archetypes are functionally related to the complexes. At the center of these complexes lies a core of the collective unconscious, that is, the archetypes or primordial images which are then manifested through the complexes. Complexes can, unconscious to the individual, take on a life of their own and act independently and autonomously, irrespective of the individual personal will. Within the archetypes lies the potential for the species specific experiences, whereas the actual live experiences are contained in the complexes.

Jung's goal towards individuation is facilitated through a dialogue between the ego's limited sphere of consciousness with the unconscious. The journey towards individuation is facilitated by what Jung terms analytical depth psychology (Jung, 1965; Vaughan, 2013; Daniels, 2005; Corbert & Stein, 2005).

More so than Jung, Assagioli created a bridge called *psychosynthesis* (that is, also a therapeutic method) between psychology and spirituality in his psychological approach. Assagioli makes provision for a higher unconscious and a Higher Self – clearly differentiating from the normal conscious self or 'I'. Assagioli maintains that the little self can transform into this Higher Self or Transpersonal Self and allows the personality to transform around this new centre. Although

Assagioli deals with the unconscious and collective unconscious, not too dissimilar from Jung, his model makes provision, in addition to the collective unconscious, for a middle unconscious which contains skills, behaviours, attitudes and feelings that are accessible to the waking consciousness. He then further distinguishes a higher unconsciousness – the superconscious, which are the transpersonal realms and where one's most evolved impulses reside (Assagioli, 1965; Daniels, 2005).

The holotropic model of **Stanislav Grof** incorporates and provides for accounts of a variety of altered states and transpersonal experiences. He bases his theory on extensive investigations into the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs and a specific type of breathwork. He conceives of three domains of the psyche — the personal, perinatal and transpersonal domains – but with a strong focus on the before and after birth experiences. These experiences continue to exert a strong influence throughout a person's lifetime (Daniels, 2005; Grof, 2013).

Michael Washburn developed the Spiral-Dynamic Model. It includes a transpersonal perspective (life is divided in three stages: pre-personal (pre-egoic), personal (egoic) and transpersonal (transegoic)), and a depth psychological approach which follows the psychoanalytic tradition. He conceives of a hidden psyche that underlies the ego, similar to Freud's id and Jung's collective unconscious (Washburn, 2003). Washburn calls this the Dynamic Ground which contains the earliest sources of our existence, and which we need to return to in the transpersonal stage after spiritual awakening if we want to be transformed and enlivened in transpersonal ways. Washburn conceives of development as a spiral:

> The spiral is evident here in the idea that we must re-establish an open connection with the earliest sources of our existence (the downward loop of the spiral) if we are to move to a higher, transpersonal stage of development (the upward loop of the spiral). The spiral, then, can be formulated as follows: we must spiral back to the deep psyche if we are to spiral up to life lived in its fullness (Washburn, 2003, p. 2).

The Spiral-Dynamic theory is similar to the Structural-Hierarchical ascent models, in that both paths follow the pre-egoic to the increasingly rational-egoic growth path (Teklinski, 2013). However, Washburn emphasises non-egoic potentials which we repress or leave behind in the development of the ego – but such non-egoic potentials contain pre-egoic and higher potentials. "It is rather a spiraling return to nonegoic potentials that, having earlier expressed themselves as pre, are about to begin expressing themselves as trans" (Washburn, 2003, p. 6). The return to the non-egoic may be regressive, but not necessarily so, and it serves an integrating purpose. It is the return to the origins or a "regression in the service of transcendence" (Washburn, 2003, p. 6).

Ken Wilber, in his foundational work, *The spectrum of Consciousness* (1977), proposed a spectrum of realisation and development of consciousness, which has been very influential in transpersonal psychology. Unashamedly mystic, Wilber states that "being and consciousness exist on a spectrum of existence, reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to Spirit. And although Spirit is in a sense the highest dimension or level of the spectrum of existence, it is also the ground or condition of the entire spectrum" (Wilber, 1993: xvi). The goal of spiritual development is to increasingly move up into higher levels of consciousness, until reaching the state in which Spirit is encountered in what can be called, for example, God, The Absolute, Enlightenment, or Non-dual awakening (Wilber, 1993). As such, Spirit "… is something we must work to comprehend, to understand, to attain union with, to identify with" (Wilber, 1993, p. xvi).

In summary, Jung's approach is but one of the theoretical models I could have followed to explore spiritual development. Had I gone the Jung route, I probably would have also included Washburn and other models based on Jung or post-Jungian thought. Jung may be more known outside transpersonal psychology circles, but was in my opinion not adequate to fully discuss spiritual development and experiences. Wilber does that comprehensively, and include within his Integral Theory the Jungian approach and some of the elements of his theory. Through Wilber, therefore, I

had access to elements of most spiritual development theories, and could use whatever was applicable.

Section 2: An Introduction to Wilber's Integral Philosophy and Theory

I became acquainted with Ken Wilber's works while I was doing research for my master's dissertation, which dealt with spirituality in the workplace and employee assistance programmes. The first article I discovered was *A developmental View of Consciousness*. He introduced the concept of holons – "everywhere we look in nature we see nothing but wholes – each whole is a part of a larger whole... These wholes are energetically dynamic and even creative (Wilber, 1979, p. 1).

As I continued reading this article, I was astonished. Here was a map for my spiritual journey that I was not aware of. He was mapping out the stages of consciousness, from basic primordial state, the body-self, the body-ego, the mental-self right, into the transpersonal realms. And I recognised those stages – especially the latter. After my journey, I had so many unanswered questions, but here was the promise of answers. I went to the local academic bookshop and was referred to Wilber's first book, *Spectrum of Consciousness*, and also his seminal work, *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*. What a revelation they were – complex, difficult to grasp given all the new ideas and the scope of his work, but electrifying. I continued to read most of his books in chronological order, which is important as he continuously build on his theories and sometimes modifies some aspects. His work has gone through several stages, which sometimes makes it challenging to work with. But the basics remain. The holons that he introduced in that first article that I read is a fundamental tenet of Wilber's evolutionary theory. "Reality is composed of whole/parts, or holons … If you look closely at the things and processes that actually exist, it soon becomes obvious that they are not merely wholes, they are also parts of something else. They are whole/parts, they are holons" (Wilber, 2000, p. 16). To illustrate, Wilber uses the example of a whole atom that is part of a whole molecule, and then the whole molecule is part of a whole cell, which in turn is part of a whole organism: "Each of these

entities is neither a whole nor a part, but a whole/part, a holon. Everything is basically a holon of some sort or another" (Wilber, 2000, p. 16).

Holons emerge in an evolutionary, self-transcending process "and in that emergence, in that creativity, new entities come into being, new builds unions out of fragments and wholes out of heaps. The Kosmos builds unions out of fragments and wholes out of heaps. The Kosmos, it seems, unfolds in quantum leaps of creative emergence" (Wilber, 2000, p. 17). Furthermore, holons emerge holarchically and Wilber refers to it as a holarchy. He also points out that that hierarchies have a bad reputation because people confuse dominator and power hierarchies with natural hierarchies, which is referring to the fact that they are increasing in wholeness and complexity. It is not a value hierarchy. The lower levels are as important because the higher levels build on the lower levels and the lower levels are necessary if the higher levels are to exist (Wilber, 2000, pp. 24–25).

The next point, which l will discuss further in practical terms later in my story, is that Wilber sees direction in this evolutionary process. There is a formative drive, a telos to the Kosmos. He calls this drive Spirit-in-action, or sometimes Eros, as it organises Form into increasingly coherent holons or Wholes. The Spirit-drive in evolution is not to be confused with creationism or intelligent design – Spirit is unqualifiable and unbounded by any one religious tradition (Wilber, 2000).

Spirit is both the Source or Ground of Being, as well as the goal and the summit. Therefore it is both immanent and transcendent. Wilber (1993) uses the analogy of a ladder – it is both the highest rung on the ladder of evolution, as well as the subsistence from which the ladder and all its rungs are made. Spirit is a self-organising and self-transcending drive that manifests through successive unfoldings. Spirit follows a descending and an ascending path: From the One to the Many (in a process of *involution* as Absolute Spirit descends into the world of Forms, soul, mind and then into matter – the Many, and from the Many into One in the process of *evolution* as denser matter, individual and collective, evolves into Spirit through a process of "self-actualisation")) (Wilber, 2000d; Reynolds,

2006). The goal of human life is the rediscovery of what was and already is there – the truth and

Absolute Real (Wilber, 2000d). Figure 2 summarises this concept:
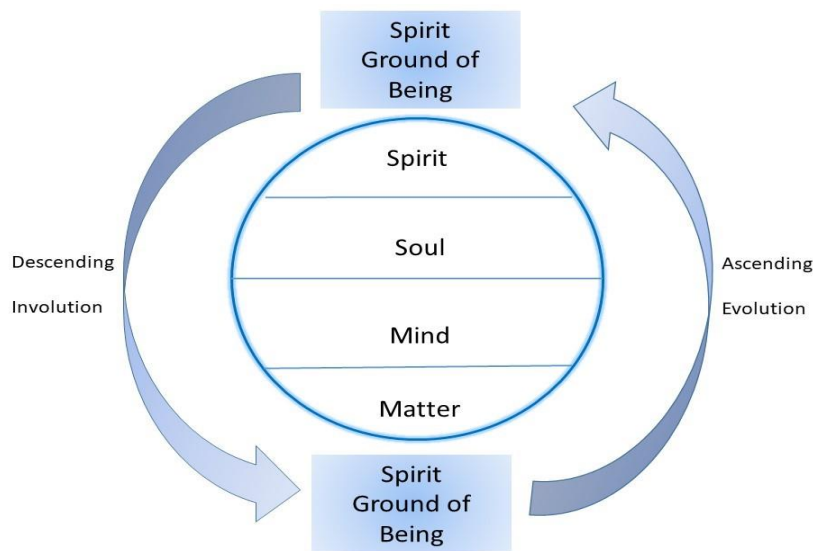
Figure 3: One into Many; Many into One

(Based on Wilber, 2000b, 2006)

Presenting his evolutionary model, Wilber starts with the perennial philosophy and its Great

Chain of Being. According to Wilber, this philosophy is the common core of the world's great

religious and spiritual traditions. Fundamentally, "it is the view that reality is composed of various

levels of existence – levels of knowing and being – ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to

spirit" (Wilber, 2006, p. 5). Similar to holons, it is the idea that each senior dimension transcends and

includes the previous levels. So, instead of the Great Chain of Being, Wilber calls it the Great Nest

of Being. It is a series of concentric circles or spheres (Wilber, 2006, 2000). Various perennial

philosophers have their own divisions of the major levels in the Great Nest. Some only refer to three

levels: body, mind, and spirit (or gross, subtle and causal), and some present up to a dozen levels

(Wilber, 2006, 2000). Wilber presents several different levels on different occasions, depending on

what he wants to discuss or illustrate. He uses levels, structures, and waves interchangeably, but *levels* refer to holons of consciousness that are qualitatively distinct levels of organisation; *structures* refer to "holistic enduring patterns of being and consciousness", and *waves* denote the fact that these levels or structures are not rigid, but rather are fluid and can run into each other. Development is a messy affair (Wilber, 2006, p. 7).

Each holon has four aspects or dimensions, and must be studied in its intentional, behaviourial, cultural and social settings. Each holon possesses these four aspects, which Wilber calls quadrants. Each quadrant is correlated with, and dependent upon the others, but cannot be reduced to any one of them. These four quadrants form the AQAL matrix: all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types (Wilber, 2000d).

AQAL Matrix

The quadrants are divided into two quadrants on the left hand side which represent the interior of a holon, and two on the right hand side which represent the exterior of a holon. The quadrants are further divided into two in the upper level (the individual aspect) and two on a lower level (the collective aspect). It can be summarised as follows (Figure 3):
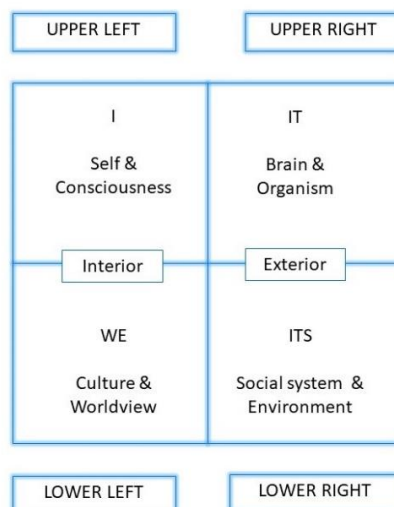
Figure 4: AQAL Matrix depicting the four quadrants: 2 Upper and 2 Lower, and interior and exterior dimensions (Figure based on Wilber, 2007, pp. 71–72)

- Upper Left refers to the individual interior (intentional aspect), which generates a first person language such as I/you/he. It is the inside or subjective experiences of individual holons. It is the immediate thoughts, sensations and feelings of an individual, and is studied by disciplines such as psychology, religion and mysticism and covers Wilber's spectrum of consciousness.

- Upper Right (behavioural aspect) refers to the objective 'it' – it is the exterior of the individual. It refers to the organism and concrete body – the area of, *inter alia*, neurotransmitters, the limbic system, DNA and complex cells. This dimension is studied by empirical science and uses objective 'its' language. It involves the measuring of the outside, objective or physical correlates of the individual.

- The Lower Left (cultural aspect) refers to the intersubjective 'we' awareness and collective interiors. It generates second-person language – we/us. This quadrant involves shared culture and social worldviews. It is the within, inside, intersubjective aspects of collective holons. This dimension is studied by anthropologists and ethnographers, for example.

- Lower Right (social aspect) refers to the exteriors of the collective or social holons. It is expressed as 'it/its' – for example, social systems and societies. It is measured and studied by system sciences and social sciences (Wilber, 2006, 2007).

An individual holon has at least these four faces of the quadrants. No holon resides exclusively in any of the four quadrants (Wilber, 2000). These quadrants are all available simultaneously, but it depends on the focus of the discussion or inquiry. Each quadrant also has an inner and an outer *zone*. It therefore provides for eight primordial perspectives (Integral Perspectivism) revealing their own phenomena, which can be investigated using any one of multiple methodologies. Wilber refers to this as Integral Methodological Pluralism. For example, the 'I' (Upper Left quadrant) can be looked at from the inside or the outside. From the *inside* it will be as the subject of my present experience,

which will result from meditation or contemplation (summarised as phenomenology). Or can I approach this 'I' from the *outside* and I can be the 'scientific' observer of myself or try to see myself as others would see me. I will then use, for example, a structuralist approach. Similarly, the study of 'we' (Lower left quadrant) can be done from the inside using hermeneutics, and if we look at the 'we' from the outside, we can use anthropology or, as Wilber provides for in general, ethnomethodology. The Upper Right quadrant uses autopoiesis/cognitive science for the inside, and empiricism such as neurophysiology for the outside. The Lower Right quadrant uses social autopoiesis for the inside and systems theory for the outside zone. Thus, these quadrants generate eight perspectives and eight basic methodologies (Wilber, 2006).

To illustrate in terms of my thesis, I mostly use the perspectives of the Upper Left quadrant and use the methodology of autoethnography (the –auto part) – a methodology which can be included in Wilber's general phenomenology for the *inside* zone. I use Wilber's structuralist theory for the *outside* zone of the Upper Left quadrant. When it comes to the Lower Left quadrant, the –ethnography part is used for the *outside* zone, and although I do not pursue this explicitly, the mutual understanding of 'we' in the *inside* zone can possibly fall under hermeneutics.

Having now provided a general introduction to Integral Theory, I now focus on the individual spiritual development aspect. Spiritual development takes place in context (see Figure 3). In this thesis, although I have all four quadrants in mind, my main focus is on the interior side of the AQAL matrix, that is, the Upper Left quadrant where spiritual development takes place in the individual, and which is influenced and shaped by the collective Lower Left quadrant. I therefore only focus on these two quadrants in my discussion of AQAL.

In the Upper Left quadrant there are four aspects to spiritual development that I discuss: Growing up, Waking Up, Cleaning Up and Showing Up (2017). In the Lower Left quadrant there are further two aspects that I discuss: culture, and worldviews (Figure 4).
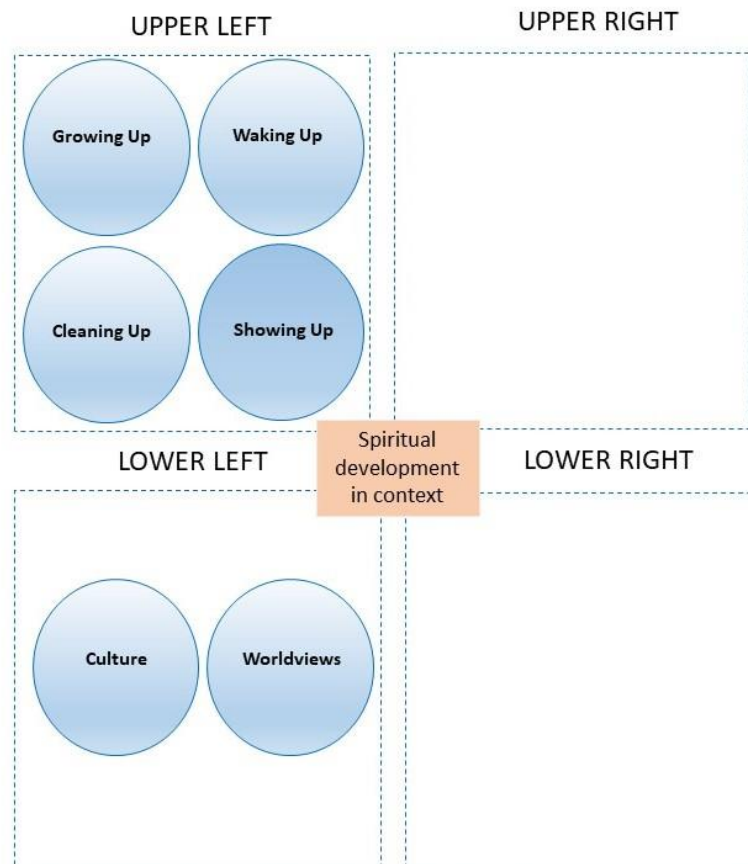
Figure 5 Spiritual development in context. The relevant aspects in each of the interior quadrants are illustrated.

Section 3: Wilber's Integral Theory: Spiritual Development in Context

3.1 Upper Left Quadrant: 'I'

Individual spiritual development, according to Wilber's Integral Theory, lies in the domain of the Upper Left quadrant. Wilber, summarising his structural spiritual development theory, proposes four interrelated aspects: *Growing up, Waking up, Cleaning up, and Waking Up* (Figure 5). Growing Up then refers to the structure-stages of consciousness, Waking Up refers to the states of consciousness, and Cleaning Up refers to the psychological 'shadow work' which is required for a fully spiritually developed human being. In addition, Wilber adds Showing Up, to refer to an individual bringing his or her whole self (integrating all four quadrants) to life (Wilber, 2017). The dominant focus is on

Growing Up, or as Wilber often refers to it – "spiritual intelligence" (Wilber, 2006, 2017). The Growing Up aspect is discussed in terms of development lines, structures and stages of consciousness (first, second and third tier structures), and the self that navigates these lines and structures (Figure 5). The Waking Up aspect – "spiritual experience" is discussed in terms of states of consciousness.
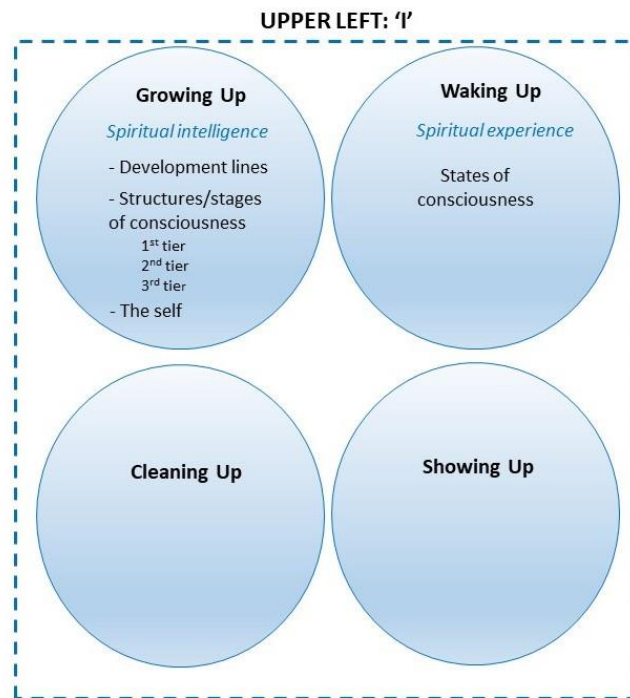
Figure 6: Upper Left quadrant. The four aspects to spiritual development are illustrated.

3.1.1 Growing Up

When Wilber (for example, 2006, 2017) talks about his structural development model, he uses the analogy of a ladder, climber, and view.

The spectrum of the basic structures of consciousness are akin to the basic rungs of a ladder. Once they emerge they remain in existence – they are enduring structures. The climber is the self-sense or the self-system. As the climber climbs the rungs of the ladder, the climber temporarily and exclusively identifies with the current rung and sees the world through the eyes of that rung. The climber's view of the world is therefore determined by their position on the rung, and as they progress up the rung they gain an even higher view – while relinquishing the previous view. However, the

rungs remain in existence and never disappear. Development includes and transcends, and therefore preserves all the previous rungs. Therefore, a worldview rests on the underlying structure or "rung" (as in a ladder) that supports it, and which is made up of many underlying components and elements – for example, cognitive development, moral development and values (Wilber, 2000).

Developmental lines

There are at least a dozen different development lines, for example cognitive (for example, Piaget), moral (for example, Kohlberg), self (for example, Loevinger), values (for example, Graves, Spiral Dynamics), emotional (for example, Goleman) and needs (for example, Maslow). Wilber (2006, 2017) includes the ideas of Gardner that there are multiple lines of intelligence, including cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, and, for the purposes of this thesis, spiritual intelligence. These development lines develop relatively independently from each other, so that human development overall is a very uneven and sometimes messy affair. Although very different, and given they cannot be compared to one another, they all show an unmistakable pattern of levels or stages of unfolding. So, each of these development lines reveals its own levels of accomplishment: for example, highly developed or poorly developed. They all show a growth in the same direction, increasing in complexity and consciousness.

First let us examine the 'ladder' – the structures of consciousness and their respective views.

As Wilber's thinking and elaboration of his theory developed, he started to combine different structures or stages into tiers – First, Second and Third tier levels of consciousness (Wilber, 2006, 2017).

Structures of consciousness

Wilber explains that consciousness "is not anything itself, just a degree of openness or emptiness … is not in itself a phenomena – it is a space in which phenomena arise" (Wilber, 2006, p. 66). According to Wilber, levels or stages of development refer to the idea that each stage represents a level of organisation and complexity. At the very least, these stages can be conceptualised as body, then mind and then spirit; or pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. Wilber typically works with eight to ten stages, hierarchically organised so that each higher stage encapsulates and subsumes the lower stages. From a spiritual development perspective, these stages translate how the individual thinks about that which is of Ultimate Concern to him or her and informs his or her worldview. It refers to the complexity of thinking (or stages of consciousness) and how such thinking develops and grows (or ceases to grow) across the lifespan of an individual (Wilber, 2017).

However, we need to find a way to number or name the different structures without confusing them with the different development lines which cross them. To this end, Wilber has used many different descriptions for these levels or structures, and it has become confusing. In his later works (2006, 2017), Wilber indicates that he likes to use colours or sometimes uses the cognitive line as "research continued to demonstrate that growth in the cognitive line is necessary but not sufficient for the growth in other lines" (2006, p. 65). Another way of describing these levels is in terms of each structure of consciousness's worldview (and also when discussing cultures and the intersubjective 'we').

For this project where spiritual development is the main topic of discussion, I will use the three descriptors of the levels or structures of consciousness: colours, the cognitive line, and worldviews.

The first tier

The first tier in Wilber's discussions normally consists of six levels of development, and he refers to a fulcrum to describe the developmental step up the rungs. I use his colours to indicate the altitude markers and include the general worldview of the separate levels (Wilber, 2000d):

- *Infrared*: Fulcrum 0: The newborn is just a sensorimotor organism, with the self-identified and fused with the sensorimotor world. The self has physiological needs and drives for food, water and warmth.

- *Magenta:* Fulcrum 1: "The hatching of the physical self" (p. 147). At this level, the self starts to differentiate into the Self and Other. The stage is focused on safety and security needs and survival.

- *Red:* Fulcrum 2: "The birth of the emotional self" (p. 148). A separate self develops and differentiates itself from the emotional environment. However, the self becomes fearful of being vulnerable and being split apart from the world. To ensure its safety, it becomes self-protective, strives for power and becomes opportunistic, and is totally self-centred. The self has a magical worldview.

- *Amber*: Fulcrum 3: "The birth of the conceptual self" (p. 153). The self is no longer identified with the emotional self, and begins to identify with the mental or conceptual self. This is the beginning of what Wilber calls the representational mind that can grasp images and symbols. The self has a mythic worldview.

- *Orange*: Fulcrum 4: "The birth of the role self" (p. 158). The stage relates to Piaget's concrete operational stage, starting at the age of six to seven. It operates on the concrete world. It includes the capacity to make mental rules and roles, and the child learns to take the role of the other. The self's identity switches from egocentric to sociocentric, and develops all kind

of scripts to conform to society's expectations. It is world of rules and roles. The self has a mythic or mythic-rational rational worldview.

- *Green:* Fulcrum 5: "The worldcentric or mature ego" (p. 169). From about eleven to fifteen years, the self develops the capacity for formal operational awareness. The self can operate on thought itself, that is, thinking about thinking. The self can imagine different worlds, and 'what if' and 'as if' can be conceptualized. The self can also judge the rules and roles from the previous stage, and criticise conventional society. The worldcentric or global perspective emerges. The self has a pluralistic worldview.

The pluralistic stage is the last of the first-tier stages and is where the second-tier stages begin – which are quite unlike any stage that appeared in all of history. The main difference between the first and second tiers is that the first tier believe their truths are the only truths. People in the second tier, however, believe that all stages have some truth, if partial. Each stage is a crucial step or stage in the development of human beings. None can be deleted without disastrous and profound developmental challenges (Wilber, 2017). The second-tier stages comprise the integrated or integral stage, and this type of thinking is considered below.

The second tier

The second-tier levels, that is Fulcrum 6: "The Bodymind integration of the centaur" (Wilber, 2000d, p. 173) development, is in contrast to the first tier in that instead of believing that my level of values is the only correct level, the second tier is the beginning of a more integral approach. Individuals now recognise the relative importance of all levels of development (Wilber, 2000b). In terms of Integral Theory, the second tier is characterised by the Teal and Turquoise levels of developmental altitude. The worldviews shift from worldcentric to Kosmocentric. In the case of Teal, it is the beginning of an integral worldview: Pluralism and relativism are transcended and incorporated into a more systemic and integrated whole. This development level tends to be secular,

in contrast to the next mature Turquoise level which starts to incorporate Spirit as a living force in the world (De Vos, 2017). At this point, the individual may start to become interested (or may have been already practising) in the Waking Up road of spiritual development, and will follow a psychotechnology of consciousness transformation such as meditation or contemplation (Wilber, 2006).

The Turquoise level is the mature integral view, which sees healthy hierarchies. In terms of Integral Theory, it observes the quadrants as the expression of various knowledge and inquiry *modes (*De Vos, 2017; Wilber, 2017).

The third tier

The third-tier cluster of levels of development is mainly theoretical, and except for Wilber (2017) who extensively conceptualised these levels, and also Rowan (2012), not much has been written about it. Little research has been done to find empirical evidence that it, in fact, exists (Volbrecht, 2008). (This thesis aims to address the third tier, and to provide some empirical evidence that such tier exists.) The third tier refers to levels of development post-Turquoise. Wilber incorporates Sri Aurobindo's levels of mind (illumined mind, intuitive mind, Overmind, and Supermind), and presents his own levels of altitude development.

Initially, Wilber proposed a spectrum of consciousness that combined Western psychological development models with Eastern state-stages of consciousness. The latter he divided into the Psychic stage, the Subtle stage, the Causal stage, and then Spirit or Non-dual awareness. In his later work, specifically *Integral Psychology* (2000b) and *Integral Spirituality* (2006), he concluded that the stages he was talking about were meditative stages and not necessarily structures of consciousness. He cordoned off the meditative stages by calling them *state-stages*, not to be confused with *structure-stages of consciousness*. These state-stages become the path of Waking Up, contrary to the structure-stages which are the path of Growing Up. These different state-stages can be accessed at any point in

the individual's development, although they will be interpreted in terms of the structure-stage the person is at (Wilber, 2006).

Wilber needed new names (and colours) to indicate the third-tier structures of consciousness, and Integral Theory postulates at least four levels: Para-mind (The old Psychic state/stage); Meta-mind (the old Subtle state/stage), Overmind (the old Causal state/stage) and Supermind (the old non-dual state/stage) (Wilber, 2006, 2017):

> … [T]here seem to be at least 3 or 4 structures/stages/levels Higher than turquoise … not pre-existing ontological or metaphysical structures already existing somewhere, but … the first very tentative structures being laid down by highly evolved souls pushing into new territory and co-creating them as they do … [b]ut to date, the sum total of humans who have stably moved into these higher structures is only a few thousand individuals, if that (2006, p. 245).

Third-tier structures of consciousness exist when the Waking Up states become enduring traits and conjoin with the underlying Growing Up stage-structures of consciousness – a particular state becomes an intrinsic part of the structure:

- Indigo – the union between the Para-mind and the Psychic (gross) state.

- Violet – the union between the Metamind structure and the Subtle state.

- Ultraviolet – the union between Overmind and the causal/Witnessing state.

- Clear/White light —the union between Supermind and the non-dual state.

Wilber's (2017) descriptions of these third-tier structures are still somewhat theoretical and abstract at this stage. Each of the four third-tier levels has three fundamental characteristics: a transpersonal component; a direct sense of wholeness (wholeness is "felt" rather than conceptualised as in the second tier); and an "awareness of awareness".

At third-tier structures, there is a recognition or intuition of some version of an individual's Higher Self. An individual feels a deep and abiding current that is experienced beyond the personality. The

Kosmic connection is felt as deep, wide, profound and immediate (Wilber, 2017). Rowan says that third-tier thinking "involves an explicit acceptance of spirituality – that we are spiritual beings, and we have a spiritual nature, and so forth" (Rowan, Daniels, Fontana, & Walley, 2007, p. 30). Rowan (2012) puts it simply: The individual begins to live as a spiritual being.

When there are discussions about the third tier, there is some scepticism (Third stage, n.d.; Harryman, 2007). Michael Daniels (in Rowan et al., 2007) is very sceptical that these third structures exist and questions if there is any evidence to support this claim. He says that Wilber claims that there are only few thousand that may have developed at this level. Daniels then asks: "Why should the cocreations of a few people form specific structures or Kosmic habits that then everyone else has to negotiate? *Particular* ones that everyone else has to negotiate (?)" (Rowan et al., 2007, p. 22, emphasis in the original). Daniels says that these cocreated realities are cultural constructions: Different spiritual traditions and different cultures will create their own spiritual paths and structures. There is nothing that is universal to it (Rowan et al., 2007).

The Self

Having discussed the 'ladder', I now consider the 'climber': The basic waves or structures and the different development lines are navigated by the self. Wilber firstly differentiates between two aspects of the self: the proximal self – "there is some sort of observing self (an inner subject or watcher)"; and two, the distal self "there is some sort of observed self (some objective things you can see or know about yourself – I am a father, mother, doctor, clerk, I weigh so many pounds, have blond hair, etc.)" (Wilber, 2000b, p. 33). Both of these parts together, as well as any other source of selfness (including the soul and the I-I or Witness), Wilber calls the *overall self* (Wilber, 1997).

The overall self contains multiple developmental streams and subpersonalities, and does not show a sequential or stage-like development. However, at least one part develops sequentially, and that is the proximal self (similar to Loevinger's ego development). This development of the proximate self is,

for Wilber, at the heart of the evolution of consciousness as it navigates through the basic waves in the Great Nest of Being, encountering developmental milestones or fulcrums. It first identifies with a stage or wave, consolidates with it, then dis-identifies with that stage again as it progresses up the ladder – each time transcending the previous rung or level as it identifies with the next one. However, Wilber (2000b) points out that the self is not rigidly stuck on a level, and can straddle different levels at any given time. However, there is a centre of gravity around one basic level of consciousness at any given time – that is, the self tends to be concentrated around a certain level of consciousness at any given time. "This means for example, that if you give individuals a test of ego development, about 50 percent of their answer will come from one level, and about 25 percent from the level above or below it" (2000b, pp. 35–36). As Wilber summarises:

> The proximate self, then, is the navigator of the waves (and streams) in the great River of Life. It is the central source of identity, and that identity expands and deepens as the self navigates from egocentric to sociocentric to worldcentric to theocentric waves (or precon to con to postcon to post-postcon levels of overall development) – an identity that ranges from matter to id to ego to God (2000b, p. 26).

There is one more important point to consider: The perennial philosophers hold the view, which Wilber follows, that the ultimate source of identity is Spirit. As one reaches the upper limits of the spectrum of consciousness, the individual I (or proximal self) becomes an object of the *Ultimate I*:

> According to the mystics, you are one with God as ultimate Subject or pure consciousness – a pure Emptiness that, as absolute Witness, I-I, or Seer, can never itself be seen, and yet paradoxically exists as Everything that is seen: the Spirit that transcends all (2000b, p. 34).

This is what is often referred to as "enlightenment". At that point, it is the *I* (Witness) who sees the *I* (subject of present awareness), who sees the *me*. The process of spiritual development,

according to Wilber, is therefore to develop this Witness, sometimes called the Higher Self or True Self by Wilber (2000b, 2017).

3.1.2 Waking Up

The Waking Up aspect refers to spiritual experiences and states of consciousness, in contrast to the spiritual intelligence and stages of consciousness which were focused on in the above discussion on Growing Up.

States of consciousness

According to the great wisdom traditions, Wilber says there are at least five great natural states of consciousness. They can all be experienced directly. Wilber (2006, 2017) describes the states as follows:

1. Gross-waking state of consciousness, or the simple awareness of the material world of Form, such as the experience of riding a bike or reading a book.

2. Subtle-dream state of consciousness such as the experience in a vivid dream or in which it can be experienced in the waking state itself – for example, during daydreaming or visualization and in certain types of meditation with form.

3. Causal-formless state of consciousness, such as in deep, dreamless sleep. This is the domain of the first and subtlest forms of manifestation emerging out of Formlessness or Emptiness, and can be accessed through types of formless meditation in which vast openness or emptiness are experienced.

4. Witnessing state of consciousness – often called the pure or empty' Witness'. This is empty and free of thoughts and a capacity to witness all of the other states – gross, subtle and causal. For example, the capacity for unbroken attention in the waking state. This is also often referred to as the True Self or the I-I – the first I being able to witness the small, finite self.

5. Ever-present Non-dual awareness, sometimes referred to as "ultimate unity consciousness" or the union between Emptiness and all Form. The Witness collapses into what is witnessed. It is not so

much a state, as the ever-present ground of all states, which can be 'experienced'. According to Wilber, both in the East and the West, this is the ultimate Enlightenment or Awakening.

To clarify, during Waking Up, and upon taking up a spiritual practice such as meditation, contemplation or centering prayer, these states develop into *state-stages*. There is a clear, if not quite rigid, progression from one state to the other, although one can have a 'peak experience' in any of these stages at any one time – but will interpret the state in terms of the structure of consciousness (as in Growing Up) one is currently in (Wilber, 2017).

Depending on the spiritual practice and spiritual tradition, one discovers the highest state, or the goal as such, for the practice. For example:

- The Supreme Identity (Sufism)

- Christ/Godhead consciousness (Christianity)

- Non-dual Suchness or Thusness (Buddhism)

Reaching the highest state stage is then known as, *inter alia*, enlightenment, awakening, liberation, non-dual realisation, transformation and transparency (Wilber, 2017).

Wilber has been criticised (Rowan et al., 2007; Ferrer, 2015) because he is biased towards Eastern Buddhist non-dual awareness as the ultimate goal, and it may be true, although he has tried to include other mystical traditions such as Christian mysticism into his account (for example, 2000d, 1997). Wilber states that when it comes to the mediation traditions, "[s]ignificant research has demonstrated that although the *surface features* of each of these traditions and their state-stages differ considerably from culture to culture, their *deep features* are in many ways significantly similar" (Wilber, 2017, p. 94).

Comparing Evelyn Underhill's mysticism stages in her seminal work *Mysticism* (1955) (dealing with Christian mysticism) with the traditional five meditation states, Wilber summarises (2017, p. 97): First there is an Awakening with a 'peak experience', and then:

- Purification (gross). One works with purifying and releasing identity with the physical body and its desire-laden thoughts.

- Illumination (subtle). One is introduced to subtler dimensions, luminosities and higher emotions or feeling-awareness of the soul.

- Dark night (causal). One discovers a formless cloud of unknowing, a liberation from finite bondage, and a taste of real "heaven". One often suffers terribly as this vast Freedom is lost because realisation is not yet permanent. The "dark night" is not all the agonies you suffer because you have not yet found God, but all the horrid pain and suffering you experience from having once found God and then losing that awareness of God's presence.

- Non-dual Unity consciousness. Soul and God disappear into ultimate Godhead.

Wilber (1997, 2017) then described the enlightenment process as follows: to discover one's True Self or the empty Witness, and to cease identifying with the small and finite self or the ego. The aim of meditation therefore is to move through all the previous states, gross, subtle, causal, and empty Witness, until one has transcended and included all of them in one's awareness but not identified with any of them – there is just pure Emptiness. "Consciousness reverts to its pure, unblemished, unconstructed, timeless, spaceless, and objectless nature … leaving an infinite identity with pure Awareness/Being/Nothingness itself" (Wilber, 2017, p. 73). The next step is to combine this Emptiness with all things seen and witnessed (Form). Emptiness and Form are united – there is a union of both subject and objects, and identity disappears into non-dual Suchness or Godhead in Christian terms.

3.1.3 Cleaning Up

For Wilber (2017), Cleaning Up consists of two aspects. First, one is required to do what he calls 'shadow' work, and second, a positive aspect – the work that needs to be done to flourish and thrive. 'Shadow', which is quite common, refers to the dynamically repressed unconscious. It carries

a rejected aspect of the ego, which can be painful and terrifying to confront. The shadow material can derail any stage of Growing Up and Waking Up. It is associated with Freudian and especially Jungian depth psychology. Cleaning Up requires that any psychologically hidden material that is dysfunctional be healed in the cleaning up process (Wilber, 2017). Wilber says that the shadow covers the full spectrum of consciousness, and according to Jung the unconscious shadow "is the basis for negative projection onto the 'other' at the individual and collective levels (for example, racism, sexism, ageism and all the other 'isms')" (Vaughan, 2013).

Wilber (2017) explains that as consciousness develops, it does so in a three-step process: The self or consciousness identifies with a particular state or stage. Then (1) it starts to differentiate and disidentify from that stage and let go of that particular worldview. Thereafter (2) the self moves to the next higher stage and starts to identify with it, and a new identity and worldview is developed. In the last step (3) the self integrates the previous structure-rung with its overall consciousness at the new stage; the previous structure is included, and the worldview of the previous structure is let go of. At any of the development phases something can go wrong and a dysfunction or pathology can result. Either the self can fail to adequately disidentify with or differentiate from the previous structure, in which case it leads to an *addiction* or *fixation* in respect of aspects of the previous stage – or the differentiation goes too far and parts that needed to be included are disowned, leading to an *allergy*. These addictions or allergies need to be confronted and healed.

The positive aspect of Cleaning Up incorporates positive psychology principles. In particular, Wilber (2017) suggests a focus on practicing gratefulness and forgiveness.

3.1.4 Showing Up

Wilber (2017) is not clear about what he means by Showing Up, except to say that it is to use and include all the four quadrants of AQUAL. All the important dimensions of reality should be recognised. We can infer a reference to his Integral Life practice, an all-rounded practice that includes

body, mind, and spirit – doing physical exercises, seeing a therapist for 'shadow' work and engaging in some form of spiritual practice (Wilber, 2006).

To summarise, individual spiritual development contains four aspects: Growing Up, Waking Up, Cleaning Up and Showing Up. I will now focus on the intersubjective-we in the Lower left quadrant. This is especially relevant in an autoethnography where the cultural context is a focus area.

3.2 Lower Left Quadrant: 'We'

This section highlights the importance of the cultural aspect and context in the development of spirituality (Figure 6).
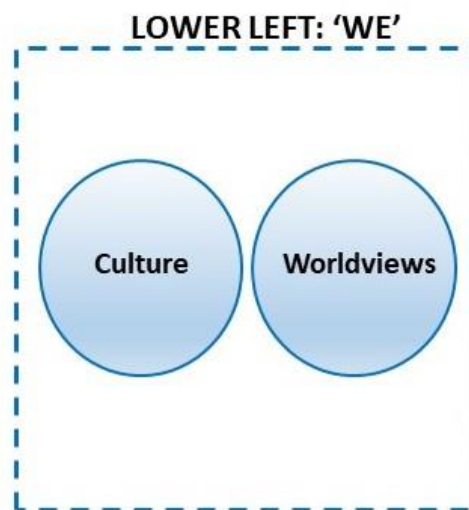
Figure 7: Diagram depicting elements in the Lower Left quadrant that are discussed

The role of culture

It is generally said that culture is "the way of life of a people". "The assumption … is that there are discrete patterns of cognition, values, and behaviour that members of different groups share in common, in contrast to members of other groups" (Mathews, 2000, p. 3). This shared way of life is moulded by language, patterns in child-rearing and public schooling, and religion (Mathews, 2000). Culture is a "product of interactions between self and others in a community of practice" (Chang, 2008, p. 23). Others from the community assist with enculturation or socialisation, so the self learns

values, norms and customs, and in the process becomes a proper member of the community. At the same time, the individual contributes to the community. The individual self becomes mirrored in others and vice versa (Chang, 2008). Human potential can be stimulated or impeded by the socio-cultural contexts (Maslow, 1999; Plummer, 2005). However, Chang (2008) points out that individuals are not prisoners of a particular culture, and one exercises a level of autonomy when deciding what is acquired, transmitted, created or kept. Importantly, one can shed membership of a cultural group without necessarily discarding the cultural traits.

Wilber's AQAL four quadrant model, when looking at the lower collective – the Lower Left and Lower Right – distinguishes between what he calls 'culture' (Lower Left) and the 'social' (Lower Right). The cultural is the interior meaning, values and identities that we share. Culture refers to our collective worldviews. Holons of a similar depth and development will respond to each other. These world space or worldviews have evolved through the ages, from archaic, magic, mythic, centauric and possibly higher (Wilber, 2000). Individual thoughts "arise in a cultural background that give texture and meaning and context to my individual thoughts" (Wilber, 2000, p. 73). The cultural community provides an intrinsic background to the individual intentionality and processing of the individual's interactions in the world. The way to understand this cultural background is to investigate it from within, and with sympathetic understanding. It is an interpretive exercise. However, all events have 'social' correlates in the Lower Right quadrant, which refer to material components which can be empirically investigated (similar to the Upper Right's individual brain and body). The Lower Right can be regarded as the social systems' aspect and examples are types of technology, means of production and concrete institutions (Wilber, 2000).

In terms of an autoethnographic study, an important idea is that the self is a part of and an extension of the community being studied, rather than just being an independent, self-sufficient individual – and self-analysis takes place in that context (Chang, 2008). In this case, I am a member

of the Afrikaner community, the extent of which is explored in this study. Since this thesis focuses on spiritual development in the Afrikaner context, issues relating to their religion are pertinent. For the Afrikaner, identity and religion have always been firmly intertwined (Oliver, 2006). Therefore, in discussing spiritual development, I note how my culture and specifically its religion have formed and influenced me throughout my life.

As Wilber conceives in his AQAL model, like the individual, the socio-cultural environment shows the same basic structures of consciousness (as depicted in the Left Lower quadrant of the AQAL map). Some examples of how they correlate can be found in cognitive thinking (Barnes, 2000), morality and worldviews (Wilber, 1995). Like an infant that develops, so does the species (and culture). All this leads to the idea that the universe and all that is part of it, evolves into increasing levels of complexity and wholeness, with each level transcending the previous level and including its predecessors. These levels are not rigid and separate, but rather they flow into each other (Wilber, 2000b).

Drawing on the work of Jean Gebser and others, Wilber (for example, 2000d; 1995) developed a theory of the history of human consciousness and describes and tracks the idea that humanity has gone through development epochs similar to individual development. What is important to this discussion, is that all those developmental stages are still present at birth as we develop as individuals or as groups. We traverse all those levels in our attempts to "'transcend and include" all the previous levels. "… [E]ach structure of consciousness remains with humanity even if history moves forward and newer structures come into ascendance" (Combes, 2013, p. 175). We all start at the archaic level and transcend and include subsequent levels – up to a certain level of development. Societies, then, are collections of individuals who are at very different levels or stages of development (Wilber, 2005). However, any given "culture has a 'center of gravity' or an average mode of consciousness, around which conventional everyday realities are organised" (Wilber, 2011, Introduction, Dawn Humans,

Dawn spirit, para 7). We can therefore look at a society or cultural group and possibly assess its centre of gravity and worldview.

However, Wilber makes an important point: Although the development of groups and societies can be traced throughout the ages with a particular worldview (and their particular colours, such as red, amber or green: see below), their progression through different stages is not mandatory such as in the case of an individual holon. They can skip stages, and do not all start at the beginning such as with an individual holon in its mandatory growth process. Determinant in a society or group is the dominant mode of discourse, and the dominant mode of mutual resonance. As Wilber puts it simply: red (magical-orientated) humans and amber (mythic-orientated) humans and orange (rational-orientated) humans and green (pluralistic-orientated) humans usually hang out with their own types, simply to be on the same wavelength (Wilber, 2006, p. 151). But any group can have a mix of colours, although depending on the dominant mode of discourse its centre of gravity can be assessed.

Worldviews

We can define a worldview as "sets of beliefs and assumptions that describe reality. A given worldview encompasses assumptions about a heterogeneous variety of topics, including human nature, the meaning and nature of life, and the composition of the universe itself" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 3). Our worldview is our philosophy of life, which provides the answers to the most fundamental questions of our existence (Nicholi, 2004). Richards and Bergin (2005) list examples of questions that are asked:

> [H]ow did the universe and the Earth come into existence? How did life, particularly human life, come to exist? Is there a Supreme Being or Creator? What is the purpose of life? How should people live their lives in order to find happiness, peace, and wisdom? What is good, moral and ethical? What is undesirable, evil, and immoral? How do people live with the

realities of suffering, grief, pain, and death? Is there life after death, and if so, what is the nature of the afterlife? (Richards & Bergin, 2005, pp. 74–75).

For Sire (2015, p. 19), a worldview "is a set of pre-suppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make up of our world".

Correlating with his structures of consciousness, Wilber normally (for example, 2006, 2017) uses six to eight structure stages to depict his *worldviews*. Wilber therefore also uses a colour representing the different worldviews representative of that particular structure (which I will briefly indicate as a more comprehensive description is in my discussion in Part 3: Chapter 3, as I will be exploring the worldview of the Afrikaner culture in which I grew up):

- Archaic (infrared)

- Magic (magenta)

- Magic-mythical (red)

- Mythic (amber)

- Modern-rational (orange)

- Post-modern pluralist (green)

- Integral: centaur and Kosmocentric (teal and turquoise).

Figure 7 (below) illustrates the correlation between Wilber's Structures of Consciousness and the corresponding worldviews – both for individuals and socio-cultural groups:

Number, colour	Wilber's original structures/ waves	Worldviews
0. Infrared	Sensorimotor mind	Archaic
1. Magenta	Sensorimotor mind	Archaic
2. Red	Phantasmic-emotional	Magical
3. Amber	Concrete/Representational mind	Mythic
4. Orange	Concrete rule/role mind	Rational
5.Green	Formal/rational mind	Pluralistic
6. Teal	Low Vison-logic	Centaur
Turquoise	High Vision-logic	Kosmocentric
7. Indigo	Para-mind -previous Psychic	Transglobal
8. Violet	Meta-mind -previous Subtle	Visionary
9. Ultraviolet	Overmind -previous Causal	Transcendent
10. Clear light	Supermind-previous Non-dual	Unitary wholeness non-dual

Figure 8: Structures of consciousness and worldviews

In this theoretical discussion, I have mainly focused on the Upper Left and Lower Left quadrants, as this is the focus of my thesis. (For a more comprehensive overview of how all the structures correlate, refer to *Appendix D*). In concluding the theoretical section on Wilber's Integral Theory, I now discuss some of the main criticisms of and debates about his theory.

Section 4: Wilber's Integral Philosophy and Theory: Debates and criticisms

Wilber's Integral Theory spans many disciplines and incorporates many other theories to create his meta-theory. There have therefore been many writers and scholars that have questioned his interpretations of the major writers and theories, for example, in the realms of physics, ecology and feminism (Rothberg, 1993). Wilber (2000d) makes the point that he uses the 'general orientation' in a specific discipline, looking for similarities rather than the focus of specific, unique interpretations. Below are summaries of some of the major points and debates applicable to my focus:

Philosophical Concerns

The Perennialist and Participatory approaches are the two dominant philosophical paradigms in transpersonal psychology (Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). The participatory approach was developed and expounded by Ferrer and Hartelius in response to what they consider to be the hierarchical and elitist approaches by the Perennialist adherents – referring to what they consider to be Wilber's structuralist form of Perennialism. Ferrer and Hartelius reject the fact that it can be said that spiritual ultimates are equivalent (for example, God or Buddhist emptiness, or the Hindu Brahman); that any spiritual ultimate is superior (for example God, or non-dual reality); and that there are any universal stages or sequences (Hartelius, 2015). All of these points are prevalent to some extent in Wilber's work. Wilber has been accused of being biased and favouring the non-dual traditions. This is true, although he really tries to include other traditions' notions of Ultimate Reality. In my reading of Wilber, I have been mindful of this fact, and I have found it quite easy to make the correlations between the traditions, even though my background is in Christianity.

Some transpersonal scholars (for example, Hartelius, 2015; Daniels, 2005) are critical of allowing any underlying metaphysics to enter into transpersonal scholarship. This is because of its speculations concerned with being, existence and first principles, which cannot be tested by scientific inquiry or validated by empirical testing. Perennialism is unsuitable as it refers to hidden, indemonstrable causes, and speculations about a transcended spiritual dimension (Hartelius, 2017).

Wilber (2006) claims that his theory has gone beyond metaphysics – what he calls integral post-metaphysics. He rejects any pre-given ontological structures of consciousness. The levels of being and knowing are collectively constructed by humans as they evolve towards the divine. When these collectively constructed levels of consciousness become stable (as the first tier structures have demonstrated), they become 'Kosmic habits'.

Hartelius and Ferrer are not convinced. They point out that Wilber still refers to an underlying Ground of Being or Spirit which keeps the four quadrants in place, even if interwoven with the four strands – "This one reality is by definition a metaphysical construct: a dimension that is behind the realm of appearances while also one with them" (2013, p. 192). Ferrer and Hartelius further articulate their critique:

> Wilber's … integral post-metaphysics remains deeply, centrally, metaphysical. His model works the way it is intended only so long as his four quadrants of reality function as integral aspects of a deeper, nondual reality. Yet it is precisely this timeless and formless reality that is a metaphysical construct – metaphysical in the sense that it is a deeper reality lying behind the appearances of the world. This reality is seemingly available only through the private subjective experience of individuals who are sufficiently evolved to apprehend it, and who interpret their experience in a manner consistent with Wilber's thought. This nondual metaphysical concept, and the associate elevation of a nondual realization as the zenith of universal spiritual development and evolution, has been central to his work … continues to be central …and signals that his work remains perennialist in nature (2013, p. 193).

However, the question can be asked – how much of a Perennialist is Wilber? He usually introduces his AQAL model referring to the Perennialist idea of the basic levels of being and knowing – matter, mind and Spirit (Reynolds, 2006). However, he denies that he would be prepared to defend any other principles of Perennialist thought "such as unchanging archetypes, involution and evolution as fixed and predetermined, the strictly hierarchical (as opposed to holonic/quadratic) nature of reality etc. – I do not believe are universal or true ..." (Wilber, 2000, p. 158).

Wilber may, however, be considered to be a New-Perennialist (Reynolds, 2006). Wilber points out that the Perennial Wisdom, as conceived of through the ages, did not include the relatively recent discovery of evolution. Wilber describes his Neo-Perennial position as follows:

having at its core the same Radical and Formless Truth glimpsed by the wisdom cultures of the past … but its outward form, its clothing cut in the relative and manifest world, has naturally changed and evolved to keep pace with the progressive evolution of the manifest world itself – and that includes, of course the idea of evolution (Wilber, 1997, pp. 63–64).

This is the same philosophical (and metaphysical) position that I take during the course of this project. This is an exploration of spirituality and spiritual development. I inquire about the nature of Ultimate Reality, the nature of spirit and what it develops into – in addition to describing my own spiritual experiences.

Theoretical Challenges

Wilber's theory that development takes place in a stage-like sequence, has been criticised by other transpersonal theorists. Washburn developed his spiral dynamic perspective in response to Wilber's structural hierarchal or 'holarchical' paradigm in transpersonal psychology. Washburn does not disagree with Wilber's structure-stages, but questions whether "it accurately describes all of human development, for Wilber's assumption that everything that normally emerges in prepersonal stages of development is inherently – and, therefore, merely – pre is suspect. Indeed, according to spiral theorists, this assumption is false" (Washburn, 2003, p. 6). According to Washburn, there are psychic resources – dynamic potentials or non-egoic potentials of the deep psyche or Dynamic Ground.

The main points of contention between Washburn and Wilber are that according to Wilber (2006), Washburn fails to differentiate between pre-personal and trans-personal modes of consciousness. Wilber states that they both are unequivocally non-personal, but to confuse them is to commit a pre/trans fallacy (Wilber, 2006). Washburn's spiral model requires the individual in the egoic stage to regress to pre-egoic stages and states – what Wilber calls an attachment to a romanticised inclination when dealing with pre-egoic stages.

Dealing with Wilber's spectrum of psychopathology where Wilber (2000d, 2006) explains that each stage has its own potential for psychological disturbances, Stanislav Grof criticises Wilber for not giving sufficient attention to the phenomena of prenatal existence and biological birth and death. According to Grof, these aspects play a significant role in the transpersonal domains, especially during an existential crisis, but also in cases of regression and psychopathology. Although Wilber deals with trauma in childhood when he discusses that stage of development, according to Grof, he remains restricted to post-natal development (Grof, 1998). Wilber (1998) does not deny these pre-natal and birth influences, but denies that a later existential crisis must involve and include the actual reliving of birth and death themes which Grof espouses.

Integral Theory and the 'Other'

From a feminist point of view, Peggy Wright (1998) challenges what she deems to be androcentrism (basing cultural or personal values on male-centered norms) in transpersonal theory – including Wilber's work. According to Wright, Eastern and Western psychological, philosophical and spiritual traditions and their underlying cultures share a history of the oppression of women, and women's experiences have not been incorporated into these traditions. Wright questions whether the universal structural development approach sufficiently incorporates the experience of non-dominant groups such as women. She states that women's spiritual development may look different to men's development, as women have 'permeable' self-boundaries which allow for a flow between self and others. When it comes to transpersonal development, this permeable self may facilitate the union with the spiritual self or Self. Furthermore, women tend to strive for wholeness rather than a specific level of consciousness. Wilber does not disagree, but states that this 'permeable' self still needs to navigate stages from egocentric permeable self to sociocentric permeable self, worldcentric permeable self and spiritual permeable self (Wilber, 1998). Wright and Wilber disagree on the extent that Wilber balances the invariant deep structures with the cultural influences and specific experiences, and who

has the power to set priorities and values. Wilber (1998) dismisses her interpretation of his work and reiterates his stance on an integral approach, in particular Integral Feminism, where he acknowledges the different schools of feminist thought. He states that they are partial, and only speaks to one or more of the four dimensions (quadrants) – personal, cultural, biological or sociological. Wilber calls for dialogue where all these perspectives are integrated.

There are many more ongoing debates about and criticisms of Wilber's Integral Theory and philosophy, but they fall outside the focus and scope of this thesis.

Section 5: Conclusion

I have discussed different approaches to spiritual development. I focused on spiritual development from a psychological perspective, and highlighted various spiritual development models. Most of this chapter was spent discussing Ken Wilber's Integral Theory, with the focus on the AQAL matrix – all quadrants, all levels, all lines, and all types. I mainly focussed on the interior quadrants – the Upper Left and Lower Left – as these are the areas in which individual spiritual development is located. Wilber differentiates between spiritual intelligence (stages of consciousness – Growing Up) and spiritual experience (states of consciousness – Waking Up) – both of which I discuss. I considered the neo-Perennialist perspective versus the Participatory approach and discussed Wilber's defence of criticisms from the latter. I further noted general criticisms of Wilber's Integral Theory.

After considering the theoretical implications, the approach I followed in this research was to explore the spiritual line as its own development line and Growing Up process. I used Fowler's Stages of Faith (as suggested by Wilber, 1997, 2017) to explore my early spiritual development, where after I continued the exploration using Wilber's stages of consciousness – especially when it comes to the transpersonal stages and experiences. In addition, I considered the cultural implications of spiritual development, which Wilber provides for in his AQAL matrix in the Lower Left 'we' quadrant.

PART 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore spiritual development in an Afrikaner context to answer my research question as to what such a process entail. In this part of the thesis I introduce the research paradigm and the chosen research methodology: an autoethnographic study. I situate autoethnography in a broader framework of narrative research and further discuss the finer details and implications of such a research methodology. I evaluate autoethnography and discuss criticisms of it. I provide details on the methods used and the ethical considerations.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms help researchers define what the research is about and the scope and limits of the research; questions of ontology, epistemology and methods are also at stake (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A paradigm can be defined as

> a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example cosmologies and theologies do (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107).

Ontology is the study of being; it is concerned with 'what is' – the nature of existence and the structure of reality. It informs our philosophical stance: our interpretation of how we know what we know. Ontology arises along with epistemology and the philosophic approach that underpins any research (Crotty, 1998). There are a range of conflicting paradigms among researchers, starting with basic differentiation between quantitative (positivist) and qualitative paradigms. As a counter to the positivist empirical approach, there are several competing qualitative paradigms. Depending on the

author or researcher, the main contenders are: postpositivist, interpretivist, constructionist or constructivist paradigms, and also critical theory. Each has its own ontological and epistemological position, sometimes finely nuanced in its differences, but sometimes radically different (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Levers, 2013).

Typically, an autoethnography falls within the ambit of an interpretivist-constructivist research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Interpretivism "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, Chapter 4: Interpretivism: For and against culture, para 4). Interpretivism focuses on the understanding or *verstehn* in human and social sciences. Multiple meanings and ways of knowing are accepted, and the interpretivist knows that objective reality can never be captured. Knowledge is relative and is based on particular circumstances and interpretations by individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Levers, 2013).

Constructivism is coupled with interpretivism. The constructivist *ontological stance* is pluralistic and relativistic - reality is constructions in the minds of individuals. Reality can consist of multiple, often conflicting constructions – yet they all can be potentially meaningful (Scwhandt, 1998). According to a relativist ontology, reality is therefore a finite, subjective experience, and there are as many different realities as there are people. Reality and subjective experience cannot be separated, because there are not two entities which can be separated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Levers, 2013). "In this way of thinking, reality *is* human experience and human experience *is* reality" (Levers, 2013, p. 2).

Epistemology, or the study of knowledge, aims to help with understanding and explaining how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). The constructivist paradigm's epistemological stance postulates that the observer cannot be disentangled from the inquiry into constructions. Constructions exist in the mind of the researcher. They do not exist outside of the researcher's mind and are not part of some 'objective' world. The research takes place by means of a transactional inquiry, and unfolds

inter alia through a dialectical process that includes iteration, analyses, and critique. It leads to a joint construction between the researcher and the participants and builds spaces that provide a credible level of understanding which has relevance. Instead of an internal or external validity, trustworthiness and authenticity are pursued (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 1998). The above stance can be considered to be radical constructivism.

The research methodology and autoethnography used, as well as the subject matter (spiritual development), raise interesting points to consider. Firstly, it is a story and therefore it is not claimed to be true in an absolute sense – although that is not the intention. As Plummer (2005, p. 363) points out "…life stories consist of only partial selections of realities. There is always much going on behind the scenes that is not told. Here we have the inevitable bias, the partiality, the limits, the selectivity of all stories told." There are no big truth claims (Ellis & Adams, 2014).

In the story I make certain truth claims regarding spiritual realities that I encountered and experienced. But how do I reconcile such contradictory standpoints and beliefs? There are objective realities in the world such as galaxies, trees and rocks, and as far as my story contends also a spiritual reality. However, things in themselves do not carry meaning independent of human consciousness (Crotty, 1998). I therefore accept a realism ontology, without subscribing to an objectivist epistemology. Constructionism seems to be a better alternative paradigm.

Crotty (1998) states that constructionism is the view that "all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (Chapter 3, Constructionism: The making of meaning, para 2). Constructionism therefore revolves around meaning. However, meaning is not discovered but is rather constructed, and emerges when human consciousness engages with an objective world. Therefore meaning (or truth) cannot be completely objective, but then it is not completely subjective where individual consciousness is simply transposed on an objective reality.

The interpreter, though not entirely objective, is separate from the phenomena to be observed and the meaning-making interaction is strongly influenced by the phenomena and society. More pointedly, it is not simply the researcher's interpretation, [but] rather [that] the phenomena affects the interpretation with equal force (Levers, 2013, p. 4).

In addition, meaning is also derived from our culture as we inherit cultural meaning based on the interactions of humans and their worlds (Crotty, 1998). Assuming this stance, I can accommodate the fact that I construct my story and account for a subjective meaning-making process. I also accept that there is an ontological Ultimate Reality, which I need to make sense of.

From a spiritual epistemological perspective, I was mindful of the speculative nature of my thesis engaging with underlying speculative philosophy, which is a philosophy "professing to be founded upon intuitive or *a priori* insight and especially insight into the nature of the Absolute or Divine". It is a philosophy of the transcendent or one lacking empirical bases" (Merriam-Webster, (n.d.)). Speculative philosophy is more theoretical and makes knowledge claims which cannot be verified by the scientific methods per se, but aims to understand the transcendental and metaphysical dimension (Carlson, 2008). However, within the story I do make certain truth claims about experienced spiritual realities, and I could therefore also positioned my research within Wilber's transcendental paradigm (1983), which in addition to objective science and rational sciences, accommodates spiritual realities and experiences. Wilber contends, instead of debating which reality we deem real or true, we follow the Aristotelian example by creating different categories of realities with their own unique truth claims. Wilber's categories are based on the tradition of differentiating between body, mind and spirit: We can differentiate between three categories, that is, the three 'eyes': The eye of the flesh (empirical facts), the eye of the mind or reason (philosophic and psychological insight) and the eye of contemplation (spiritual wisdom).

Each of these categories makes its own truth claims, and can be measured accordingly. Each category can follow certain scientific methodologies, that is, injunctions ("if you want to know something, do this"; experimental and experiential), apprehension ("look and see"), and communal confirmation ("compare the results of apprehensions with others"; verification). The eye of the spirit can therefore be classified as a valid category of reality (Wilber, 2005). Therefore, based on the eye of contemplation, I could insist "on treating 'unseen worlds' as ontologically real rather than treating discussions of non-human sentience as a culturally relative belief" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 61).

Research Methodology

Situating autoethnography as a research methodology

Over the past three decades research has taken a narrative turn in order to understand experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Narrative is an orientation to the way we organise and understand our world (Stephens, 2011) and has evolved through several turns. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) described these developments or different 'turns'. First, there is a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched, which saw the move away from maintaining a position of objectivity associated with the positive realist stance towards research focused on understanding, interpretation and meaning. The positivist position treated social facts as objective physical things that could be known outside of time and context by a neutral researcher. The emphasis shifted to a more relational view that understands that human interactions are not static and that the phenomenon studied can be influenced by the researcher.

Second, there was a move from the use of numbers to the use of words as data. This is because it was realised that coded research risked losing nuance, and that numbers provide a limited way of representing data. Furthermore, it was recognised that there was still a reliance on researchers to

construct a narrative to explain the numbers. A third turn points to a shift from a focus on the general and universal towards a focus on the local and specific. There was a move away from the requirements of generalisability and the 'grand narratives' that could explain the world regardless of specific or particular circumstances. Civil society, women and minorities added their voices and personal stories and also added richness to the world of social scientific work. Biographies, memoirs and autobiographies noted that these stories – focusing on the particular - deserve as much attention as the 'general' in social science.

Finally, there was growing acceptance of a wider range of alternative epistemologies, as the realisation grew that there is more than one way of knowing. There was a move away from positivistic tests of reliability and validity towards authenticity, resonance and the trustworthiness of research. "The acceptance of the relational and interactive nature of human science research, the use of story, and a focus on a careful accounting of the particular are hallmarks of knowing in narrative (research)" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25).

This narrative orientation or narrative research includes various research methodologies, but what narrative researchers have in common "is the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 4). They all agree that the story is fundamental – but what kinds of stories or how they should be studied may vary. Narrative researchers use several research approaches and strategies. When we refer to narrative research, we are not talking about prosaic prose but the story, and 'narrative' and 'story' are often used interchangeably (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly (1989) referred to a 'story' when referring to particular situations and interviews, and used 'narrative' to refer to longer-term life events. However, they treat these terms as equivalent. For Polkinghorne, "(i)n a story, events and actions are drawn together into an organised whole by means of a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7). Time is presumed to have a linear direction, and the plot links a prior choice or event to a later effect. "Beginning with a narrative view

of experience, researchers attend to place, temporality, and sociality, from within a methodological three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that allows for inquiry into both researchers' and participants' storied life experiences. Within this space, each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives" (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 541).

One methodology in the narrative stable is autoethnography. Autoethnography has its roots in the same narrative turns as described as above, and in particular evolved from traditional ethnography. After colonisation and the study of 'other' cultural groups, the emphasis shifted to researchers working in their own communities and settings. The led to the researcher-self being inserted into the research communities, and researchers' own voices started being heard in a self-reflexive turn. Experiments with self-observation and analysis ensued (Anderson, 2006). Interrelated was a heightened focus on emotion in the social sciences and the humanities and there was also experimentation with blurred genres of writing (Steinman, 2008, Du Toit, 2020; Lourens, 2020) Boundaries between the social sciences and literature were fractured, leading to, inter alia, Ellis and Bochner's emphasis on literary style 'evocative' writing, which refuse to abstract or explain, or attempt to generalise knowledge claims (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Adams, 2014).

A narrative approach can be useful in psychology, although relatively few psychology studies use this type of methodology (Stephens, 2011). Psychology has been slow to embrace qualitative methods, probably because the discipline identifies with the more scientific approach, but that is slowly changing in terms of embracing the narrative turn and autoethnography (Ellis & Adams, 2014). This is surprising because the narrative approach seems to be a good fit as a "(n)arrative is a pervasive structure with which we comprehend and convey the experiences and meanings of events" (Stephens, 2011, p. 63). When people want to describe disruptive experiences, they turn to stories. That is, "a narratory principle operates to provide meaning to the often nonsystematic encounters and

interactions experienced in everyday life" (Sarbin, 1986, p. 3). They use stories to work through these experiences to explain why this had happened, why they behaved in a certain way, and how they have changed because of a disruptive event (Stephens, 2011). People are often "forced to change their personal narratives to maintain a coherent sense of self which fits their new … circumstances" (Stephens, 2011, p. 64). In psychology, such personal narratives develop from "long sections of talk and extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple interviews or therapeutic conversations" (Riessman, 2008, p. 539). Barusch (2012) points out that therapists were using narratives for healing, long before the relatively new focus in social science research.

Having located autoethnography in the broader frame of narrative orientation, autoethnography as a research method is discussed.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography refers to "research, writing, stories, and methods that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 254). Carolyn Ellis, arguably the main proponent and developer of this research methodology, further described autoethnography in the *Handbook of Autoethnography*:

> Autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated the many layers of our own defences, fears, and insecurities the project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors

ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living (Ellis, 2013, Preface, para 5).

Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) stated that autoethnography expands the paradigm of what traditional ethnography is – it shows that ethnography can be both personal and academic. Such an inquiry incorporates many of the traditional qualitative data collection methods, but such data are collected and incorporated differently. Similarly, the particulars of methodology are often blended into the text if they are addressed explicitly. Chang (2008) focused on autoethnographies that include auto-biographical data together with ethnographic methodology and intent. Such an approach requires a contextualisation of a personal story. She stated that autoethnography can offer a variety of benefits, as a possible transformation tool for the self. It also has the potential for cross-cultural coalition building. She warned, however, that autoethnography can have little social impact if there is an excessive focus on the self and its own story, instead of incorporating analysis and cultural interpretations.

Ellis and Adams (2014, p. 255) further stated that autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing, and that it blurs the boundaries between traditional research and story-telling:

> [A]utoethnography features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. We write concrete stories about our lives because we think that the stories of a *particular* life can provide a useful way of knowing about *general* human experience (original emphasis).

Ellis and Bochner (2006) and others (for example, Richardson, 2000) focused on the evocative or emotional autoethnography with postmodern sensitivities, and reject the traditional realist and analytic form of ethnography. On the other side of the spectrum, similar to Chang (2008), Anderson (2006) called for an *analytical autoethnography* that maintains its roots in traditional ethnography

and remains analytic. Anderson called for an autoethnography that features five key features. First, a complete member researcher – the researcher must be part of the social world being studied. Most commonly, the researcher is opportunistic because they are born or thrown into a situation (for example, illness), and therefore assumes a dual role as member and researcher.

Second, Anderson (2006, p. 382) called for analytic reflexivity, which is

> an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others.

The third key feature of Anderson's (2006) analytic approach requires the researcher to be a visible and active member in the text. This is opposed to traditional ethnography where the researcher is supposed to be invisible. The researcher should show analytic insights by recording their own experiences alongside the experiences of others. The researcher should "… be involved in the construction of meaning and values in the social worlds they investigate. As full-fledged members, they cannot always sit observantly on the sidelines" (p. 384).

Anderson (2006) further states a fourth key principle: dialogue with informants beyond the self to overcome the potential critique for self-absorption. No ethnographic work – not even autoethnography – is a warrant to generalise from an "N of one." (p. 386), that is, a sample of one. Dialogue is required with the "data" of "others". Ellis (2007, p. 13-14) states that

> [a]s a genre of writing and research, autoethnography starts with personal experiences and studies "us" in relationships and situations. Doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience.

Lastly, Anderson (2006) requires a commitment to an analytical agenda. In contrast to Ellis's approach which focuses on an insider perspective and evokes an emotional response in the reader, Anderson requires the use of data to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena. The data should be transcended. Autoethnography should "… contribute to a spiralling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding" (p. 388).

I have borne these two different approaches in mind while doing my own research. On the one hand, Ellis and Bochner's (2006) approach allows a flexibility that I appreciated while remembering their goal that the story needs to be evocative. At the same time, I appreciated Anderson's analytical approach, because that served my dual aim of interpreting my own experiences within Wilber's Integral Theory. Similar to Lourens (2020) I therefore decided to use a 'hybrid' approach. However, I accept that my story is not generalisable, but that it could lead to a better understanding of the phenomena and experiences I have encountered.

In general, Ellis and Adams (2014) and Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) identify key guiding principles for autoethnography. (This is the same Anderson (2006) that was previously very critical of Ellis's evocative form of autoethnography, but has since softened his stance.) First, it is an emphasis on personal experience: "Social scientists take on the dual identities of academic and personal selves in order to tell stories about some aspect of their experience" (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 260). Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) state that key to autoethnography is the visibility of self. It focuses on issues of selfhood and identity. Yet, it is the 'I' that "… not only looks but is looked back at, that not only acts but is acted back upon by those in her focus" (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Second, autoethnographers are familiar with existing research, even if they often do not explicitly make that clear. However, their experiences add to existing research, while offering readers a new perspective. These first two principles cut across all autoethnographies (Ellis & Adams, 2014).

Other principles include: Using personal experience to describe and critique cultural experience, often motivated by promoting change and offering hope, valuing insider knowledge and taking advantage of being an insider. Furthermore, "…[I]nsiders or members of a culture will have different kinds of knowledge of the culture than will strangers or outsiders to the culture ..." (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 262); It provides an opportunity for those insiders to break the silence and reclaim their voices – cultural members no longer have to rely on others to tell their personal stories. Researchers can add their own nuanced personal perspectives.

Autoethnographies help with maneuvering about and with healing processes when hurt, confusion, anger and frustrations are present. By writing, one learns about oneself, and one is therefore able to heal oneself (Ellis & Adams, 2014) and is able to "to welcome the vulnerable and unspoken pieces of [one's] existence back into [one's] body" (Lourens, 2020, p. 5). Related to this often painful opening up, Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2016) require autoethnographers to make themselves vulnerable on many fronts. Autoethnography often requires courage and persistence in confronting experiences.

Last, Ellis and Adams (2014) state that autoethnography provides accessible prose, as opposed to highly abstract academic work containing jargon and obscure references. Meaning and knowledge are available to "more people than a select, academically trained few" (p. 263). Autoethnographers use innovative techniques to highlight experience rather than engage in traditional academic writing. As Ellis (Ellis & Adams, 2014) recounts:

> I can count on one hand how many people ever wrote to me about my more orthodox social science work, but I have gotten hundreds of responses to my autoethnographic stories about loss and identity from those who have had similar experiences (p. 263).

Evaluation and critique of autoethnography

Criticisms have been leveled at autoethnography: the use of self as the only data source, and often little traditional fieldwork is done. It has been said to be too subjective, self-indulgent and narcissistic (Ellis & Adams, 2014; Holt, 2003). However, Ellis and Adams note that these criticisms may just be too simple as the critics do not recognise that selves are constituted and embedded in cultural systems, and that researchers are not self-contained entities and are not purely objective. They also stated that fieldwork *is* done – some researchers interview others, and analyse field notes such as diaries and journals, recalling memories and talking with family and friends (Ellis & Adams, 2014).

How then do we decide what is good autoethnography and what is not? Traditional quantitative criteria about generalisability, validity and reliability are inadequate to evaluate autoethnography. Validity becomes the search for verisimilitude – "it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). Further, it is judged by the ability to communicate with others different from oneself. Reliability involves reliability checks or member checks, for example taking the story back to the other role players for them to comment, even to offer different interpretations (Ellis, 1999; Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006). As for generalisability, autoethnographers turn to readers to assess if the story speaks to them about their experiences and others they know. It provides opportunities to have vicarious experiences. (Ellis, 1999). In qualitative analysis the emphasis is on search for trustworthiness, the aim of which is to decide if the study is worth paying attention to (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Lietz et al. (2006) describe strategies for autoethnographers to establish trustworthiness. They include, *inter alia,* the use of reflexivity (the active acknowledgment that the researcher will have an impact on the meaning on context under investigation), the use of an audit trail throughout the data analysis process, the use of triangulation and peer debriefing if applicable, and member checking, similar to reliability checks as discussed earlier.

Since I was mindful of the critique of an autoethnography as being self-indulgent and 'naval-gazing', I used some qualitative techniques to ensure validity and therefore credibility. As per Creswell and Miller's (2010) suggestion, I also used *triangulation* – corroborating my opinions and insights with available theories and literature, and various discussions or interviews with others. I remained skeptical, even of my own experiences, and I looked for *disconfirming or negative evidence* which was not consistent with my expected themes. I used *self-reflexivity* – self-disclosing my own biases and assumptions. And, finally, I attempted to provide a *thick, rich description* to help the reader experience an account that is deep, dense and detailed in order to add to the general credibility.

Autoethnographies can be evaluated by using criteria from a combined approach that is rooted in social science and the humanities. Summarising their guiding principles, Ellis and Adams (2014, p. 269) expect an autoethnography to:

(1) use personal experience; (2) have a familiarity with existing research; (3) describe and/or critique cultural experience; (4) illuminate insider knowledge; (5) break silence and reclaim voice about a topic; (6) maneuver through pain, confusion, anger, and/or uncertainty; (7) and be accessible.

Richardson (2000) requires an autoethnography to make a substantive contribution and have aesthetic merit. She also requires reflexivity with sufficient self-awareness and self-exposure. In addition, she requires that an autoethnography has an impact and affects the reader emotionally or intellectually. Finally, she requires an autoethnography to express a "fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience" (Richardson, 2000, p. 254).

Research Methods

Sampling and data collection

Similar kinds of data are collected in an autoethnographic study compared to other qualitative and ethnographic research, for example, field notes, personal documents and interviews (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016). In my case, I collected and preserved extensive notes and written accounts of my experiences during the period of my life that was chosen for this research. These notes are replete with self-description, self-reference and introspection as I tried to make sense of my experiences, although it was necessary to re-interrogate these notes after some years had passed – as suggested by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013).

I was the main participant in this autoethnographic study. However, I decided to interview others, who can be called co-participants if you will, by convenience sampling. As I went about my daily business while reflecting on this project, I talked to others: I asked questions about the Afrikaner; I asked about religious beliefs. At least one participant was referred to me by someone who told me "you should talk to so and so". I talked to my friends about the events that took place, and looked to confirm, highlight or juxtapose the events of the autobiographical story, as suggested by Raab (2013). Chang (2008) states that although the interview is not commonly associated with autoethnography, it is useful to stimulate memories, to fill in the gaps in information, to validate personal data, and to gain others' perspectives on the researcher. Ellis (1998) endorses interviews and adds that interviews with family and friends help to reconstruct the events. Some of my 'interviews' were more formal. I got formal permission to record and transcribe the conversations, as I wanted to use the perspective directly in my story, but depicted as dialogues. There were three such interviewees, and in my account I will describe the context of the interview, as well as relevant information about the interviewees. I interviewed two people from the Afrikaner community to gain an understanding of the Afrikaner religiosity. Further, I interviewed my mother on several occasions

and also had more informal discussions. The benefit was that she was both a self-aware member of the Afrikaner community, and a major role-player in my story. I used unstructured interviews, with a reflexive dyadic interview style. In the interviews I asked questions, but also shared personal details and recollections, thereby evoking a similar dialogical response from the interviewees (as per Ellis et al., 2011; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013).

Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation is at the centre of autoethnographic research, and "distinguish their final product from other self-narrative, autobiographical writings that concentrate on storytelling" (Chang, 2008, p. 126). Raw data are interpreted and adapted to the final product. The terms data analysis and data interpretation are often used together and function inter-dependently but they do not mean the same thing. Data analysis identifies the essential features and the relation between them. Data interpretation refers to the focus on finding meaning beyond the data, and making sense of the data.

Autoethnography is both a methodological process and the product itself. Therefore, the story is not analysed by an "objective researcher", but analysis takes place in the telling, the conversations with the interviewees, the writing and the self-reflection as the process unfolds (Ellis et al., 2011). Particular to the method of autoethnography, Chang (2008) suggests strategies for analysing and interpreting data. She suggests that in addition to a) searching for recurring topics, themes and patterns that one should b) look for cultural themes, which are positions held by society either implied or declared, and which can stimulate activity or exhibit controlling behaviour. In my story, and the interactions I had with my family and friends, main recurring topics were my spiritual search and the suspicion of mental illness, and the choices that put us at odds with our cultural environment. The main topic – spirituality – became the topic of my thesis. Themes can frame the whole autoethnography (Chang, 2008).

Initially, I considered using a thematic analysis as an analytical strategy. It seemed to fit with the thematic analyses that Chang suggests. However, as the research project evolved, I found that these themes evolved spontaneously as I made sense of my own experiences. The thematic analysis strategy with immersion and formal coding seemed superfluous and did not quite fit the autoethnographic process. As I weaved through the story, I found myself identifying themes and continued to be conscious of them until the end of the process. Instead of a formal thematic analysis section, I then simply added a final chapter called "Reflections" in which I tried to tie up all the themes – both personal and cultural. Further, shorter themes developed as the different chapters coalesced and are expressed as the chapter titles.

Cultural themes emerged quite spontaneously as I navigated my spiritual development in contrast to the implied and often directly expressed cultural values, which includes the religiosity of my culture. The religious aspect of my culture became more prominent as the analysis and interpretation developed until it came apparent that this was the dominant cultural theme.

I have incorporated Chang's (2008) further suggestions that the autoethnographic researcher should c) identify exceptional occurrences which relate to exceptional events and encounters that were impactful and may have changed the course of a life. Many first-time experiences can open one's eyes to new perspectives and become life-changing experiences, steering people into a whole new direction (Chang, 2008). In my story, in addition to providing background details on my growing up, there were crucial events that changed the course of my life and which became that story that I wanted to tell. But there were also chance meetings and unexpected help which I did not anticipate. For instance, there was a significant conversation which set a whole process in motion, which I refer to as The Call in my story. There was also a chance meeting with a man who would play a significant role in my life and exposed me to a very different side of which I otherwise would not have had.

Chang (2008) further suggests d) the analysis of what data are included or omitted in the story, either intentionally or unintentionally. She states that we should remember that

> what is omitted in the data also sheds valuable light on the data. The absence of data comes from different reasons. On one hand, some elements are simply absent in one's life, thus nothing is there to record in data. On the other hand, omission in data can result from intentional or unintentional exclusion of them in recording. One way of discovering omission in data is through asking a question about omission for each inclusion (Chang, 2008, p. 133).

I spent time reflecting on which events and people to include. I have lived a relatively long life with many highlights and low points. I had to consider events that would advance the story and the themes I wanted to connect to. I therefore deliberately included events or data and deliberately omitted others. However, I know that there are perhaps other data or details that might have added to the story when looking at it from the perspective of others, but which I did not consider. This is mostly because I thought the information was boring, but also, on occasion, because it involved others and it was not only my story to tell. Chang further suggests that the researcher e) connect the present with the past, whereby the roots of the present day may have origins in the past – i.e. a cause-effect relationship that may be relevant. Such a cause-effect may never be established with certainty and on may need to use logical reasoning, imagination, and intuition to explain such a connection (Chang, 2008). I spent much time tracing through past events to current events; the story span of my life until now, and at my age there is some reflection on where events originated from. For example, I could trace my spiritual development as a child, being strongly influenced by both my parents. My mother taught me to have a personal relationship with God. My father taught me to question any pre-given truths. I could also trace the influences of my community and Afrikaner religiosity on my own spiritual development, either accepting the 'truths', or rebelling against them – both of these left own

traces. Further, I included photographs as data to illustrate the context in which I grew up, as well as to put faces to myself and my family.

Chang further states that f) the analysis of relationships between the self and others as this is a key element in autoethnography – either by sharing similarities or recognising differences. The following questions can be considered: "What kinds of others are included in your data? What is the relationship between yourself and these others? Which types of others are left out of the data? Why are they left out?" (Chang, 2008, p. 135). Chang (2008) makes the distinction between *others of similarity* – others belonging to the same community and share common identities, and *others of difference* – represent different practices and sets of values. This was an important point, as I considered how much my growing up in the Afrikaner culture shaped me, and how I differed from the accepted norms. It was also especially relevant when I considered my relationship with my parents who played, and continue to play, an important role in my life. Further, in my story, I include my friendship with a man who on the face of it shared my cultural background, but who represented an *other* of difference in terms of values.

I further g) contextualised the data beyond the personal story. This is the strategy to try and explain and interpret events and behaviours in relation to the cultural environment, which includes the sociocultural, political and religious aspects. To assist with the understanding of the context, one uses external resources, such as literature and interviews with others (Chang, 2008). Importantly, one "should set a boundary by determining how broadly you want to define the context (Chang, 2008, p. 136). In my analysis I wanted to move beyond simply retelling my story. I aimed at understanding my own cultural context, the Afrikaner, and how and if I identify with such a cultural identity. I therefore read widely on the history and making of the Afrikaner, and trying to understand their worldviews. Finally, I decided to define my boundary and specifically focused on the Afrikaner's religiosity as this was the most pertinent aspect to my thesis topic of spirituality. To help me explore

that aspect, I interviewed others, both formally and informally. I wanted to incorporate as many other viewpoints as possible, especially relating them to other spiritual development models and theory and current thinking – thereby moving beyond my own experiences and situating them in a larger context.

Further, and as per Chang' final suggestion h) I used social science constructs and theories to explain or elucidate social or psychological phenomena. Theories can be used to explain one's case, and can be used to guide the organisation and structure of the story (Chang, 2008). In my case I primarily used the Integral Theory of Ken Wilber, but also including various other literature that was applicable in the context of the story.

Ultimately, data are collected and interpreted to explain life experiences and to contextualise those experiences culturally (Chang, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

There are four key ethical principles to consider in this research: "autonomy and respect for the dignity of the person, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice" (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 67). The first principle refers to voluntary consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. However, to broaden the discussion, Guilleman and Gillam (2004) distinguish two different dimensions of ethics in research: procedural ethics and 'ethics-in-practice'. Procedural ethics refers to the ethics approval attained from the academic institution's Ethics Committee. It deals with informed consent, rights to privacy, and protecting human subjects from harm. Ethics in practice or situational ethics deal with unpredictable, subtle moments that come up in the field (Ellis, 2007). The latter includes relational ethics. It requires that ethical dilemmas be resolved through good moral reasoning, and it requires sensitivity to other beings and our interdependency to all living things. Responses to ethical dilemmas are ones that are suitable, balanced and harmonious, considering our moral responsibility when dealing with complex situations (Austin, 2008).

In autoethnographic studies like the one that I have done, I had to deal with both procedural ethics, and relational ethics. Following Ellis's (1999) suggestions, I obtained formal, written voluntary consent from the role-players and if they so wished, provided them with a copy of my story or written account – and where they are featured or discussed – thereby giving them the option to raise concerns that I could consider, such that amendments could be made if required. Formal, written voluntary consent was obtained by means of a participation letter. In it, I explained that all audio recordings and notes would be kept confidential, and if they so wished they could remain anonymous and identities and identifiable characteristics would be altered to protect privacy.

When it came to relational ethics, I had to consider a few ethical dilemmas regarding my own situation. This is because it is not just one's own story that is being told, and family members, especially, can be easily and readily identified – so leaving little room for anonymity (Ellis, 1999). In my study, I considered four different categories of people: family and friends mentioned in my story, my immediate family especially my mother, one of the main role players in my story who had a sensitive and disreputable background, and then finally, those I have formally interviewed.

When I considered friends and family I had to weigh up if whenever I referred to them would cause possible harm and if anything I said would reflect negatively on them, and also how they would feel being included in my story (Ellis, 2007). I came to the conclusion that the brief referrals I made to them in the story showed their love and support for me and did not in any way reflect negatively on them. Even so, I have not included details such as descriptions or surnames that may make individuals recognisable to others. Further, I obtained their permission to use their names and photos where applicable. Nobody raised objections.

The second relational ethical dilemma I had to deal with was my mother. When I initially raised the topic of my thesis, she asked, "Why do you want to dredge up that painful chapter?" I knew what she referred to – it was a time in our lives where we had severe disagreements, and our

relationship took severe strain. It gave me pause. How would telling the story have an impact on her and how would it reflect on her? (Ellis, 2007). I made the decision to go ahead, but kept her informed. I also gave her a draft of the story to read. She was therefore fully informed of what I was thinking and writing throughout the process. I also formally, and informally, interviewed her on many occasion, and for the formal interviews I obtained her written permission. The interviews facilitated many discussions between us on the full range of my experiences, which allowed her to become comfortable with my topic and her role that she played in my story. My father passed on in 2009, but it may still be problematic writing about the deceased even if they have limited legal rights to privacy (Ellis, 2007). However, I knew him well and I do not think he would have had a problem with anything I wrote about him or the role that he played in my story.

The third category that I had to consider mostly relates to one man (and his associates) who was a main role player in my story. It was not feasible to contact the man (nor did I wish to) to obtain his official permission to include him in this research project. I have, however, shared with him an earlier draft of my story in the past which I wrote as a means to make sense of my experiences regarding him. He had no objection then. However, in the telling of the story and the role this man played in it I weighed up the possible implications and possible harm. According to the principle of "justice" I tried to deal with possible harm with fairness and equity and did not allow indiscriminate harm (Wassenaar, 2006). As far as possible I also tried to include his perspectives in my account, although I was aware that some things were not my story to tell and decided to omit them. As per Ellis's suggestion (2007) I used a pseudonym, and removed characteristics that could identify him.

The final category relates to the two people I have interviewed to explore Afrikaner religiosity. Although they gave me permission to use their responses in my story, I had consider how these conversations would reflect on them and if any possible harm to them may ensue. One of the interviewees (Piet) read my account of our conversation and was enthusiastic about it, even if his

opinions go against the norm. The other interviewee was very comfortable with the topic. In the end, I was satisfied that any possible harm is minimal.

As a final ethical consideration, and in the spirit of beneficence, I offered psycho-social support to those who were interviewed, in case they experience negative emotional reactions. I contracted with the Director of Lifeline to provide such services free of charge. I also availed myself of the psychological support that Lifeline provides, as a project of this kind can bring up strong emotions and feelings which may need to be dealt with – as per the suggestion of Ellis (1999).

Conclusion

I have described my research paradigm which deals with my ontological and epistemological assumptions. I also described my research as located in the interpretivist-constructivist research paradigms, with a constructivist epistemology and a constructionist ontology. As an introduction to my research methodology, I situated autoethnography in the larger context of the narrative turns, which is the study of stories or narratives. Autoethnography is a methodology which has its roots in traditional ethnography, but is combined with an autobiographical element. I discussed what such autoethnography entails, and I have incorporated criticism of the research methodology. I further discussed my methods and detailed my sampling and data collection methods, and how I went about analysing the data. I concluded with my ethical considerations, and particularly relational ethics, which are relevant when we tell stories about ourselves and others.

PART 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION:

Travelling Light

This part of the thesis contains the data or story, which I have named *Travelling Light.* I present the story and an analysis of the experiences and any relevant data. I also used Ken Wilber's Integral Theory to explain and analyse my experiences during the course of the story. I have structured the story in four parts and used Joseph Campbell's Monomyth of the Hero to indicate significant milestones after leaving the everyday context:

- The Context

- The Call

- The Journey

- The Return.

THE CONTEXT

Afrikaner Religiosity

Chapter 1

The Land of Begin Again

My family have been sheep farmers in the Karoo in the north-western Cape for generations. We all have a great love for the farm and what it represented. It was a place of family history; for children a place of growing up and playing freely; a place of refuge for the world-weary; and a place of healing. Everything revolved around my parents (Figure 8). They were involved in the community and with other people. Often somebody in need would end up on the farm, perhaps for a week, or perhaps for a few years.

As a family, we function as aware people. We question and analyse – ideas, the world around us and especially ourselves. We would spend many late nights talking about life and personal issues, drinking wine, or whatever was available. Any topic and anyone in the family was fair game. By family I mean not just my parents and my younger brother, but my extended family of uncles and aunts, cousins and their spouses – and everyone else who cared to join in. Getting excited and even angry was par for the course. So was laughing until it hurt (Figure12).

Figure 9: My parents and I – 2004.

At the centre of it was my mother who is passionate about life and people and a very wise woman. She spent most of her life being involved with other people – especially when it came to children. For many years she taught at the local high school and was the school psychologist. Whenever there was a child in need she would involve herself in the family's situation and would sometimes even bring the child home. Besides my brother and me, my parents raised and supported a few other children and our family was never a closed one.

My father, who died in 2009, was a softly spoken, very loving man. He spent his life battling a heart condition that should have left him dead at the age of 25. But he survived against all odds. Being a sickly child, he spent most of his time reading and consequently he was a store of information. He also had a memory like an elephant. When we were small children and my cousins and I were arguing about something, we used him as our definitive authority. We all agreed that whatever he said was correct.

My parents never settled for the conventional way of life even though they did all the right things in the small-town community of Prieska. For example, we had no typical gender stereotypes. My parents allowed the other to develop and grow in whatever direction the heart desired. There was always the understanding between my parents that my father could die at a young age, and that he wanted my mother to be as self-sufficient and independent as possible. When my mother wanted to further her studies and afterwards decided to teach at the local school, my father encouraged her, even when every day she had to drive 40 km each into town and then back again. But it cut both ways. When my father turned 40, he was very keen to go back to university. This he did with my mother's encouragement and blessing, even though it meant that she had to keep the farm going and spend a full day teaching while he was 400 km away in Bloemfontein. Three years later, with a degree in administration in hand, my father started a new career. After a short stint as the administrator at the

local hospital, he joined an arms and ammunition testing facility just outside of town. He continued working there and farming part-time, until he was retired for medical reasons some 10 years later.

Changes at home were a regular feature. It wasn't at all threatening, perhaps because my parents' relationship was so solid. We never felt insecure, not about them, not about where we lived, and not about money.

I had a happy childhood and was a well-loved little girl (Figure 9). Children growing up on a farm usually have a particularly special time of it – mostly because both parents are so easily accessible. We spent as much time with our father as with our mother. The farm was an open and safe place and this especially so for my brother who roamed freely. I often look at my brother (Figure 10) now as a grown man, all mellow and relaxed, and remember the wild, hyperactive little boy we had to scrub every evening to remove the day's dirt.

Figure 10: I was a happy little girl.
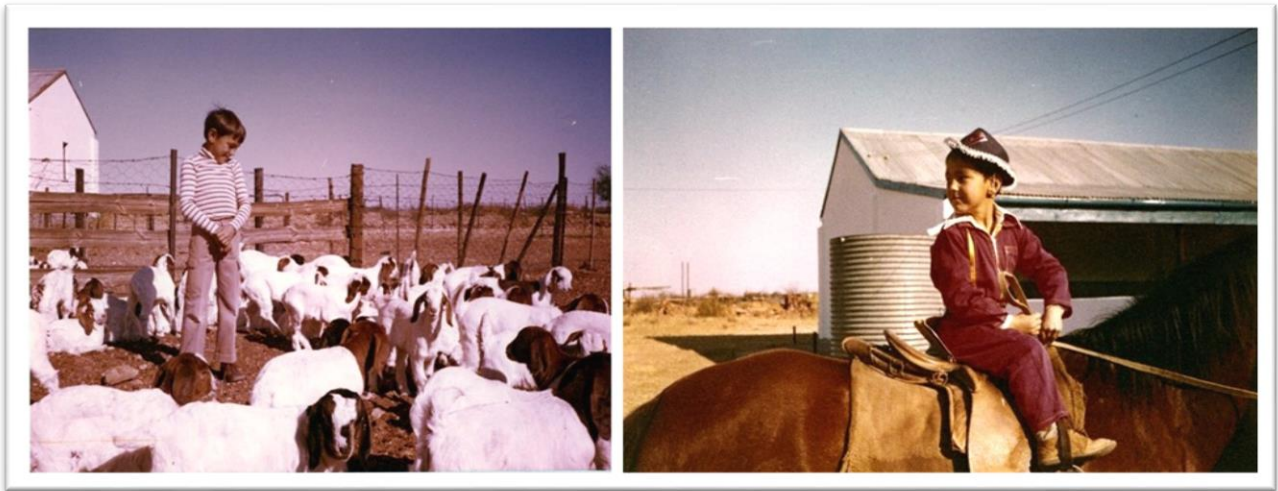
Figure 11: My brother – a wild little boy – as a youngster.

The north-western Karoo is a harsh part of the country, especially during times of drought. Lawrence Green, when he wrote about this part of the Karoo (Green, 1955), mentioned that colloquially it was referred to as the "Land of Begin Again" (Figure 11). My father would often refer to that description, sometimes with humour, but often with some resignation after a long and protracted drought had destroyed whatever reserves he had – and when he had to start all over again. I once asked my father how he ever managed through all the difficult financial times, and with a short laugh he replied, "The bank was very good to me."

But this part of the world teaches us that material things are fleeting. We never expected much. If it had rained, we received special gifts for birthdays and Christmas. We went on nice holidays during December summer breaks. My father might even have bought a new vehicle. If it had not rained and we were in the midst of a drought, we all 'tightened our belts'. Growing up in this part of the world teaches you about the valuable things in life: Money is not so important. Supportive neighbours and friends – those are the really valuable, without which one could not survive in this arid, tough environment.

Figure 12: A view from our "mountain" Swartberg. In the distance, the farm house and adjacent buildings are visible.

There have always been different ethnicities in the district, with Coloured people making up the majority by far. This part of the world is predominantly Afrikaans speaking. The White population in the district has mainly been farmers and may be called Afrikaners – although there are also some English speaking farmers. Defining the Afrikaner as a separate group in South Africa is not always easy. It is not a homogenous group of people (Steyn, 2004), which also raises the question of whether such a group can be identified.

Verwey and Quayle, (2012, p. 553), state that

[h]istorically, Afrikaner identity has drawn heavily on Afrikaner nationalism, which depended on several tightly interwoven discourses. These centred on themes of religious, racial, and cultural purity, superiority, calling, and the struggle for autonomy against oppression – which included the struggle for an independent language.

It can, however, also be said that Afrikaner nationalists deliberately *constructed* an Afrikaner ethnic identity out of language and cultural and historical symbols – which ultimately led to political domination (Verwey & Quayle, 2012; Blaser & Van der Westhuizen, 2012; Giliomee, 2018). Delport and Olivier (2003, p.179) state that

> [d]uring the apartheid years in South Africa, elitist role players in Afrikaans-speaking society deliberately and manipulatively attempted to enforce a collective and predefined Afrikaner identity upon many Afrikaners, including the Afrikaans-speaking youth.

However, there are enough similarities, meaning one can provide some sort of a definition. The Afrikaner nation and culture have been developing for the past four centuries out of diverse groups of people. These people could be characterised as almost completely White, with their own language, Christian scriptural belief and political philosophy, sense of identity, Christian national life, and worldviews (Swart, 1987). "Traditionally, Afrikaner identity formed a triangle, with religion at the pinnacle, while perception of history and personal characteristics formed the two base corners" (Olivier, 2014, p. 287). I now discuss these aspects, starting with possible characteristics.

My father had a favourite description that he used to read to us, and which amused us somewhat – even if it was archaic and outdated 'colonial' thinking. It was an excerpt from a book by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was a war correspondent during the Anglo Boer War in the early 1900s. He wrote:

> Take a community of Dutchmen of the type who defended themselves for fifty years against all the power of Spain at a time when Spain was the greatest power in the world. Intermix with them a strain of those inflexible French Huguenots who gave up home and fortune and left their country forever at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The product must obviously be one of the most rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen on earth. Take this formidable people and train them for seven generations in constant warfare against savage men and ferocious beasts, in circumstances under which no weakling could survive, place them so that

they acquire exceptional skill with weapons and in horsemanship, give them a country which is eminently suited to the tactics of the huntsman, the marksman, and the rider. Then, finally, put a finer temper upon their military qualities by a dour, fatalistic Old Testament religion and an ardent and consuming patriotism. Combine all these qualities and all these impulses in one individual, and you have the modern Boer – the most formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain. Our military history has largely consisted in our conflicts with France, but Napoleon and all his veterans have never treated us so roughly as these hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology and their inconveniently modern rifles (Doyle, 1900).

This description may portray the Afrikaners as a humourless people, but it is not the case. Swart (2009) wrote a wonderful paper describing the "terrible laughter of the Afrikaner" (2009, p. 889). Even amid severe adversity and tragedy, the Afrikaner has found a way to laugh at his circumstances, sometimes because there was nothing else left to do. Swart uses examples from the Anglo Boer War and Commando humour – from practical jokes to just plain silliness. Even in modern times, whenever a tragedy strikes like a town flooding and people losing their lives, black humour – which deals with tragic or morbid situations in humorous terms – came to the fore as silly jokes. I remember a case when a yellow school bus left the road, ended up in a dam, and all the children drowned. A joke started, where people used to sing the chorus of the Beatles song "Yellow submarine'' – "We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine …" (Lennon-McCartney, 1966). Perhaps we do it as a coping mechanism; there many reasons for laughter, as Swart explains. She further quotes Malherbe, who wrote in 1934 that the Boer

> is characterised by resignation in times of adversity and disaster, illness and death; but also by the clear sense of the comical in daily life, and the loving and humorous consideration of the values in the great reality that surround us. … But the great humour also liberated us from idle wishes and fear and opened further horizons (2009, p. 902).

We also get laughed at, as the Van der Merwe jokes illustrate: "Just as Paddy developed into a stock character in Irish jokes, Van der Merwe became the stereotype: a bigoted, dim-witted, rural, and naïve stock character … as a stereotype against whom White English-speaking South Africans (and possible some middle class Afrikaans groups too) could underline their more liberal and cosmopolitan identities" (Swart, 2009, p. 904). By the 1970s, these joke had become ubiquitous. I remember growing up with everybody telling Van der Merwe jokes, but I remember this Afrikaner stock figure, in his own stupid and bumbling manner, turning the tables on everybody else – especially the English.

As far as the "dour religion" goes, we are also allowed to make some fun of religion, but not too much. Otherwise it strays into blasphemy. My mother relates how her mother taught them that their bodies were the temples of God. My mother was a bit chubby when she grew up, and whenever she wanted a second helping her brother would shout out: "Look mom, she is stretching the temple again!"

Figure 13: My mother and one of my favourite cousins, Mike, sharing a moment together.

The Afrikaner has also been characterised by strong-minded individualism and stubbornness, or even obstinateness. Afrikaners were also resilient. The pioneers were required to survive and be independent of established governmental structures. They weren't only stock farmers but were also

inter alia required to be builders and wagon makers – everyone had multiple skills. The woman had to make their own clothes, bake their own bread and made their own soap (Oliver, 2011). "This created a sense of superiority, a feeling that they did not need others and a stubborn refusal to ask for help or accept advice or instructions from others" (Oliver, 2011, p. 35). I would always marvel at my father, the farmer: He was a very 'bookish' man, but he had to design his own water-reticulation systems, sewerage works, be a mechanic, and undertake building and tiling on the farm (with help from the farmworkers). Even today, one can still hear the saying "*a Boer maak 'n plan"*. This can be translated as "a farmer/Afrikaner will always find a way to get around a problem, even if he has to invent a solution" (Oliver, 2011, p. 80).

When it comes to a shared sense of history and the development of political thought, the Afrikaner from my part of the world starts to diverge from the history that was taught about the Afrikaner in the schools during my school years. Our history lessons provided a romanticised version of the brave *trekboers* and their resistance to English colonial oppressors, and their struggles in the interior. But in the case of the northern part of the Cape colony, the old pioneers who came to this part of the country were not part of the Great Trek. They did not leave the original, old Cape colony for political reasons. Rather, they sought new grazing areas for their livestock. They were not part of the old Boer Republics and, with some exceptions, were not part of the Anglo Boer War that ravaged the old republics in the early 20th century. They remained under the control of the British-dominated Cape colony, and as these parts became settled and grew, they had the help and support of rulers in the Cape (Giliomee, 2003). Besides farming, this part of South Africa is also rich in minerals such as copper and asbestos, which were mined prodigiously until it was no longer viable or safe to do so (as with asbestos). The mines were owned by British companies, and according to some of the old people the British also modernised farming practices. For example, they required boundaries and the sub-

division of the big farms into different camps, with fences enabling the livestock to be moved around to preserve grazing (Figures 13, 14).

Figure 14: One of the grazing camps on our farm in the north-western Cape; note the proliferation of grass.

Figure 15: If it had rained, the Karoo is beautiful.

My great-grandfather on my father's side, as well as my grandparents on my mother's side sent some of their children to English boarding schools hundreds of kilometres away in Grahamstown. Perhaps having an English education made them less parochial in their outlook. Our last patriarch in the family was my father's grandfather, who was the epitome of an Afrikaner patriarch.

Figure 16: The last patriarch, Oupa Jan: My great-grandfather and I at my christening.

There is a family story about *Oupa* Jan (Figure 15) who ruled his household and his daughters with an iron fist. One of the daughters, Kotie, and a young man on the neighbouring farm fell in love. There was just one problem though – Jim was of Lebanese descent, which was unacceptable, but worst of all he was a Roman Catholic. When he came to visit on his horse, he was forced to pick up any horse dung that was deposited and had to take it with him when he left. The romance was doomed from the start and amounted to nothing. Kotie never married and we always speculated that it might have had something to do with her thwarted love affair.

To understand the Afrikaner, is to understand the Afrikaner religion, as Afrikaner identity and religion have always been firmly intertwined (Oliver, 2006). The Afrikaners, long before they defined themselves as Afrikaners, first referred to themselves as Christians. Religion played a significant role

in their political, economic and social history, since Europeans first settled in what became known as South Africa (Giliomee, 2003; Oliver, 2014). Although by no means a unified nation, the Afrikaners share a religiosity – even if there are various streams of religious beliefs (Oliver, 2014).

Theologically, Protestant Calvinism has been a dominant stream, although there are different interpretations among the Afrikaners. Van der Merwe (2008) contends that if Christianity is rejected, watered down or side-lined, it threatens the core of the Afrikaner's worldview. All other values are embedded in Christianity as the master value (Van der Merwe, 2008). These values are characterised by, for example, Bible centrism, fundamentalism, conservatism and patriarchy (Van der Bank, 1994), and in the case of Afrikaner women, piety, self-sacrifice, and *ordentlikheid* (respectability) (Landman, 1994; Van der Westhuizen, 2013). The Afrikaner is also ethnocentric (Duckit, 2004), in terms of Calvinist ideology and the exclusion of other groups in terms of race and sexual orientation (Van der Westhuizen, 2013). Excluded groups traditionally included English-speaking South Africans (Lombard, 2020; Verwey & Quayle, 2012) as my father's quotation of Conan Doyle also illustrates. Steyn, (2004, p. 147) writes:

> Afrikaners contended with the more powerful forces of the British Empire throughout a history that was experienced as a long and bitter struggle for freedom from white-on-white overlordship. The self-esteem, indeed, the very self-image, of Afrikaner nationhood was forged within a mythology that celebrated the courage of a people who refused to be subordinated to the British Empire on more than one occasion in their history. The rise of extreme Afrikaner nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century is generally understood as a reaction to the defeat of the Boer forces in the South African (Anglo-Boer) War of 1899-1902.

The religious influences of the Afrikaner centre around two main notions. First, the Calvinist paradigm. Afrikaners saw themselves as "a modern counterpart of an Old Testament tribe" (Oliver,

2014, p. 289) – an idea which stems from a primitive Calvinism that the old *trekboers* subscribed to as they moved into the interior. Socially and culturally insulated from development in the rest of the world, their religious practices mainly centered on reading the Bible and some Calvinist notions from the seventeenth century. These Calvinist ideas subscribed to a religious fundamentalism which included the Bible as the revealed source of all knowledge – and a literal reading of the scriptures, preferably the Old Testament. It also included the Calvinist doctrine of being 'elected by predestination' to glorify God. This evolved into the idea of the Afrikaner being a 'Chosen People'. However, how far back the Calvinism notions go and when and if they actually started to influence the Afrikaner Nationalist project, is debatable (Hexham, 1980; Du Toit, 1985; Cauthen, 2000).

Secondly, the Afrikaner's religion (or at least parts of it) has also been strongly influenced by an evangelical stream, mainly starting in the 1820's with the importation of Scottish missionaries by the then British colonial government. This reached a zenith in the 1860s with the missionaries and the writers John and Andrew Murray (Hexham, 1980; Du Toit, 1985). Interestingly, my mother can also trace back her parents' religiosity and sense of mission, partly to the writings of Andrew Murray. My mother told me that my grandparents read these texts avidly.

I said the following to my mother: "Some writers say that old Afrikaners were strongly influenced by the Calvinist idea of predestination and elected people; that is why they believed they were the chosen people in Africa. As a nation we were chosen by God to come and do God's work here in dark Africa. But was it part of the thinking when you were growing up?"

My mother responded: "I do think that type of thinking was among us. Maybe not so much the chosen people thing, but that we had a destiny. … Growing up in my home, that type of thinking was very strong. My mother had this thing that everybody who entered our gate must hear about God. She had a strong sense of mission. She later decided that the farm was her mission station and everyone who entered the gate must hear about the Lord. She would even go and pray

next door at the camp where there were many railway workers. She would help deliver babies, and while she was busy with the birth she would tell the mother about the Lord. I'm not sure it was the appropriate time, but there she was." My mother laughed.

I asked my mother: "So her midwifery work was very much entangled with her missionary work?"

My mother replied: "Very much so. My parents had a strong connection to the *Afrika Evangelisasie Bond* (Africa Evangelical League) at that stage. They had all these women that did missionary work. They wore these small caps and never married, and visited us quite often to come and rest and so on. It was a group in the Dutch Reformed Church. It was supposed to be only a group inside of the church, but they became very strong and almost formed a church within the church, which was very uncomfortable for them. But their missionary work was the big thing they talked about. This is what I grew up with."

Christian evangelists were much involved with the colonial process in southern Africa (see, for example, Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986). Van der Walt describes the period of the mid- 1800s (1992, p. 77):

> The joint impact of all these Europeans (Boers and missionaries) was culturally and religiously devastating for the Bantu tribes and individuals who fell victim to these influences. The Boers were practically all Christians, and together with the efforts of the missionaries the Bantu people were Christianized by them. Because of the disruption of their traditional way of life and economy through the Difaqane the Blacks were virtually forced into labour in the employment of the Whites, a state of affairs reinforced by the missionaries who concentrated on training their converts and other Blacks around the mission stations for purposes of labour in the service of Whites.

In my discussion with my mother, I was not so much concerned with the political aspects and implications of missionary work. Rather, I was interested in what kinds of thinking and attitudes shaped her religiosity – which may have spilled over into my religious education.

I asked my mother: "So how did that affect you as child?"

My mother replied: "Maybe my stance in respect of people of colour. I mean – it was very patriarchal – our farm workers came in every evening for evening prayers. Everybody came into the kitchen to share in the devotions. The following morning my mother would lead prayer meetings for them."

I said that "In his book on the Afrikaners, Giliomee (2003) says exactly the same thing about the early settlers in the Cape and their slaves".

My mother replied: "I think they all had a sense of missionary purpose, so that is possible. I don't think what happened on our farm did not happen on the neighbours' farms. Even the lowest of the workers – the sheep shearers – who were seasonal workers and who drank a lot … they also came in to kitchen. I always tell the story about old Moos. He was part of the shearing team and it was his responsibility to throw the fleece on the sorting table. It was quite a feat to make sure that it did not tear. In any case, he drank a lot. He would walk down the street, quite drunk, swearing and shouting. And then he would see my father coming up ahead, and he would quickly change his tune and start singing hymn choruses which he learnt from my mother. Those were the types of associations they had in relation to my parents."

I asked: "What about (my) father's upbringing"?

My mother replied: "*Oupa* Frans (my father's father) and his family was very much church people. On a Sunday morning everybody went to the old house (where my great-grandfather and his daughters lived) and then *Oupa* Jan (my father's grandfather) would read a sermon from the church's magazine, and it would be similar to a church service."

Both sides of my family were mostly part of the *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church, or DRC). This was the largest of the three Afrikaner churches and one that originated when the colony began. It was quite influential throughout the history of South Africa, especially during the Afrikaner's rise to power and the resultant White Afrikaner domination during the apartheid era (Giliomee, 2003; Oosthuizen, 2018). The Afrikaner religion has played a significant role in their political orientations. The Protestant churches, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, were important in supporting and facilitating apartheid, which formalised and legislated the racial segregation of Whites and other indigenous peoples in South Africa. To some extent the DRC is still trying to recover their legitimacy, even after apologising for their role in establishing that political system (Oosthuizen, 2018).

I grew up in this rural Afrikaner farmer community. Although my family was considerably less rigid about religion, it was an important part of my upbringing. I am not sure about the extent we as a family identified as Afrikaners.

What we had in common was Whiteness, a language, religion, and perhaps some of the old pioneers' resilience. (You needed some resilience to function in that part of the world.) The church played an important role, and to the extent that it was infiltrated by the Afrikaner nationalist project, those ideas filtered through. The ideas spread into the schools, the community and to some extent into my family. Ideologically, we always resisted apartheid policies, yet we were complicit in the privilege the system afforded us. We had good schools, medical services, voting rights and a privileged position in society compared to other race groups in South Africa.

To what extent do I identify as an Afrikaner? This is a question I kept asking myself during the past few years and throughout this project. I will revisit this question a little later.

Chapter 2
Growing Up

Against this backdrop of the Land of Begin Again, a golden thread has been woven through my life since I was a child. It wasn't the only thread – but a significant one. It was the search to find who and what God is, if such a God exists, and what is required of me on this earth. Why am I here?

We have a favourite story at home. For many years my mother was an English teacher at the town's main high school. Those were the days before satellite television, and she had always said you just could not teach English to the children of the north-western Cape. It's a foreign language for them. To illustrate her point, she would tell the story of a new Afrikaans troop in the army. One day he was asked to say the Lord's Prayer in English, while he was on parade. It went something like this: "Our Father You are in heaven. Hello. What's Your name?" Funny as it was, this sums up one of the main themes of my life.

Spiritual development is a complex phenomenon. Ken Wilber, in his Integral Theory, positions individual development in the Upper Left quadrant, and points to four aspects which are included in spiritual development. He makes a distinction between spiritual intelligence (or what he calls Growing Up) and spiritual experience (Waking Up). In his model he also includes Cleaning Up and Showing Up as part of spiritual development. All these aspects I will include throughout my story and discussion, but I will start with spiritual intelligence. This is because I want to trace my own spiritual development and growth using Wilber's Stages of Consciousness – but mainly James Fowler's Stages of Faith. Wilber (2017) considers Fowler's Stages of Faith to be an excellent theory to demonstrate the development of spiritual intelligence and includes Fowler's stages in his theory. I will use this as the basis of my discussion on my personal growth.

Fowler defines faith quite broadly and not with reference to any religious tradition – even though he comes from a Christian tradition. Importantly, Fowler separates the content of faith (beliefs

and values) from the underlying psychological processes and factors that help to facilitate the operation of faith in a personality (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992). The theory is therefore suitable for investigating the development of faith and spirituality, without getting caught up in a specific theological point of view, or which religious tradition is being discussed.

As to faith development, Fowler (1991, p. 27) writes:

Faith as a universal, dynamic quality of human meaning making can be defined in terms of each individual's center of values, images of power, and master stories. Faith develops in stages toward a point of maximal individuation of the self and corresponding minimization of the personal ego as the standpoint from which evaluations are made.

In formulating his theory about faith development and the stages through which it develops, Fowler brings together the features of several developmental models, especially those of Piaget (cognitive development), Erikson (psycho-social development), Kohlberg (moral development) and Selman (the development of interpersonal perspective taking). Fowler's theory has a strong focus on cognitive development and the Piaget structuralist model, for which he has been criticised because of neglecting the affective components (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992). Piaget delineates four major stages of cognitive development (pre-conceptual, intuitive, concrete operational and formal operational) (Piaget, 1964). These stages are invariant and hierarchical. It requires that each person pass through a particular stage in the sequence, and that each stage is more complex and sophisticated than the stage preceding it. Fowler takes the same approach (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992).

Fowler's structuralist and cognitive development approach appeals to Wilber, as for Wilber the cognitive development line is important for several reasons. It is useful tracker of the structure stages of development – a basic yardstick or 'altitude marker'. Furthermore, as I already have pointed out, growth in the cognitive line is the very least of the growth lines necessary to track developments in other lines such as the spiritual intelligence line, which are currently being discussed (Wilber,

2006). However, Wilber's cognitive line goes beyond Piaget as he makes room for higher cognitive structures: after formal operations (2000d), he conceptualises a level he calls vision-logic and then still beyond.

Fowler's stages of faith consist of a pre-stage that is Primal faith (infancy to age 2), and a further six stages. Stage 1 is Intuitive–projective faith (toddlerhood and early childhood), Stage 2 is Mythic–literal faith (middle childhood and beyond), Stage 3 is Synthetic–conventional faith (adolescence and beyond). Later stages are: Stage 4, Individuative–reflective faith, Stage 5, Conjunctive faith, and Stage 6, Universalising faith (Fowler & Dell, 2006).

I next track and analyse my own spiritual development throughout my life up to the point where this story starts. I will use Fowler's stages of Faith to assess my own development. I will also refer to Wilber's structures of consciousness and each structure's worldview, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, and how they relate to Fowler's stages – as set out by Wilber (Wilber, 2017).

I don't have any recollection, and there is therefore little to say about the pre-stage of **Undifferentiated** or **Primal faith** (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, 1991) – since this is the stage of the new-born until the age of two. The young child has the potential for faith but is still undeveloped. This type of faith enables the child to overcome or offset any anxiety which may occur due to separation from his or her caregivers during infant development. "It doesn't determine the course of our later faith, it lays the foundation on which later faith is built" (Fowler, 1991, p. 34).

The next stage is Fowler's Stage 1, which he calls the **Intuitive–Projective**, and which is marked by a *magic* (magenta) worldview according to Wilber (2017). This stage is appropriate for early childhood (ages two to six or seven) and is characterised by a mix of fantasy and reality. Children in Stage 1 "combine fragments of stories and images given by their cultures into their own clusters of significant associations dealing with God and the sacred" (Fowler, 1981, p. 128).

I grew up reading Bible stories, more specifically those from the New Testament. I had a children's Bible storybook which my mother read to me long before I could read it myself. I loved Jesus's miracle stories and parables, especially the story of the Good Samaritan. The Bible and Jesus were important, and even at that age my mother would try and explain to me what the stories meant. As Fowler and Dell (2006) state (p. 38):

Constructions of faith are drawn to symbols and images of visible power and size. Stories that represent the powers of good and evil in unambiguous fashion are prized; they make it possible for children to symbolize and acknowledge the threatening urges and impulses that both fascinate and disturb them, while providing an identification with the vicarious triumphs of good over evil that such stories as fairy (and Bible) tales can provide.

However, at this age, a child cannot think abstractly and faith is not thought-out ideas but relied-on impressions that the parents left them with. My parents' religion was a benevolent one. There was no talk of God's disapproval, of sin, or even the devil. Jesus's stories and teachings were guidelines for a good and meaningful life.

The main factor leading to the next stage "is the emergence of concrete operational thinking … [and] the child's growing concern to know how things are and to clarify for him- or herself the bases of distinctions between, what is real and what only seems to be" (Fowler, 1981, p. 134). This is **Stage 2**, the **Mythic–Literal stage** (corresponding with Wilber's *Magic–Mythic* or red stage) – starting generally at age six or seven and lasting until twelve. At this stage, the child starts to begin to differentiate between fantasy and facts.

I had questions and they started off quite benignly. I came home from school in my first year and told my parents: "The teacher taught us the story of Jonah and the whale. I don't know, but I don't think it's true that a man could be swallowed by a whale for three days, and then got spat out

and he still lived!" My parents just laughed. In that moment, I suppose I received their tacit endorsement that it was okay to question these kinds of absolute religious truths.

Even as a young child, I often heard my mother telling the story of how honest her mother had been. Apparently, my grandmother was so honest that when she accidently kept a pen that she had borrowed from someone, and subsequently discovered that she still had it – she would put it in an envelope and mail it back to that person. She was quoted as saying: "what if the blessings stay away?" As child I was terribly concerned about that prospect, and it greatly shaped the development of my morality.

This idea of blessings bestowed and withheld is a typical example of this stage. Fowler calls it reciprocity. Fowler (1981) illustrates this point by using an example of a woman who spent her life living by God's rules and biblical values, and so built credits with God in the hope and belief that nothing bad would happen to her, and if there was a calamity she would be spared – spiritual money in the bank which she can draw on when needed. "I do God's will, and in return he spares me from the bad things in life." (The problem with this kind of thinking is that when life goes wrong, as it invariable does, it can create a crisis of faith: The bargain and the agreement does not hold. The blessings stay away.)

When I was about ten, my parents bought me yet another children's book (there were many). This time it was beautifully illustrated and about the development of humankind. It was a great book. The first chapter dealt with the evolution theory, which my father explained and put into context – as he loved to do. I found it all very interesting. But then, what about the earth and everything else being created in six days? My mother related, reassuringly, that in the Bible it says: "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (referring to *The Amplified Bible*, 1954, 2 Peter 3:8). So, who knows how long it took to create the earth? Not everything in the Bible should be taken literally. For my mother, the Old Testament

was more about the story of how God interacted with humans, rather than the literal truth. (The New Testament, on the other hand, was another issue). There was no contradiction between evolution and creation for me; no issues.

I progressively internalised the story and dogma of my religion as my school years progressed, but in fits and starts. By now it wasn't only my parents who were instrumental in my spiritual development, but also my teachers and caregivers in the boarding school I attended. At the age of ten and about the same time as my instruction in evolution, and perhaps related to our discussions about religion at home, I had a moment of rebellion. At boarding school my friends and roommates were very pious. Religion was very much part of the school experience, and even at boarding school it was taken very seriously. Every morning before breakfast and every evening before lights out, we were expected to spend some time, about 15 minutes, in *stiltetyd* (silent time). We were expected to kneel in front of our beds, read our Bibles, and pray. We were monitored. There was one small snag for me: I loved reading story books; I was always reading and *stiltetyd* was very inconvenient, especially while in the middle of a gripping chapter which I wanted to finish before the lights were switched off. So, I made the decision to stay put – lying on my bed reading my book instead of praying. Before long I was called to the teacher's room to be reprimanded, and I told her that my prayers happened according to my own schedule. Unsurprisingly, my parents were called, but my mother supported me. If I look back, that was the time that the seed of an individual pursuit and expression of my religion was sowed.

However, it was not finished. When I was about 12 and still at boarding school, I became increasingly irritated with the extreme piety of my roommates. A frequent game we played was along the lines of "In case of a fire, what would be the first possession you would rescue?" Or "If you were stuck on an island, what would be the only thing that you would want?" In each case you were supposed to the say "The Bible". Any other answer was wrong. And so, it went on …

One afternoon, out of boredom and probably some irritation, I took out my toothbrush, named it Miemie, and knelt in front of my bed and pretended to pray to "Her". The shock, the horror that I unleashed! Even as write this, I still have remnants of the feelings of guilt and shame. I crossed a boundary that day. Certainly, in terms of what the people around me expected of me – but perhaps even for God! I never told my parents about this incident, and quite surprisingly none of the girls told on me (that I'm aware of). But shortly thereafter I approached my mother and said: "I'm not sure what religion really means. I don't understand this talk about Jesus, and how it all works." Responsive as always, my mother arranged for me to see one of our local ministers in the church, a lovely man who could connect to children. In a simplified way he explained the master "story" to me. For the first time I understood what it was really about, and I embraced my religion and continued to do so during my school years.

My faith development, as I moved from the mythic–literal phase into the next one, is consistent with what Fowler (1981) called the **Stage 3 *Synthetic–Conventiona*l** stage (from ages 13 to 18). (This corresponds to Wilber's amber *Mythic* worldview.) What facilitates the movement into this stage is that formal operational thinking starts to develop in the adolescent, "which opens the way for reliance on abstract ideas and concepts for making sense of one's world" (Fowler, 1981, p. 37).

For my high school years, I went to an Afrikaans (and Afrikaner) all-girls boarding school in Bloemfontein. The school drew heavily on its old Boer Republic history and its leaders. It was also rooted in a Christian Nationalist educational tradition, and the school board was run by the Dutch Reformed Church. It was a very good school and there were learners there from all over South Africa. (I did not attend the local high school in Prieska as my mother was teaching there at the time and she thought the school might be too small for the two of us.) I liked boarding school. Or at least I did not mind it. During my elementary school years, I was a boarder during the week from the age of five

years – all the farm children were. So, I was used to boarding school life and used to being away from my parents.

Stage three is also the time when the adolescent starts to become preoccupied about his or her identity and career or vocation, and personal relationships becomes important. "The new cognitive abilities make possible mutual interpersonal perspective taking 'I see you seeing me: I see the me I think you see.'" (Fowler, 1981, p. 37), and the adolescent must make sense of and integrate all the different interpersonal relationships. I was no different, and I had all the same preoccupations. This is also the time that one starts to build a personal relationship or friendship with God – in the sense that one conceives a "divinely significant other" (Fowler, 1981, p. 154). "There is a hunger for a God that knows and confirms the self deeply" (Fowler, 1981, p. 153). For my faith development it was a natural progression and I started to expand my religious activities with church-going and catechism classes. I belonged to my religious community and conformed because it was everybody else's faith system. Nobody questioned it and neither did I at this stage. The only downside was for me at that stage, at boarding school, was that unless you were invited by friends or the friend of the family to spend a Sunday with them, we had to go to church twice on a Sunday – which was a bit much. So, sometimes I hid under my bed and read my books when I was supposed to go to church, but I did not think that God would be too concerned about that.

Stage three is the stage of conventional, conformist faith development, and synthetic "as it is non-analytical; it comes as sort of unified, global awareness" (Fowler, 1981, p. 167). Authority is located externally to the self – in parents and people in authority (Fowler, 1981).

As much as I conformed, there was also a rebelliousness side to me. A few times a week I sneaked out of the school grounds to go to a local book store a few blocks away, and there was a little voice inside of me that whispered "rules are made to be broken'. So, it was not much of a surprise when I found myself experiencing yet another controversial religious incident. When I was in my third year

of high school, about 15 or 16, I counted myself lucky to share a room with three others that I considered to be 'cool kids'. However, after a few weeks into the new year it became apparent that they were busy with some serious, charismatic religious beliefs and practices. There were prayers and Holy Spirit talk the whole time – which was quite foreign to me coming from a DRC background. One night, after lights out, they managed to persuade me to join them in prayer and with their speaking in tongues. It was all done with much religious fervour and emotions. The next morning, I was very uncomfortable with what had transpired the previous night, and I told them I wanted no further part of it. I was met with such anger and was told that it was a slap in God's face. Luckily for me it was a weekend when I could go home. I told my parents what had happened and how confused I was about it. My mother made an appointment for me to see our local minister (by now it should be clear that my mom was very good at that) to clarify the doctrinal issues for me.

The minister was a lovely man who explained to me that it was not ideal to confuse emotion with faith. He told me about Martin Luther who apparently suffered on occasion from depression. When people asked him if he felt like a Christian that day, he would say that "I may not *feel* that I am a Christian, but I know what I am." He also pointed out that any discussions of the gifts of Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia) or prophecy in the Bible are interrupted by a discussion about love – which is the greatest gift and superior to all other gifts (*The Amplified Bible*, 1954, 1 Corinthians 13).

However, I still needed to go back to boarding school and spend time with the same room mates. Again, my parents intervened. My father took me back to school and had a conversation with the school principal. As far as he was concerned it was a DRC school with its own doctrine – and this charismatic evangelical group was out of synch with those principles and beliefs. The principal acted immediately, and the group was quashed. I was moved to my own room. To add to my feelings of isolation, for a while I was a bit of a pariah among my former roommates and their friends. I was,

however, relieved to be distanced from the difficulty. Even today, the charismatic side of the Christian tradition makes me very uncomfortable.

The Synthetic–Conventional stage is also when the adolescent starts shaping and internalising his or her own set of values and norms. Role models start to become important. I was fortunate to have many positive role models, and not only in Prieska. My family in the big cities lived influential lives with influential and often famous friends, and they often came to visit us on the farm. One family friend was a politician and a member of parliament, and was an outspoken critic of the apartheid regime. He greatly influenced me, and I suspect the whole family, to conceive of a non-racial, post-apartheid society. Another role model was an Afrikaans-speaking writer and movie producer. He was very critical of the Afrikaner's parochial worldview and its self-important piety. He went out of his way during his career to highlight this and often attempted to shock the Afrikaner into some self-awareness. When I was an adolescent, his outspokenness shocked and intrigued me. He was just so irreverent.

But for all the wonderful extended family I had and the great teachers, my parents had a profound influence and impact on me. I liked and admired them tremendously. My mother taught me to have a great love and a personal relationship with God. My father taught me to question absolute truths. As a late adolescent I was on the cusp of the next stage, stage 4, because of the 'religious talk' at home and especially because of my father.

My father and I spent much time alone. My high school in Bloemfontein was about 400 km away, and it was his job to fetch me and to take me back to school after a home weekend or a holiday. We had ample time to discuss religious questions and issues during our road trips. Listening to music and talking about religion were some of our favourite pastimes. My father was an extraordinary man. He was well-read and had an exceptional general knowledge. (He read encyclopaedias for fun. And telephone directories!) He also read what he could find on religion and was well versed in

understanding other religions and other belief systems – even the esoteric and somewhat bizarre, like Lobsang Rampa! (Interestingly, Spangenberg (2004) traces the evolution of thought among some DRC members that led to the new reformed movement which goes beyond the literal–mythic perspective. The books and writers that he mentions were all present in our home, and my father loved to share his thoughts about what he read. Thus, the rest of the family also picked up on those thoughts.)

In addition to the Eastern concepts such as the "third eye" and chakras, we were fascinated with the concept of reincarnation. If true, how could that be incorporated into the Christian religion? We thought that perhaps Jesus provided a short-cut. And if it couldn't be reconciled, were we ready to let go of our religious identities as Christians? Not at that stage; that would only happen several years later. But we continued to have these kinds of discussions, increasingly just between the two of us, as I moved into adulthood. My mother became impatient and irritated with our constant questioning, and less tolerant of our divergence from conventional views. Her unhappiness with us would worsen in the years to come.

After I finished school I left for the University of Stellenbosch to study law, an endeavour with mixed results. According to Fowler this is the typical time to enter the **Stage 4 Individuative– reflective** stage of faith development. This corresponds to Wilber's orange *Modern-Rational* worldview. The late adolescent or early adult leaves the confines of his or her familiar background and is often exposed to people with different ideas and convictions, which may then challenge tacitly held values and beliefs. This stage requires that the individual question and examine, and they reconstitute beliefs and values formed up to that point. According to Fowler, two things need to feature for the stage to emerge successfully: "the critical distancing of one's previous assumptive value system, and the emergence of an executive ego" (Fowler, 1981, p. 179). The main difference between this stage and the previous stage 3, is that with stage 3 the assumptive value system is understood and is uncritically accepted. Many people stay in stage 3 – even into adulthood. Stage 4

requires the critical interrogation of the values and faith system, and the individual is required to decide what they believe and why. As for what Fowler terms the *executive ego*, the locus of control needs to shift to an internal focus and away from authority figures such as parents and Church, with the concomitant taking responsibility for values, ideas and beliefs (Fowler, 1981).

Mostly under my father's influence, I had already started to question some of the conventional religious faith aspects, although it wasn't quite as radical as completely parting with them. As for the executive ego, it happened in fits and starts. I was somewhat rebellious by nature and had already started challenging authority from an early age. Coupled with the fact that my mother raised us on Viktor Frankl's existentialist psychology, I understood what it meant to take responsibility for oneself and one's actions, as much as I could do when I was 17 or 18 years old. The real challenge came when, aged 20, I wanted to marry a man that my parents disapproved of. It was the first real and serious clash between my parents and me and it was a 'growing-up' experience. I eventually, aged 21, married the man in question and assumed an adult role. The marriage lasted six and half years and it was an uninteresting time from a spiritual perspective. We were not church-going and did not have major questions or problems with religion. Mostly, I tried the adulting role – which was expected in my community and by my parents. Most of the struggles and questions had (temporarily) gone away. I still was not able to answer all the questions, but that was okay. After an unsatisfactory marriage which lasted six years, and in a boring and dead-end career, I quit both. Actually, it was a bit more serious than that; I had a severe burn out. I just couldn't continue anymore after working relentlessly for many years in a boring job and in a bullying environment, coupled with frustrations at home and with my own life.

Now single and jobless at 28, I had to take stock of my life. None of my expectations about life had panned out. Nothing I had done or achieved was consistent with whatever ideas or dreams I had about life or had been raised to pursue. I did not know what to do next. While Fowler links the

emergence of stage 4 to leaving home, this stage is also likely to emerge after a crisis, such as a divorce – which then throws doubt on all previously held beliefs. So, in my case, even though this stage had already begun at an early age due to our discussions about religion at home, it was only at this time that everything was set to be explored.

I spent three months waitressing in a popular seaside town, with accommodation provided by some good friends. It was a very healing time. I worked in the evenings, and during the day I spent hours reading and thinking, either on the beach or on a lovely big patio at the house where I was living. I was also starting to read some serious books and was assessing and contemplating all my failures. First, I read Wayne Dwyer's *Your Erroneous Zones* and began to re-explore and rethink life.

What was remarkable to me that in my being-alone space, was that so many interesting and important people dropped into my life – all helping in small but important ways to point towards a new reconceptualisation of my life. It had become very noticeable. A New- Zealander friend spent time with us on the farm and kept questioning all my underlying assumptions about life and *my* life. (And the answers I came up with, were not satisfactory to me and were mostly my parents' scripts.) A brief stop at a friend's holiday home turned into a waitressing opportunity and a special healing time for me. I had a feeling that it was all orchestrated by Someone, and that I was cared for and looked after by some benevolent Force. There were no coincidences. A friend recommended that I read James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, which had a discussion about synchronicity which seemed to be happening to me all the time – and then my journey took a whole new turn.

There was a moment where I was just sitting on the beach in the late afternoon sun, wondering who I really was and where I was going, when "I am a teacher" welled up from deep within me. A few weeks later an old friend visited me and referred me to a then current magazine article which explained how to teach English as a foreign language abroad. I then enrolled in a course on teaching English as foreign language – and six months later I left for Taiwan.

I had some anxious moments. I was terrified, but I decided to go through with it, at the very least to overcome my sometimes fearful nature. I arrived in Taiwan without a pre-arranged job, but at least I had temporary accommodation arranged. Initially, I stayed with a woman who worked at the embassy. This was organised by an uncle who had ties to the diplomatic service.

I found two jobs during the first week after my arrival: Working at a kindergarten in the mornings and at an aftercare centre where school children were also receiving English lessons. In the beginning – being completely removed from my normal environment and culture – I felt as if I was living someone else's life – it resembled a virtual reality game. Everything was different to what I had been used to.

After about six weeks, my roommate and I had a disagreement and she told me to find other accommodation. She was going away for a weekend, and when she returned I needed to be gone. I accepted it. The problem was that I did not know where else to go, and to top it all I had to fly to Hong Kong that same weekend to renew my visitor's visa. Friday found me in tears in a small little alley. I was terrified and had no idea of what to do. I needed help desperately, but there was nobody to help. But I had no choice – I was going to have to resolve the problem by myself. I went to Hong Kong, and when I came back late on Sunday evening I went to a restaurant where expatriates used to hang out and where I knew there was a notice board. In terms of accommodation, only one place was advertised. I went to have a look at it, packed my things, and moved in that same evening.

My time in Taiwan turned out to be quite an extraordinary experience. I loved teaching, and there were two schools where I taught. Then, things turned around for me in a major way. I made really good friends, but none of them from South Africa. All the old scripts fell away – where I grew up, which school I attended, which university I studied at. All the normal stereotypes were gone. People related to me as a person, Sonja, not my history in the South African context or who my parents were. It was very liberating.

I shared my new accommodation with two girls, one from Taiwan and the other from New York. We became close friends. We represented three cultures and three different religious backgrounds: Katrina, my Chinese friend, practised the indigenous Chinese blend of Taoism and Buddhism. Sari, my friend from New York, was Jewish. I had a Christian background. Of course, the conversation moved to the various belief systems, and Katrina asked me to explain what Christianity was about. Trying to be brief and to the point, I explained that Jesus came to teach about love and to take away our sins by dying on our behalf – so that we can have eternal life. "Oh', she said, "what's sin?" She caught me out for a moment. How does one define sin? How do you distil a lifetime's worth of teachings and nuances and the struggles to find your way through the grey areas – into a few sentences?

First, I would have to make the conversation meaningful and make the argument that she, like everybody else, was also sinful whether she knew it or not. Then I could tell her not to worry about it because Jesus took care of it on her behalf. The absurdity of trying to convince her that this was the only way to get to God struck me – and I just left it. Surely the teaching that Jesus is the *only* way to achieve personal salvation and a relationship with God cannot be the only, absolute truth? For my Chinese friend that evening in our apartment in Taipei, Jesus was as real as the 'man on the moon'.

At some point halfway through that year in Taiwan, I made the deliberate decision to wipe away my old ideas about life and God from the table and then to start again. I did not know who and what God was, or how he or she functioned. All I knew from my own experience, was that there was some sort of a higher intelligence in my life. Letting go of my childhood God and the father figure that my religion provided, opened the door to explore God in a new way. Instead of the fear that I anticipated I would feel, I felt an incredible freedom instead. Despite letting go of my childhood religion, the connection and involvement from "God" was still there. In fact, it became stronger the more I focused on exploring what it all meant. I was starting to *experience* God, although how it all

worked and fitted together I did not know. Furthermore, I was still struggling to find my purpose in life. What was I meant to do? I just had a sense that I needed to return home – but to what I did not know.

I returned home in 1997 after a school year (I had just turned 30), and I was back in the Land of Begin Again with my parents. Subsequently, with my parents' help, I moved to Johannesburg. After some fits and starts, six months later I found what I had been looking for – a job in training. It was an amusing story, in a strange way, how I secured this job. The recruitment agent decided, because of my experience in Taiwan and this company's distant origins in Singapore, that we would be a perfect match. This was even though I had little relevant experience. Still, I secured an interview, and I got the job. It was with an actuarial consultancy which specialised in employee benefits. Due to legislative changes, pension funds and medical schemes had to reconstitute their boards of trustees to manage their affairs. Because of my legal background, it was my job to help train the new boards – which I did for a few years. During this time I became involved with the HIV and AIDS debates. It had a direct impact on employee benefits and we, and the companies who were our clients, were becoming concerned about the impact on the employee benefit funds. Thus, I developed expertise in this field, and we started a new consulting line in this area. I had finally found my purpose. I was so passionate about it that colleagues would later tease me: "Oh, here comes Sonja. She sees dead people." I later moved to a manufacturing company to manage their employee benefits division and their HIV/AIDS corporate programme. I had a meaningful job that provided me with a sense of purpose in life. I had good friends, and I did not take myself too seriously anymore. I was happy and fulfilled.

During this time, I started my undergraduate studies in psychology (a long-standing passion of mine). I mostly read in my free time, many books on spirituality. Every Friday evening I would go to my local book store and buy two books for the weekend. Luckily for me, Oprah had the same

interest and I followed her lead and read the authors she interviewed – such as Neale Donald Walsh, Gary Zukav and Caroline Myss. I had, since my time in Johannesburg, made a final break with my childhood religion, Christianity, and I was comfortable following my own spiritual path. Stage 4 does not require that one give up one's faith according to a specific religious community, but it does require that one maintain that faith through choice and clear commitment – instead of uncritically and tacitly accepting the conventional beliefs. However, I was somewhat disenchanted with the Christian faith. But then, I wasn't exposed to people from my religion who could help me move beyond the Stage 3 conventional and conformist view of Christianity. Thus, I set out on my own. I was also done with the Stage 4 Individuative–Reflective, and ready to move to Stage 5 **Conjunctive faith** – which is a stage where polarities or opposites are integrated and where paradoxes are embraced (Fowler, 1981). (This stage corresponds to Wilber's green *Postmodern-Pluralist* view).

If anybody asked me about my spiritual beliefs, I would just say, "I have no intention to search for or convert to a different religion. They all have important but partial truths, and besides, to understand a different religion is also to understand the cultural background of that religion, and I don't have the time to investigate nor the appetite for it. What I have decided, is that I am going to bypass religion and find my own way to God."

Whatever books I read, I passed on to my father who now had a similar worldview to me – to my mother's consternation. My father's spiritual process and journey seemed to run parallel to mine. During that time, a South African academic and futurist, Dr Piet Muller, issued a call on a national Afrikaans radio station for contributions to a book he was writing about *inter alia* near-death experiences and reincarnation. My father responded, and his story was published in Muller's book. What is clear from my father's contribution are his thoughts and feelings about his own spiritual search:

On 8 December 1994 I had open-heart surgery to replace an aortic valve [my father was aged 55 at that time]. My heart at times was very weak and initially the doctors didn't want to operate. Eventually they decided to do the operation, even though we all knew that the chances of me surviving it were slim.

Basically, I was in coma for five days and it was during that time that I had the experience. I suddenly woke up and knew what had happened to me. In front of me were two black tunnels. Each one had a big opening, somewhat wider than the rest of the tunnel that I could see. The tunnels were brightly lit. They were rippled like a human oesophagus. The one tunnel was horizontal, and the other was vertical. Then I saw something, the meaning of which I still do not know. In front of me I saw myself sitting on a small rug, of the type you would find in front of a bed. On the other end was a young child, approximately two or three years old. We both sat with our legs crossed and arms folded on either side of the rug, and we looked at each other.

Then the rug rose and slowly moved into the horizontal tunnel. Immediately thereafter I found myself inside the vertical tunnel. I felt myself slowly descending into the tunnel. I was about three metres down when I suddenly became very afraid. In my life I had never been so terrified. I thought to myself that if only I had been in the horizontal tunnel, I would not have been so afraid. But the fact that I was in the vertical tunnel allowed the thought to cross my mind that I was descending into hell. Then I started praying. I asked God to spare me because I still had a lot of work to finish on earth. What work I had in mind I do not know. But suddenly the experience came to an end, and I was unconscious once more.

Why I suddenly was so afraid of hell just shows how completely and deeply one is indoctrinated by the churches. That I, who had been reading about the subject, could react in such a way is incomprehensible to me. Now that I know and am absolutely convinced that I

know where the end destination of every soul or spiritual body is, my area of interest has shifted completely.

My area of interest is to determine how the many religions fit into the greater whole. Since my primary school days, I could never make peace with the sentimental and romanticised version of the Christian religion presented by the church with such great fervour and passion. …

I just want to mention that I am a retired farmer and am currently aged 63. My health is still very poor. But there is nothing wrong with my brain. I thank God for that. As you have said during the radio programme, a person that had gone through such an experience basically undergoes a personality change. I suddenly became more spiritual and live in my own world more and more. The spiritual side of life is in my thoughts at least three-quarters of the time during the day. In light of my health and age, and because I do not have much time left on earth, what I have written here came out of my heart and conviction and also that I do not take my future lightly." (Muller, 2004, p. 111-113) (my translation)

My father and I saw all religions as equally valid, and in our opinion none could claim to be the only way to God (for us, religion is really an accident of birth, depending on where and subject to which culture one has been exposed). In line with our thinking, Fowler (1981, p. 186) states that the following stage, **Stage 5 Conjunctive faith** (green Postmodern–Pluralistic), which we now found ourselves in:

… accepts as axiomatic that truth is more multidimensional and organically interdependent than most theories or accounts of truth can grasp. Religiously, it knows that the symbols, stories, doctrines and liturgies offered by its own or other traditions are inevitably partial, limited to a particular people's experience of God and is incomplete. Stage 5 also sees, however, that the relativity of religious traditions that matter is not their relativity to each

other, but their relativity – their *relate*-ivit*y* – to the reality to which they mediate relation. Conjunctive faith, therefore, is ready for significant encounters with other traditions of its own, expecting that truth has disclosed and will disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct its own (Fowler, 1981, p. 186).

We had many intense arguments at home during that time. (Even if I had my own life in Johannesburg, I often spent time with my parents in Prieska.) In terms of my father's and my thinking, Christianity was but one religion, and had many wise and profound insights to offer. But so did other religions. For my mother, however, Christianity was the only way, and she was desperately afraid and concerned about our salvation and where we could end up after death. She was very angry at my father given his influence over the children, and at our lack of commitment to Christian beliefs and practices. I really had no interest in going to church and neither did my brother.

Conjunctive faith is also the stage where one reassesses and newly appreciates symbols, stories, metaphors and myths – not only from one's own tradition but also from other traditions. My father and I liked to compare the religious stories, looking to find the actual meaning they tried to convey – without getting caught up in the literal implausibility of the stories. This is where we differed greatly from my mother. She could appreciate stories from the Old Testament as exactly that – stories and myths. But when it came to the New Testament, she could not and would not budge from her literal interpretation, to our great frustration. I often wondered why my mother, who was open-minded, intelligent and wise, was so stubborn about it. We were not the only ones flummoxed by it. As Streib put it:

> How does it fit together that a person, on the one hand, is able to deal with everyday situations successfully on the basis of practical reason and, for example, is able to design and control technological machines of high complexity – remember that a significant number of fundamentalists are graduates from our universities – and that the same person, in matters of

collective and personal future, in matters of meaning, in matters of religion, resorts to the most simple answers, subjects to the grand simplificateurs? In terms of developmental theory, how can we understand that a person is able to perform formal operations in most domains of everyday life and that this same person takes every word of a guru or fundamentalist leader as the revelation of truth? (Streib, 2001, p. 153).

Fowler (1981), however, states that many adults remain at stage 3, with some moving partially to stage 4 in terms of developing an executive ego, but not in terms of leaving the conventional and conformist value systems behind. Many adults do not reflect on their faith or value system as a system, and they are unable to separate the symbols of their faith from what it symbolises. In fact, the demythologising of symbols of faith is experienced as a fundamental threat to meaning, as symbols and meaning are bound up together. However, Fowler also states that faith development is a

> complex interplay of factors that include biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, psychosocial experience, and the role of religiocultural symbols, meanings, and practices. Because development in faith involves all of these aspects, human development – movement from one stage to another – is not automatic or assured. Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining best described by a structural stage of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood, or adolescence. By the same token, contexts of spiritual nurture and practice, coupled with a person's spiritual aptitude and discipline, may lead some children to a deeper and more rapid development in faith (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 36).

Similarly, Wilber's (2006) answer to this question is that people develop differently through different development lines, and that the spiritual line can stop or arrest at any point in time (for example at Stage 3), while the cognitive, emotional lines had all progressed beyond this stage.

Whatever the explanation, the experience of the various stages of faith in one family can cause uncomfortable conflicts and misunderstandings.

In my analysis of my own spiritual growth, and without teasing out all the different aspects of Fowler's theory (which is a considerable task and beyond the scope of this chapter), I found that the Fowler's stages of faith are quite helpful. Besides some exceptions in matching the different stages to different ages, I found his theory to be accurate and meaningful. I did not want to, and I did not need to, force my story in his theoretical framework; it was a natural progression and fit. From a post-modern perspective there are writers who would prefer that Fowler let go of his hierarchical stages of faith development and instead refer to different styles of faith – something which Fowler resists (Fowler, 2001, Streib, 2001). Hierarchies may imply bigger and better – a value judgement. However, there is no value judgement in Fowler's approach, and he points at that people have meaningful experiences of faith whatever stage they are at (Fowler, 1981). He further adds:

> ... [B]y determining which stage an individual may be operating from at any given time, we are in no way assigning a grade to or judgment of the validity, sincerity, value, or effectiveness of that individual's relationship to the deity of his or her faith. To identify a person's stage or transition does not imply that his or her spiritual life is better, more faithful, or desirable than anyone else's, whether in that stage or another. Faith development theory is not intended to be used, nor should it ever as a measure of 'how good a Christian', 'how good a Jew', 'how good a Muslim', or 'how good' anyone of any faith tradition may be. Making such judgments constitutes a major abuse of this theory. We are not putting a value judgment on the contents of a person's faith and religious/spiritual identity. We are attempting to describe patterns of knowing and relating through assessing cognitive, moral, and other forms of development that constitute a person's relationship to the transcendent or the Higher Being of a particular

religious tradition and relationships with other humans, both inside and outside a person's particular faith community (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 40).

Because I sometimes have such value judgements, especially in the past where it concerned my mother and her faith development, is not a reflection on Fowler's theory, but rather on my own impatience and intolerance. It is also part of First tier thinking, where people at each level think that they have the only truth and that everybody else is simply misguided or wrong. Being at the Pluralistic stage, or Conjunctive stage, one thinks that that is the only way to see the truth, even if the truth includes multiple perspectives, and thus intolerance can result. Similarly, the person at the Synthetic–Conventional, or Mythic stage thinks that a person at later stages has deviated from his or her faith and is on the wrong path (Wilber, 2017).

This brings me to Wilber's (2017) Second tier worldview, that is teal/turquoise *Integral*, and where Fowler's last stage, **Stage 6 Universalising Faith**, is to be found – which I have not discussed yet. According to Fowler (1985), this stage is quite rare, and throughout his research he encountered few subjects at this stage. This is perhaps why this stage is more theoretical in approach than his previous stages.

At this stage the process of decentration from self nears completion, that is, the person can take the perspectives of others and is beginning to take on the perspective of God. What begins as simple perspective taking in the Mythic–Literal stage has evolved to take on multiple perspectives evident in the more rational later stages, and now acquires a universal perspective. The self is no longer important but is not devalued. It is simply "no longer the center from which one's valuing is being done. It is done with an identification with the transcendent or with God" (Fowler, 1991, p. 41). There is an increased capacity for universal love, care and justice.

Fowler (1981) uses examples of great men and women such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa as exemplars of Stage 6, but I personally find it too limiting or it

sets the bar too high. The values and perspective evident in this stage can be espoused by ordinary human beings that do not necessarily take on the mantle of trying to change the world. Fowler's Stage 6 correlates with Wilber's second tier structures of consciousness and beyond. This stage then remains an open stage, which I will explore as this story continues.

Chapter 3

Afrikaner Worldview: In God we Trust

Before I continue with my story about my spiritual development, I first want to provide more context in respect of the Afrikaner's religiosity. Instead of using more literature on the subject, I want to explore the nuance of their Christian beliefs, thinking and worldviews. To help me with this, I talked informally to two people about their thinking, and as I did so I kept Wilber's cultural worldviews in mind.

As Wilber conceives in his AQAL model, like the individual, its socio-cultural environment shows the development of the same basic structures of consciousness as depicted in the Left Lower quadrant of the AQAL map. These Wilber calls the culture's or groups' worldviews, and given a culture's 'center of gravity' or average mode of consciousness as they go about their everyday business, we can look at Afrikaner and assess their thinking – specifically with reference to religion. Wilber uses a colour to represent each structure of consciousness and gives names for the different worldviews representative of that particular structure – as in archaic magic, magic–mythical, mythic, modern–rational, post-modern pluralist, and integral.

As Wilber describes (2017), the **archaic** (infrared) level is the oldest and earliest level. It dates back millions of years to the pre-humans, just as the earliest humans differentiated from apes. It includes physiological needs and drives for food, water and warmth, similar to the new-born's needs. According to Wilber (1983a), contrary to a romantic notion some people might have of the time period, it was not Eden – and humans needed to evolve "up from Eden" to access higher levels of consciousness.

This pre-differentiated level starts to differentiate into the Self and Other, which sets the stage for the next level – the **magic** (magenta) level. This stage is similar to ages one to three today. The

stage is focused on safety and security needs and survival. It is marked by anthropomorphism and superstitions. There is still an overlap between the self and surroundings, and there is magical confusion and intertwining – the object and the image of the object are fused and are thought to be one. For example, if you stick a pin in a voodoo doll, harm will come to someone else. From a Christian religious point of view, this stage is represented by belief in the Bible, with the magical worldview of the pre-school child. It is full of wondrous stories of miraculous interventions: Jesus's virgin birth and miracles performed by Jesus – for example, turning water into wine and raising the dead to life. Some believe that they are protected by a higher power when handling snakes and drinking poison. It is also marked by beliefs in a "Heavenly Father" who rewards righteous behavior and punishes unrighteous behaviour. God is seen to be a supernatural being "out there" – who intervenes with miracles and punishments. The believers are therefore preoccupied by the confessions of sin in order to appease God. This stage represents bargaining with God (Smith, 2011; Wilber, 2017).

Magic develops into the mythical level, and at the **magic–mythic level** (red) the self and other finally separate. However, the self becomes fearful of being vulnerable and split apart from the world. To ensure its safety, it becomes self-protective, strives for power and becomes opportunistic, and is also totally self-centred. The main difference between this stage and the previous one, according to Wilber (2017), is the location of the source of power. In the previous magical stage there is the belief that the person is able to produce a magical outcome, for example by engaging in religious rituals or doing a rain dance. At this stage the person knows that they do not have the power, but some omnipotent God does. There is now an absolute authority who must be surrendered to, and who makes the rules: "The Bible says", "God says", "The minister says". The world is black and white, good and evil with no grey in between, and fear keeps people in line" (Smith, 2011).

The next stage is the **mythic** (amber) stage, which Wilber (2005) estimates comprises the worldview of 60-70% of the world's population. The mythic stage marks the beginning of the stages where the self can take on the role of others, put itself into someone else's shoes and see the world through that person's eyes. The self's identity expands from ego-centric to ethno-centric, self-centred to group-centred, and given the importance of the group the self is now conformist. This stage is very conformist, and is preoccupied with law and order, conventions, and my group or country (Wilber, 2017).

In Christianity, there is a master narrative that has been taught for at least 1500 years. The story goes like this:

Mankind developed from one father and one mother, namely Adam and Eve. These first parents, however, created all of our destinies when they listened to Satan and transgressed God's command. Everybody was destined for eternal life, but because of their disobedience in the Garden of Eden, we are all doomed to die. The whole of the Old Testament tells the story of how God prepared the way for his Son, who was destined to break the power of Satan and death.

Jesus arrived from heaven at the appointed time as the eternal Son of God and became human through the Virgin Mary. As a substitute for us all under God's judgement, Jesus died for the sins of all mankind. Because he was obedient to God's salvation plan and willingly died on the cross, he broke the power of Satan and death. The result of this atoning death is that we all can live forever as God intended at the beginning of His creation. The proof that Jesus's mission was successful is confirmed by his descent into hell, his resurrection, his ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will come at the end of time to reward those who believed in him – and who thus accepted his sacrifice – with eternal life. But those who

rejected his sacrifice will be punished with eternal death and hell. In hell rules Satan and his angels" (Spangenberg, 2004, p, 275-276) (my translation).

In the mythic stage, these mythical stories are taken to be absolutely, empirically true – not metaphorically or symbolically – but as absolute truths and concrete realities. Often some of the magical stage lingers – as with the turning of water into wine as discussed earlier. This stage also marks religious fundamentalism, which is already manifested in the magic–mythic stage. Fundamentalism refers to five fundamentals that were adopted by some Protestant churches in the early 1900s. It states that the Bible contains the literal words of God, there was a virgin birth, Jesus was divine, Jesus died on the cross as atonement for our sins, Jesus's body was resurrected, and Jesus perform miracles (Smith, 2011).

These beliefs are common among the Afrikaners. To probe these kinds of beliefs and thinking, and in an effort 'to show rather than tell' (Ellis, 2004), I had a conversation with a young woman called Danel, aged 24. She was a friendly neighbour and loved to talk about her religion. I asked if we could have a conversation for purposes of this project, and which I wanted to record and use, and she agreed. She grew up in a neighbouring town in the Northern Cape and was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church, although she currently belongs to a 'house church' with a more evangelical bent. Because of her evangelical work, she is very clear and articulate in her beliefs, which has made her a very suitable conversation partner.

I asked Danel, "Does the Bible contain the literal words of God without error? Is the Bible the literal word of God?"

Danel replied: "I must say – many people critique the Word of God especially since there are so many translations available now: many versions. But in each version I find the Lord. I believe it is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit wrote it – through people. God wrote the Bible by using people.

Like the New Testament was written by Paul, well most of it, not all. I totally believe the Word is the truth."

I continued to probe, "Do you think we should take it all literally? There really was an Adam and Eve … The world was created in seven days?

Danel replied: "I can never definitively say the world was created in seven days, because God's days are not necessarily our days, so I will never have an answer to that until I get to heaven. I always say to people – I believe there was an Adam and Eve; there was a Noah; there was an ark, because geographically – in my studies – we can see there must have been an ark with the water that had drained and the Earth being formed. You can see it today – you can see it when shells are found in Africa. There had to have been massive amounts of water on the earth. Somewhere. I believe it totally. But what I have discovered in life is that I want to ask questions which will bring me closer to Jesus. But yes, I do believe one should take everything literally in the Bible. I also believe the New Testament is for today. The Old Testament I read to discover what God did for us – to protect us. There is some weird stuff in the Old Testament that I believe a new believer will be tempted to do an about-turn on. But if you read deeper and you understand the New Testament, you will see that Jesus was already in the Old Testament, and right through the Bible until the last book. Maybe not physically, but in spirit and in people."

I asked: "Was there a virgin birth and is Jesus divine?" Danel agreed: "Not only because I read it, look at it and believe it, but because I have done some research into it and asked God about it. I believe it totally. Why did she had to have been a virgin? The Bible said she needed to have been without sin and it had to be in bloodline of David, and so on. God worked strategically so that the enemy could not have known know Jesus was on His way."

"You believe that Jesus died for our sins?" I asked.

Danel replied: "Not only did he die, but he was resurrected and is alive today to live within us, today."

"You think he was *physically* resurrected and physically ascended?" I asked.

Danel replied: "Yes, definitely. The Word says time and time again 'I am sitting at the right hand of the Father … and I'm coming back.' One day He is returning. I believe totally that He was physically resurrected, with all the evidence that exists in Jerusalem, and with the many people that saw him afterwards."

"And He ascended physically?" I asked.

Danel replied: "*How* He ascended I do not know exactly, but I know He sits at the right hand side of God. And again, there were eye witnesses …".

"Do you think there is a heaven and a hell?" I asked.

Danel replied: "The pastors and the ministers always said that heaven is up above, and hell is down below. Nowhere in the Bible has it said that is so. I believe that the Lord prepares the perfect paradise for us, for when He returns one day. But I often ask people where Jesus is – Jesus is in heaven – but where is He now? In my heart. We can choose when we accept Jesus to experience heaven on earth because that is what Jesus says in in His prayer in the book of Matthew – 'Let Your kingdom come, let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Our goal on earth as Christians is to bring heaven down to earth for other people. Otherwise, why would I believe in Jesus if the world can offer me the same thing? So, you can either experience hell on earth or you can experience heaven on earth. Every Satanist ends up in death because all sin leads to death. But the moment that Satanists turn to God they experience something completely different; they experience heaven."

"What about when you die? Is there one of two places you can end up? I asked.

Danel replied: "There are many theories about that. I cannot say for certain where and what because the Bible does not tell us 100 percent. I believe God leaves some things out of the Word so

that we can trust Him, and can know that you can have eternal life. And if He says there is a hell it is not about making me afraid, but to give me a choice out of love. I don't think it is valid to walk up to people and say to them 'Choose heaven or hell'. I say, 'Choose love, because that is what Jesus is.' There are two theories. One is if you die you go to heaven or hell. The other theory is that you fall into a deep sleep until Jesus returns, which is when you will be judged. This is because the Lord says that every knee shall bend and every tongue shall witness that he is Jesus."

"What do mean by here are many religions but just one Jesus?" I asked.

Danel replied: "With my evangelical work and all the countries that I have visited, the Lord revealed one thing to me – that there is one God and that is Jesus. All the other religions are about people who existed and who died and a culture that has continued. It is not a religion, it is a culture. People see it as religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Satanism, and so we can continue … Being a Muslim … But there is one Jesus Who describes Himself as living. With all the other religions you have to do something and do everything for the god, but Christianity is the only religion where the God gives in love."

For the believer in the **mythical** stage (and the stage before), there is only this one truth. Any non-believer is simply confused or wrong. There can also be a strong impetus to convert others to this one religion (Wilber, 2017). Furthermore, at this **mythical** stage, which already started in the **magic–mythical** stage, people tend not to question this traditional mode of thinking – for as long as the Bible or the Church says that is true (Smith, 2011; Wilber, 2017). Danel's constant reference to the Bible still has the strong authoritative influence that harks back to the **mythic–literal** stage. It may also be that because of her evangelical work it became important to be able to provide proof from the Bible.

I wanted to get to the concept of spiritual experiences and spiritual growth. I asked Danel: "Do you see the Holy Spirit as a person?"

Danel replied: "The Bible describes Him as an advocate and as a helper in Acts. Even Jesus in the gospels said that He will send us a helper and then it happened as described in Acts 3 where the Holy Spirit came and filled the people. The Holy Spirit is God's power, and that is why the Bible say that you can blaspheme against anything except the Holy Spirit. I always see God – father; Jesus – love, peacemaker, rescuer, saviour; and Holy Spirit – power. What people forget is that Jesus sits next to God in heaven and He sent the Holy Spirit, and what they all do together – He (The Holy Spirit) prays with us, we listen to Him, and yet He and Jesus and God are all One. It is incredible. And how Jesus intercedes with the Father is based on what he hears about us from the Holy Spirit. Because the enemy [Satan and his demons] still comes, just as he came to Job. He says, look at this person – she just thought bad things about that other person; she swore … and then the Holy Spirit comes and intercedes … but look at what she did there … look at how she prayed, look at how she apologised for what she did … And that is how the Holy Spirit is the counsellor and the advocate that stands up for us."

"How do you see spiritual growth? I mean, today, you believe in God and Jesus in this particular way. Where do you grow to and how do you grow?" I asked.

Danel replied: "I know that it is going to sound like a cliché, but I grow closer to Him (Jesus) – to live more according to His image for the world to see. The Holy Spirit, one day, said to me, 'Sometimes you will be the only Bible some people may see' so, my spiritual growth is geared to growing my identity more in Him. Every day I struggle with stuff – for example, consistency. In my first year of teaching my emotions were all over the place. I was not being consistent, where something would move me. And Jesus was not like that. He was always consistent."

"It is almost like the bumper sticker that says, 'what would Jesus do'?" I smiled.

Danel replied: "It is really like that. That is always my 'go to'."

I thanked Danel for a lovely, open conversation, and she said, "You can ask me any questions, any time. I will never see it as objectionable. I enjoy it. My husband and I, when we started dating, that was all we talked about – and he is even worse at talking about it. I sat down with him one day and asked him if we could just have a normal relationship and talk about things other than Jesus." Danel and I thought that that was funny.

§

A different way to look at the stages is to distinguish between pre-rational (which includes the archaic, magical and mythical stages), rational (modern-rational and post-modern pluralistic), and post-rational (Integral and beyond) (Wilber, 2017).

To help me reflect on the pre-rational stages with the nuances that only an insider would understand, and to explore the rational and post-rational stages, I had a conversation with one of the farmers in the same district that I grew up in. Piet is also what we would consider to be an Afrikaner, and is in his late fifties. I know him socially, but my mother recommended that I talk to him, saying that he had many questions and opinions. I explained the nature of my research project and I asked his permission to record the conversation. What follows below is almost a complete record of our conversation, although I did some minor editing to improve readability. During our conversation I made no attempt to bracket my own opinions and biases.

The conversation started off by discussing religion in general and the purpose of it.

Piet said: "The way you live your life determines how you get to God, – not writings and prescriptions. You don't really need the Church … but maybe when you are young. As a child you need a basis and then later you can decide for yourself. You must give guidance to a child. It is about order … about civilised norms."

I agreed: "The way I see it is that religion does two things: in the first place you acknowledge that there is a Higher Power, and the second thing is that religion plays an important role in determining your value system. And once you've done that, then you decide what you do with it."

Piet replied: "Yes, but for me you can only take someone up to a point. Some people are like donkeys, they don't ask questions. They just carry on. And another guy thinks 'but hell, man, there must be something else?'"

"The way I see it, where the clashes come in, the church wants you to believe like a child, and think like a child …" I said.

Piet replied: "That's exactly it."

"And you're not allowed to ask questions; you must believe like a child" I said.

Piet added: "How can you ask a grown-up to believe like a child – he isn't one anymore."

The child-like belief and thinking that Piet and I were referring to could be attributed to an interpretation of a Bible story presented in all the gospels. It deals with an interaction between Jesus and a child, and which Christians, in my experience, often take literally:

> At that time the disciples came up and asked Jesus, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
>
> 2 And He called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them.
>
> 3 And said, truly I say to you, unless you repent and become like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.
>
> 4 Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (*The Amplified Bible,* 1942, Mathew 18, verses 1–4).

As Oosthuizen (2018) points out, those who insist that we should be believe like children forget that Paul also said that when he was child he thought like a child and argued like a child, but now that he was a man he left those childish things behind.

I continued, "And now you have to pick a fight with the church just because you want to ask questions. The churches don't like that. Doubt is a bad thing – it gets suppressed by the Christian community. Because what if you die tonight, and you have been doubting and if that balloon has popped – then you are doomed. So people do anything they can not to let that doubt gain a foothold. Because otherwise you're *in jou moer in* (done in) (Figure 16)."

Piet laughed: "Or so they tell us. Or me."

Figure 17: The Dutch Reformed Church is a prominent feature in Prieska.

Actually, my observations were not so far off the mark. Wilber contends that humans have a deep existential fear of death. Religious beliefs about the eternal hereafter serve as an immortality project to protect the believer from a fate worse than death. "… [S]ince one's immortality prospects hang on the veracity of the ideological nexus, the nexus as a whole can be critically examined only with the greatest of difficulty. Thus, when the normal and unavoidable moments of uncertainty or disbelief occur … the questioning impulses are not long allowed to remain in the self-system (they are threats to one's immortality qualifications)" (Wilber, 2005, Chapter 6, Belief, para 2).

Faith, on the other hand goes beyond mere belief and people with faith paradoxically are often in religious doubt. Doubt can therefore be a sign and manifestation of deep religious faith. People with faith intuit something much bigger and larger than themselves (Wilber, 2005). Doubt is your friend. Wilber (2005, Chapter 6, Faith, para 3) quotes a profound Zen saying:

Great doubt, great enlightenment;

Small doubt, small enlightenment;

No doubt, no enlightenment.

As we continue our conversation, Piet said: "Agnostic. I'm actually agnostic."

"When did you actually start questioning things?" I asked.

Piet replied: "You know, it was just after my father's death. I don't know what he was like in his young days, but he was this guy that did not drink or smoke. He would never have sworn in front of his children, like me, you understand? And suddenly he was sick and then he died. He was 58. And I just started thinking about things differently. You know other people say, 'we'll pray for him to get healthy again, we must just go to Church.' It does not work that way. *Life* does not work that way. But to answer your question, what actually bothered me (as we have said before, I am not a child) was how the ministers in the Church simplify the Bible and religion – like Noah's ark, like an Adam and Eve. For me, the Bible is a guideline for an ordered life. There is nothing wrong with the Bible. But one of the things that bothered me was that there is this God that created earth – why did he make such trouble for himself?" We both laughed.

I continued, "Yes, and since we understand the theory of evolution, we know that there was no Adam or Eve."

Piet replied: "How *could* there be an Adam and Eve? And take Noah – how many survivors were there … seven or so people. Now think for yourself – how much inbreeding would there have been? And then a minister tells you to think like a child. Let me give you an example: D__ [the local *dominee* or minister] has a *biduur* (prayer meeting) for the farmers. But now he has this very oversimplified sermon for us – but we are grownups, man. He tells the story of how long Jesus hung on the cross. Then I asked him 'D___, think for yourself. You have got one nail through each hand – it must have torn out. It is totally impossible that one could hang like that.' He just ignored me. His

entire story centered on these nails, how it must have hurt, the suffering … he went on like that for probably half an hour. And when I brought this up again he got very angry and told me to keep quiet. You know, a total oversimplification of these things."

Piet continued: "You know, it is always easy for one if everything goes well for you. It is easy to say God is blessing me. I prayed for it – I listen to them all talk. But it is not so easy for one that is struggling to walk 'the prayer path' – believing the things will come."

"And not ask questions" I added. "You know what I find extremely irritating – these people that walk around and whose lives are working, and they tell everybody: 'Oh, I'm so blessed'. So, if things are not going well, does it mean I am no longer blessed? What is the opposite of being blessed? Is God angry at me? And for what reason? It is all very well for the people who are blessed, but all they are actually telling you is that they have more favour with God than me. It is a kind of one-upmanship. 'I got a gold star from God.'"

The "gold star" or "brownie point" thinking that I am referring to harks back to the **magical** stage, where people are preoccupied with avoiding punishment and appeasing God, and it is still very much mixed in today with the **mythic–literal** and **mythical** stages. The righteous are rewarded and nothing bad will happen to them. What I've observed is that a real crisis of faith develops when bad things happen to those who believed themselves to be good Christians (and it inevitably does: people do get sick and accidents happen).

Piet said: "Yeah … I am not lying awake at night because of these things. I just understand things differently to other people. And If I think differently to you it is all fine. If someone wants to discuss it, we can do that. But I do not want to argue with a minister about it. I'm not going to achieve anything."

I agreed, "At some stage I also a questioned all of these things, and I clashed with everybody. And then I got to the point where I realised that I do not have to fight with the Church. What I am

now busy with, and which is very interesting to me, is that there are some psychologists, for example Ken Wilber and James Fowler, who theorise about certain stages of faith or spiritual development. Let us take, for example, this stage that you and I are familiar with, and which we have been discussing – the **mythical** stage. We believe that all these stories or myths are actually and literally true – there really was a Noah, and Adam and Eve existed. And then you realise that these stories are stories for underlying messages that need to come through. And you start thinking, but I do not need all these stories, and you start to move into a more rational frame of mind. You then reach what Wilber calls the **modern rational stage** (orange). We don't need stories anymore."

Piet interjected: "Because you are a grown-up you can think for yourself. You know, sometimes, I do go to church to listen to what the minister has to say. Some of them use everyday occurrences to structure a sermon, to convey a message, and to use a simple example to 'change your thinking'. But then you get ministers that start preaching from the Old Testament, with these simple stories. Unfortunately D___ is like that."

"D___ told me that he does not read any book other than the Bible. It is enough for him" I said.

Piet asked in reply: "Speaking of the Bible, why must I read the Bible every evening if I know what is in it: Psalm 23, or Psalm 1 or Ecclesiastes?"

"We are in our fifties. How many times have we heard those same stories? I am a bit bored" I laughed. I further said: "But coming back to the rational stage – you think, I do not need these stories any more and start thinking for yourself. I look at life and I ask questions. But in that rational space, two things can happen: it is all rubbish, I throw away all of this nonsense, and I do not feel connected to any of this religious stuff. Or you can say, maybe my experience has taught me that there is still Something. I do not know what it is, but there still is something."

Piet replied: "I am *there*."

At the **rational** stage, the self can take a second-person perspective and a third-person perspective and move from ethno-centric to world-centric. This stage is marked by modern, rational approaches and individuals becomes more reflective and objective. It is based on humanistic values and perhaps a world embracing spirituality. The theistic God is replaced by a more impersonal "The Sacred", "The Ground of All being", or simply "The Divine". Deism is common. Established religious beliefs are questioned and interpreted to reveal more symbolic or metaphorical meanings. On the other hand, this stage can see a disenchantment with religion and spirituality, and as my conversation with Piet demonstrates, agnosticism or atheism can be appropriate responses (Smith, 2011; Wilber, 2017). This stage rejects pre-rational traditional religion, and people in this stage are often angry, which is not necessarily a bad thing. This is because such anger can be used to fuel further spiritual development. Smith (2011, The Bible, para 3) points out that "(o)ne cannot use reason to argue someone out of a position they did not arrive at by reason. This is why using reason to change a person's beliefs who is deeply imbedded in the traditional religious level does not work". Piet and I can attest to that.

I described to Piet what happens, in my experience, as the post-rational stages start to set in: "And then next …, if you stay with that Something and you strip away all the unnecessary stuff and you sit with it, sometimes struggle with it, then comes a whole new world that opens for you. And that is what I want to explain by doing this project. If you move through the rational stage, there is something else waiting. A whole new experience. Yet, nobody tells us there is still something else coming. People get frustrated during the rational stage and think that is the end of it. But when that something else is coming, then we realise we have no need to dress it up in mythical stories and figures that shape your life. Our spiritual life works a little differently. Instead of listening to what other people tell me, I trust the insights that I come up with on my own. I do not want my own religion anymore, but neither do I want to change to another religion – they all have their own stories, different

but the same. I think there is a God, or that has been my experience, but I do not know who and what it is or how it works. But I am going to find out on my own. Do not tell me anything. I can do it myself."

Piet agreed: "I am going to decide for myself what He looks like."

"And I will ask Him or Whoever directly. And you get answers that way" I said.

Piet sounded sceptical: "Who are you actually asking?"

"Well, you say, 'I do not know if you are a man or woman or an 'It'. I assume you are not a being – you do not have a body. I assume it is some kind of ghostly, spirit-like, formless thing that I am working with. I do believe I am interacting with some form of Higher Intelligence, a Consciousness that connects with me. And I am pursuing that line of thought. I have got nothing to lose now – have I?" I asked.

Piet asked: "But you are now actually talking about what is going internally, aren't you?"

"Yes, and you don't talk to other people about it, it has got nothing to do with them. It is an internal thing. But I say to myself – let me take a chance on this" I said.

Piet replied: "But it is also not to say that if you think that way you are bad, like the Christians will have it. But this is the thing that hangs around your neck. If you are not a believer it is not to say you think you can do whatever … but that is the perception. And if you think that I am a non-believer, then it is fine. Just have a discussion with me without imposing your beliefs or your will."

"We come back to the point – I am not a child. You are not a child. What I always find extraordinary is that we live our lives as functioning adults, but in this one aspect we are expected to be like a child" I said.

Piet replied: "I think for 80 percent of people it is probably okay to think like that. We just carry on like that."

"I have this theory – Life is so difficult, and I don't want to worry about what is going to happen to me when I die. So just tell me what to think and how to believe; tell me what the path is" I said.

Piet retorted: "But don't think I'm not going to question …"

"Of course, but the average person does not want to ask questions" I said.

Piet replied: "There are so many religions out there. Who is going to say which one is the right one? How are you going to argue with a Muslim? You can't argue with him."

"He thinks exactly the way that you do, just from a different point of view, a different side …" I said.

Piet replied: "Exactly. That is why I am saying – sometimes it is pointless talking to other people about this kind of stuff."

At this point in the conversation we began to touch on the next structure of consciousness, a more complex development stage – the **post-modern pluralistic** (green) stage. This stage reflects different perspectives on every topic that arises. It tends to become relativistic. There are no universal truths; each culture has its own truths and its own values, and no one is better than the other. This stage is also called post-modern, multicultural, or relativistic. It focuses on human bonding, is very sensitive, and very aware of oppression and hurting others. Nobody has the right to impose their truths and values on others. Everybody has their truths which are true for them (Wilber, 2017). "Modernism limits itself to scientific exploration while postmodernism encourages spiritual exploration. Modernism says there are absolute values while postmodernism says all is relative" (Smith, 2011, Postmodern consciousness, para 3). In terms of religion, postmodernism honours others' traditions and may even include different religious perspectives in its own (Wilber, 2017).

This stage hates rankings and stages and despises hierarchies (like the current discussion of different stages). All people are radically equal. That is there is an egalitarian stance. Stages of

development are seen as elitism (Smith, 2011; Wilber 2017). However, Wilber makes the point that those criticisms fail to distinguish between dominator hierarchies (which all agree are bad), and actualisation or growth hierarchies (which are seen in nature and human development). In the case of the latter, all stages are valuable and each stage is more complex, deeper and higher, more adequate, and more holistic. That is, it is a holarchy and capable of a wider response (Wilber, 2017).

Piet continued, "But it is not say that I live an unorderly life."

"No, your morality is not tied to your religion. As a child to two aspects may go hand in hand, but not as a grownup. It is already established. Your spiritual life has got nothing to do with it. I personally think that the rules we adhere to in our society are all manmade, but if we want to make sure people follow them, then we say – 'those are God's rules'."

Piet exclaimed: "Yes, that is exactly it! I will tell you another story. There is this guy, I won't name him, but he is rather prominent in the church. I once asked him bluntly 'Who wrote the Bible?', and he said, 'God wrote the Bible.' And I thought to myself – here is someone that has never thought of these things before."

"And if we question contradictions in the Bible, then people tell us 'God works in mysterious ways'" I said. We both laughed.

Piet replied: "Yes, and we will never understand His ways. Anything is possible … You know, sometimes I listen to people at meetings, with the little sermons … and we are asked to pray for an outcome. And I think to myself, I am not so sure it will work, but you give it a try. Things play out as they should."

"There is this old story of the two boxers both praying to win the match, and God needs to decide who is going to win. Is it the one with the most gold stars from God?" I said.

Piet laughed, "Yes, look at rugby games and how they pray beforehand to win. But one team has to lose – so what then? The losing team will probably be the team with the least injuries."

As an aside, the same can be said for praying for rain. I did not ask Piet, but I can guess what his answer would have been. In our family we sometimes laugh, because in mid-summer the stock farmers really need rain in order for the veld to be sustained. Yet, at the same time, the last thing that the irrigation farmers in the same district next to the Orange River want is rain on their grapes – for example. So who is God going to listen to? As I was writing up this project that part of the country, in fact most of the Karoo, was in grip of a long and devastating drought. Many farms had not had adequate rain for five or six years (Figure 17). Many prayer meetings were arranged to pray for rain. "Does it even work?" I asked my mother, who has been a stock farmer's daughter, wife and farmer herself, and who also has been part of many such prayer days and meetings. She said, "I haven't seen it working … not in my lifetime." Yet, rain is something that is prayed for, and which God is thanked for when it arrives all the time – in conversations, in church, and on social media. As Smith (2011) says, in the rational stage, one realises that the weather is best left to natural forces.

Figure 18: Above: The north-west Cape in the grips of a devastating drought (courtesy of my neighbour A.R. Cahi). Below right: an image produced by a town in the district depicting a farmer praying for rain to sell as 'bumper stickers' for drought relief. (Circulated on social media).

I continue my conversation with Piet: "You know what? I do not think you and I really have an issue with the people that think like that. We have a problem with people who do not think any further and, because we think differently, make us feel ostracised."

Piet agreed: "Yes, that is exactly it."

"… and they judge us as terrible people, as unbelievers going to hell. We are constantly fighting that type of judgement" I continued.

Piet replied: "You and I are talking now from a different perspective, but it is not necessary that we talk to people about it. I just listen to them, and have my own thoughts about things. I just keep quiet. It just makes everything unpleasant, and they hang a label around your neck."

"In our situation, where we've grown up … we work with a community with very different ideas. If we live in the city, I suppose you can have your own circle of friends who may share your ideas" I said.

Piet retorted: "But here we are forced by circumstances to deal with it."

"You have to go to funerals, to church …" I said.

Piet said: "You don't have much of choice. You work with what you have." He continued, "Every person has his understanding of God. For me the Godhead is the sun that rises, the moon's eclipse, the ewes lambing …"

"You are a man of the soil" I smiled.

Piet concluded: "God is in there for me. It does not lie in a person. I cannot really describe it."

The pluralistic stage is the last of the first-tier stages and where the second-tier stages begin. The main difference between the first and second tiers is that the first tier believe their truths are the only truths. People in the second tier believe that all stages have some truth, if only partial. Each stage is a crucial step or stage in human beings' development. None can be deleted without disastrous and profound developmental challenges. I will pick up the discussion again as the story goes along.

§

The conversations that I had with the two people with such diverse worldviews illustrate the divide within not only the DRC, but also all the Afrikaans Protestant Churches. The Church grapples with the dilemma of how to deal with both the fundamentalists and those who have questions about established dogmas. There is an unbridgeable divide between the literalists versus those who interpret the Bible metaphorically and within a historical context, cognisant of all the facets of science. That is, a clash between the literal mythic and rational, pluralistic approaches.

Up to now, the church fathers have chosen to focus on the fundamentalists. Those who have unanswered questions have just silently left the Church, as the drop in numbers of congregants possibly indicates. It is not necessarily the case that people become less spiritual: they become less interested in organised religion (Oosthuizen, 2018). And so have I.

The chapters that follow will tell the story of my journey beyond religion and into new discoveries ...

The Call

This first stage of the mythological journey – which we have designated as the 'call to adventure'– signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown (Campbell, 1949, p. 58).

Chapter 4

A Leap of Faith

The day my life spun into a new direction started normally enough. It was a Saturday, and a lovely spring morning in Johannesburg. The kind of cool, sunny day when from the moment of waking, you feel energised and ready to tackle anything the day might bring.

My garden was well on its way to recovery after winter. The previous two years, I had spent an inordinate amount of time planting shrubs and flowers – with the sole proviso that whatever I planted needed to grow big and grow quickly. So, come spring, there was not that much to do besides the routine feeding, watering and light pruning. The only problem I could discern was my enthusiasm: I had planted shrubs that had turned a small townhouse garden into something that resembled a jungle! Everything had grown very well and very little lawn was left. I lived alone and had done for years, mostly by choice. At 37, I had made peace with the fact that love was not that easy to find. Maybe there was a relationship somewhere waiting for me, but I had got tired of looking for it. I figured that if God wanted me to have a relationship, he would have to drop someone from the sky – right in front of me.

I had a good life, good friends, and a good job, but I had never been interested in climbing the corporate ladder. I have always tended to pursue jobs that are meaningful to me and that made a difference to the workplace where I was at. I was in my career. I would have said that I was self-actualised at that time. In fact, I was finishing my undergraduate studies in psychology, a long standing passion of mine, and I had studied Maslow as part of my courses. The handbook (Moore, 1997) listed key characteristics of a self-actualised individual, and (in my thoroughly biased opinion) I fell into this category. I felt that I was fulfilling all the potential I had in me with my work – which I felt was a calling for me. I enjoyed people, especially my friends, and even my family. I felt that I

was self-fulfilled as Maslow (1970, p. 46) describes, "to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming."

And yet, when I thought that I had reached a solid and happy place in life, something was missing. It was a dissatisfaction, an uncertainty about what to do next, and it left me quite depressed. At work I had done what I had set out to do, and the question then came – where to now? Do I join a new company, perhaps bigger, and duplicate what I had done so far? What were my alternatives, I wondered. What made it worse, I kept hearing words in my head: "It is time to start your real job." I did not know what to make of it or what it meant.

I knew that I was in some sort of existential crisis, but did not know what to do about it or where to go from there. I found my depressed mood to be counter-productive and it got in the way of my ability to think clearly about the next moves to make. Thus, I sought professional help. The antidepressants made me feel better, but still did not solve my problem of what to do or where to go next.

In Wilber's earlier work, starting with his first book *Spectrum of Consciousness*, and continuing in his big work *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*, he describes the individual at this stage of development as the centaur after the mythical Greek man-horse. He sees the centaur as an individual person able to integrate the body and mind, the rational and the physical life experience (Wilber, 2000d). The individual's consciousness becomes more transparent to itself, and increasingly objective – "the mind looking at the mind intersubjectively" (2000d, p. 195). Wilber in his later work renames the stage as being part of the integral structure of consciousness, which is underpinned by the vision logic or network-logic cognitive development (Wilber, 1993, 2017). This is the beginning of the second-tier stages.

In addition to self-actualisation, the centaur is the stage of meaning-making but also existential concerns (Wilber, 2000d). The centaur is in the grip of an existential angst when confronted with the

fact that nothing is really important – we are all going to die. So, what is the meaning of it all? Wilber describes it as follows:

> A profound existential malaise can set in – the characteristic pathology of this stage. … No longer protected by anthropocentric gods and goddesses, reason gone flat in its happy capacity to explain away the Mystery, not yet delivered into the hands of the superconscious – we stare out blankly into that dark and gloomy night, which will very shortly swallow us up as surely as it once spat us forth (Wilber, 2000d, p. 271).

In any event, I believe the centauric worldview is quite a significant and even critical stage in spiritual development. This is because it is the last of what can be described as the rational, egoic or personal bands. From here on, if the individual continues growing, they start moving into the trans-rational, trans-egoic and transpersonal bands of development. In fact, according to Wilber, the only cure for existential angst is

> the transcendence of the existential condition, that is, the transcendence of the centaur, negating and preserving it in a yet higher and wider awareness. For we are here beginning to pass out of the noosphere and into the theosphere, into the transpersonal domains, the domains not just of the self-conscious but of the superconscious (Wilber, 2000d, p. 272).

The proximity of this centaur stage to the transpersonal bands also creates fertile ground for Wilber's second component of spiritual development – the Waking Up to other states of consciousness. Wisps of Spirit start to seep through into the everyday consciousness. As Wilber describes it:

> looking deep within the mind, in the most interior part of the self, when the mind becomes very, very quiet, and one listens very carefully, in that infinite Silence, the soul begins to whisper, and its feather-soft voice takes one far beyond what the mind could ever imagine, beyond anything logic can endure (2000d, p. 106).

In hindsight, it is all very clear, but for me it was a very unsettling time. I had begun to experience an awareness, a waking up, but I did not know what to do with it or what to do about it. It deepened my frustrations with my life. For example, a few years earlier I had an experience where I awoke up in the middle of the night and suddenly found myself floating and looking down on my parents as they were sleeping in their bed. I was terrified, and screamed 'Mom, Mom" but no sound came out – and suddenly I was back in my own body and in my own bed. After the incident I very much regretted that I went into such a panic about it. Who knows what else I could have discovered.

More incidents had occurred, and they were increasing. For instance, I woke up one night with a voice calling my name, but did not seem to be coming from this reality. I had strong feelings of foreboding before each of my two car accidents: I knew what was about to happen, and yet I was powerless or not inclined to stop it. On one curious occasion, I 'heard' 'someone' laughing at me when I did something stupid, and it came from elsewhere – not in my head.

Wilber (2000d) categorises states of consciousness (as opposed to structures of consciousness) into different types. First there are natural states of consciousness such as being awake, dreaming, and deep sleep – which we all have access to during a 24-hour cycle. Then there are altered or non-ordinary states, whether it is drug-induced or experienced through meditation or contemplative prayer. Included in the altered states are what Maslow termed peak or transcendent experiences, or as Wilber puts it, "peek" experiences. These are spontaneous experiences that open us up to a different realm and leave a person feeling in awe or momentarily in a transcended state (Maslow, 1972; Wilber, 2000d). Initially, Maslow attributed these peak experiences to people who are self-actualised. In his later work before his death, Maslow started to revise his theory and hypothesised in his Theory Z that peak experiences point to something else – to a sense of transcendence beyond the healthy and actualised human being. He then conceptualised a level beyond self-actualisation: self-transcendence (Maslow, 1972).

But, to continue with my story, since my gardening craze had subsided somewhat, I had to find new ways of entertaining myself at the weekends. I joined a gym with every good intention, but I am not really an exercising type, and I have never had to worry about my weight as I am tall and very skinny. More to my liking was a Tai Chi class offered at the gym. Even though the moves confounded me, it left me nicely relaxed and a little spaced out.

So, on that particular Saturday morning, I had just finished with my Tai Chi class when I remembered a little place around the corner from the gym where I could have breakfast. I noticed an advertisement for a spiritual fair taking place near to where I lived, while paging through the weekend newspaper. It seemed like a good idea to pop in there on my way home. I like spiritual matters and I like crystals, which are usually for sale at these types of fairs. Besides, it seemed like a pleasant way to spend the rest of the morning.

I had a few big pieces of rose quartz that I used as bookends. The thought that crystals might have some unique or healing properties intrigued me – not that I knew much about this. But I thought they were pretty and possibly that they could even be beneficial. It was enough reason for me to search for some more.

While browsing through the stalls, I saw a young woman sitting behind a table and I picked up her business card. It simply said that she was a 'channel'. "A channel?" I asked. "What does a channel do?"

"I act as a channel between human beings and their spirit guides" she explained. "The guides communicate with the clients through me."

I had never heard of channelling, but the concept of spirit guides or angels was familiar – even though I knew very little about the subject.

In fact, not long before this incident I had investigated the idea that Spirit could manifest in some form of spirit guides because of the strange experiences that I had been having. Hoping for

some explanation of what was going on, I went to see a psychic as they were the only people that I could think of who might have direct access to the spirit world. The psychic confirmed that there were spirit guides involved in my life. The possibility intrigued me, but I remained a sceptical and did not really believe that they were real.

I made a rough calculation of the money I had in my purse and thought I probably had enough cash for the fee she charged. But I had more shopping to do, and so decided to keep her business card. Who knows? I thought I might want to contact her at some stage and started walking on.

Suddenly, a rush of energy came at me, and I stumbled and nearly fell. Surprised, I looked around, but there was no wind blowing and I did not feel as if I'd had a sudden drop in blood pressure. It came from outside of me. I glanced at the woman who had witnessed my loss of balance. I said, "Wow! I think I need to stop here." She smiled and seemed completely unsurprised as she pulled out a chair for me to sit on. The young woman – her name was Cari-Ann – informed me that my spirit guide wanted to talk to me.

So, we started an extraordinary conversation. Cari-Ann spoke on behalf of the spirit guide. She fell quiet, listened to what he had to say, and then repeated it to me. The interaction became so fluid that I hardly noticed her at all.

It was a deeply personal conversation. My spirit guide, who presented himself as a Russian with an unpronounceable name, knew everything: my insecurities, incidents and events that happened in the past, the challenges I faced, and the questions I sought answers for. I was having a conversation with someone who knew my deepest thoughts and feelings – even those that I seldom express.

According to the spirit guide, I was about to enter a new phase of my life, and I thought 'Not a moment too soon'. Despite my well-functioning life, I felt that I was simply treading water, and waiting for something to happen. I said to my new spirit guide friend, "In a way I suppose, I have always felt that I was being prepared for something, but I never knew for what. Even at 30 I felt that

I was going through some sort of crash course in life. There had been so many intense experiences happening at a rapid pace, that I felt as if I'd gone through experiences that for most people would have taken a lifetime."

"Yes," my spirit guide confirmed, "you were being prepared for enlightenment."

Enlightenment.

The implications of this announcement silenced me. Now there was something I had never considered. I really did not know much about it, except that it was a goal in the eastern religions to reach a level of understanding beyond the physical reality, that it requires years of meditation and contemplation and that very few people manage to reach that level. So why me? Was this real?

Enlightenment or no enlightenment, here was a new opportunity for me to discover God and the spiritual dimension, or what I simply called Spirit. I had never thought that I might be able to communicate directly with spirit guides or Spirit. Now all that had suddenly and miraculously changed. At the centre of my being – excitement stirred. Something within me felt that this was what I had been waiting for all my life. For the first time I made sense. My life made sense.

As we were closing our conversation, my spirit guide told me to expect more of the energy interaction that I had experienced in our session, and of greater intensity. Even as we were speaking, I was conscious of new sensations, for example the palms of my hands were tingling. I was simply enthralled and how could I not be? My spirit guide also informed me that the conversation was to continue, and I needed to start meditating every day. He would connect with me in that space. He also asked Cari-Ann to facilitate a session where my own channelling abilities could be strengthened.

I went home and I was like a kid with a new toy. I'd learnt to meditate years ago, but I was not really serious about it then and I had practised it in a very rudimentary fashion. Now, because it was necessary and because I had been instructed to do it regularly, I continued practising my meditation skills whenever I had the chance. It turned out to be surprisingly easy, but it was not so

much because of my own skills as it was about someone or something else who had taken over the process. I just needed to be available and accessible. In the meantime I had my channelling training session, which greatly enhanced my abilities to hear my spirit guide. The communication was still a bit hazy and in its infancy but a whole new world had opened to me.

I did not hear voices as we normally understand them. There was no sound, not in my ears or in my head. Instead, words formed telepathically in my mind that I could 'hear' clearly. If I still thought that perhaps the words were my own thoughts, I was convinced otherwise when occasionally my spirit guide interrupted me as one would in a normal conversation. I tested the idea by trying to interrupt myself with a stream of different thoughts, but I could not do it. These conversations mostly happened when I was in a meditative state, and only when I was connecting directly with the spirit guide. This wasn't always easy – it required serious focus and concentration.

Strange things were happening to my body, and this played a large role in convincing me that I wasn't making this all up. I was experiencing new active connections that were growing daily – as if someone had thrown a switch. I developed extra senses and I could feel energy flowing from crystals and stones. I could feel sensations at the top of my head, and at the nape of my neck. Shivers ran down my entire body – almost like warming up in the sun when you are cold. However, the sensations were more prolonged. It is difficult to describe these sensations as they are different from the normal senses we experience as human beings. It was all very new to me, and the spinning and bouncing energies all around my body made me feel as if I was in a circus ring.

Whenever I connected to my spirit guide I experienced a strong locked-in sensation. It felt like the energy one would feel when playing with the opposite poles of two magnets. When my spirit guide wanted to communicate with me outside of our meditation session, he signalled a communication stream with a strong downward pressure on the top of my head. I came to refer to it as a 'download', because shortly after that downward pressure, new information or ideas would

simply be there as part of my normal everyday thoughts. In the beginning it was quite difficult and frustrating as I knew something was being communicated to me. But I did not know what it was, and I really struggled to understand. Fortunately, the 'download' did not happen all that often at the start of the process. It only started occurring regularly much later.

I was also beginning to experience the idea that there was something else besides my body-mind. One mid-morning I was lying on the grass basking in the sun – almost half asleep – when I suddenly felt something shift. My whole body just disappeared. Not literally, but in the sense of having a body. I was left with a consciousness – an awareness that I am, I exist – but it was outside of my normal physical self.

Little incidents continued to happen, and I was beginning to call this new consciousness my 'I am' consciousness. Intellectually, I knew and understood the concept of the soul, but now I was beginning to explore what it meant by experiencing it in real life.

The introduction into this type of consciousness was a little slower and more subtle, as my spirit guide probably knew how I had panicked before. I had the time to get used to each new sensation and experience. Often, I would take a nap in the afternoon. Just before waking up completely, I had little 'I am' sensations – an awareness of spinning quickly back into my body before waking up fully. Once I became used to this new experience and my brain and body no longer reacted in shock, and I made a more leisurely return. Sometimes I spent a pleasant time in an in-between state, or more accurately in both states. I would be aware of my 'I am' outside of the body, and I would simultaneously be aware of lying on the bed.

I was still happily exploring and trying to figure out how best to connect and interact with my new teacher, when things became somewhat 'tricky'. Late in August 2005, a few weeks after the first conversation I had had with my spirit guide, I woke up with a now familiar pressure at the top of my

head. It felt like a block of lead balancing there. 'A bit early in the day for this type of interaction, and somewhat inconvenient', I thought, as I was getting ready for work.

I was working my notice period at the manufacturing company where I had been employed for about the previous three years, and was about to join a healthcare consultancy. I still had many final details to tie up to ensure a smooth handover process, and I was preoccupied with planning the day ahead.

"What are you trying to communicate?" I asked my spirit guide. "In any case, you're coming on a bit strong; it is getting to be quite painful." But as hard as I tried, or rather as much as I was trying to relax, nothing flowed in, and I was none the wiser as I got into my car and left for work. Twenty minutes later I was stuck in traffic. There had been an accident ahead of me and the cars in my lane were not moving. I resigned myself to the inevitable wait, and so I relaxed and listened to the morning show on the radio.

Then the message came through as clear as a bell.

Do not take the new job; take some time off.

"What! Wait!?" I thought.

Then it was there again. *Do not take the new job; take some time off.*

I was completely taken aback by this communication. What on earth! There was no way I could do that. For starters, how would I support myself? I needed to work …

If you sell your house you will have the means to support yourself. You can always move to the farm and stay with your parents.

"Are you crazy?" I thought.

But even more worrying was: am I crazy? Had I lost my mind? Or even worse, was I making this up?

I reached the office as soon as I could and phoned Cari-Ann. "I have an emergency – I desperately need to see you today. I think I've lost my mind!" We scheduled a meeting for late in the afternoon.

My stomach was tied up in painful knots for the rest of the day. The idea of leaving my job was not my biggest concern. I had done that about ten years before to embark on a road to 'find myself'. I ended up teaching English in Taiwan. That move helped me to make sense of my life, but then I could at least explain my circumstances as it sounded reasonable enough – if somewhat unconventional. But leaving a job because of the whim of an unseen spirit guide (not even God) was going to be impossible to explain. I had always been sceptical about people using 'a call from God' to go off on some tangent.

I rushed off to see Cari-Ann for another channelled meeting. I did not trust my own abilities at that point, and I wanted a neutral party to confirm or deny the ideas.

"No, you are not losing your mind" my spirit guide chuckled (through Cari-Ann). "I suggest you take the time off. There are things that we need to teach you. You don't have to, of course, but you know as well as I do that when you engage with an idea you become almost single-minded, and it takes up all your energy. It will be very difficult – not impossible – but difficult to go through this process if you have a full-time job." I considered the idea, knowing deep down that he was right.

But what was it all about? What were we talking about here? I could not imagine what it was that we would be doing, and my teacher was frustratingly vague. I had become used to the idea of spirit teachers during the past few weeks, but I still had no real understanding of what it all meant. Up until then it had been quite enjoyable, but if I was expected to uproot my whole life, then it was going beyond an interesting pastime. All I understood was that I was going through a process where I would be taught but had no idea what that would entail. Even Cari-Ann had to admit that this

instruction was the most radical that she had come across in all the years she had been channelling for people.

I had no manual or 'how-to' book on the road I was about to embark on, and I had very little understanding of what I was undertaking. But now that I felt reassured that I was not 'crazy' or making it all up, I allowed myself to settle into the idea, and to absorb the exciting possibilities. Within me, I experienced a deep trust that this was right for me; that I was doing the right thing. I would simply have to take a leap of faith, even if my decisions were going to be very difficult to explain to everyone else – especially to my parents. That certainty and trust remained my centre point over the next few years when my life was falling apart. I turned to it repeatedly. It was all that I had.

To explore what spirit guides are and mean, the obvious place to start is with Jung, who had quite a number of them, most notably Philemon. His experiences can then be explored and how he made sense of it.

After his break with Freud, Jung withdrew from public life, and during this time explored the unconscious. He began to journal in a series of notebooks, which was published relatively recently in *The Red Book* (Shamdasani, 2009). From this period of experimentation with the unconscious, Jung developed a great deal of the architecture and foundation of his theories. Some of his main interests focused on the psychology of religion, but also spiritualism, the paranormal, mysticism, and occult phenomena (Vaughan, 2013).

Jung experimented by invoking fantasies and deliberately switching off normal consciousness. In his memoir *Memories, dreams, reflections* (1961), Jung described how, in a series of fantasies and using active imagination, he encountered several figures. He described it as follows:

Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with

him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. … Psychologically, Philemon represented superior insight. He was a mysterious figure to me. At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality. I went walking up and down the garden with him, and to me he was what the Indians call a guru. (Jung, 1961, p. 183)

There are two ways we can use Jung to try and make sense of spirit guides. Jung distinguishes between the personal unconsciousness and the collective unconsciousness, and either of these locales could be the source of spirit guides.

I will start with the personal unconsciousness, which is the storehouse of past events and is accessible to consciousness – by will or external stimulus. It is also a product of interplay between the collective unconscious and the physical and cultural environment in which the individual develops. Within the personal unconsciousness we find complexes which are feeling-toned responses to ideas and experiences. They exist for both healthy and psychotic individuals and are functional units and essential parts of the healthy mind (Vaughan, 2013).

Important to our discussion is that these complexes are autonomous and can operate independently or unconsciously of the conscious mind, and they can disturb or dislocate consciousness. For example, these complexes can be the source of visions or spirits that control mediums in trance states, or the source of multiple personalities. In the case of spirit guides, such a complex may have become repressed and separated from normal waking consciousness and they then project themselves in a form separate to the self (Klimo, 1998; Vaughan, 2013). Alternatively, but related, Jung thought that on occasion the "shadow" part of a person may project something other than the normal self (Klimo, 1998).

What Jung then says, in essence, is that my spirit guides or teachers are a split or repressed part of myself that appear to me as "the other". I can consider it, and there are perhaps many unconscious parts of myself that I do not know, and it may be an explanation. However, what it does

not explain is the energy that came at me before I met the teachers through the channel, Cari-Ann. I did not initiate it. It did not suddenly appear to me in my normal consciousness. It seems that Jung himself, despite his later explanation of his own spirit guides as self-induced fantasies (Shamdasani, 2009), was not sure of what he was dealing with. In his memoir, Jung recalls a conversation he had with a prominent, elderly Indian gentleman, about this man's guru. The gentleman then answered:

"Oh yes, he was Shankaracharya."

"You don't mean the commentator on the Vedas who died centuries ago?" I [= Jung] asked.

"Yes, I mean him" he said to my amazement.

"Then you are referring to a spirit?" I asked.

"Of course it was his spirit" he agreed.

At that moment I thought of Philemon. [Jung]

"There are ghostly gurus too" he added. "Most people have living gurus. But there are always some who have a spirit for a teacher."

This information was both illuminating and reassuring to me. Evidently, then, I had not plummeted right out of the human world but had only experienced the sort of thing that could happen to others who made similar efforts (Jung, 1961, p. 184).

A second explanation for the phenomenon of spirit guides may lie in Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and its chief contents – the archetypes. This collective unconscious is not based on personal experience, but it is inborn (Jung, 1959). The contents are not personal, but collective, and belong generally to a group or a nation, or even the whole of mankind. The archetypes are innate forms and instincts – primordial images and mythmaking images (Jung, 1959; Klimo, 1998).

It could be that channelling spirit guides is tapping into this universal memory. Although "… this concept of the collective unconsciousness and the archetypes may open the door for a more self-

transcending view of communication, it is still consistent with a basically closed model of the human psyche" (Klimo, 1998, p. 248). In other words, Jung's conception means that everything stems from and is produced by the human psyche in this closed system, and that would include spirit guides.

Assagioli, an Italian psychologist and a contemporary of Freud and Jung, makes room for a more open system and distinguished his view of the collective unconsciousness from Jung's:

… [B]ut he [Jung] has not clearly defined this term, in which he includes elements of different, even opposite nature namely primitive archaic structures and higher, forward-directed activities of a superconscious character (Assagioli, 1965, p. 19).

This is a point that Wilber also makes, which I discuss below. Within Assagioli's (1965) concept of collective unconscious he makes room for a lower unconscious, a middle unconscious, and a higher unconscious or superconscious. Within the lower unconscious are the elementary psychological activities which direct and coordinate the bodily functions, and fundamental, primitive and inferior drives, urges and dreams. The middle unconscious relates to our waking consciousness. The higher unconscious or superconscious is:

… [T]he source of higher feelings, such as altruistic love, of genius and of the states of contemplation, illumination and ecstasy. In this realm are latent the higher psychic functions and spiritual energies (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 17–18).

Assagioli thus opens the door quite wide to possible communication to separate spiritual energies or entities with his more open model. Getting back to Wilber, who agrees with Assagioli, he distinguishes between higher and lower archetypes and is also critical of Jung and his followers which mix them up:

I agree with Jung on the nature of these archaic images *qua* archaic images: I believe they are collectively inherited … They are important in certain types of pathology; they can be found abundantly in the world's mythologies; they often appear in dreams; and so on. But those archaic

images have little if anything to do with post-postconventional development. One of Jung's pre/trans fallacies was that he confused collective prepersonal, collective personal and collective transpersonal structures (Wilber, 1997, p. 359).

As to higher archetypes, Wilber says the following:

… [T]he [higher]archetypes are the primordial forms lying on the boundary between the causal unmanifest and the first subtle-level manifestation. They are thus the first and earliest forms in involution or manifestation (or movement away from causal Source), and the last or highest forms in evolution, or return to Source (and thus the final barriers as well). These archetypes … are subtle forms, illuminations, sounds, extremely subtle affects, and so on – the first forms of being, on which all lesser beings will be modelled … And thus the archetypes, the true archetypes, are the Forms of our own highest potential, the Forms of our own true nature, calling to us to remember who and what we really are (Wilber, 1997, p. 359).

As per Wilber, the difference between these lower archetypal images and higher archetypes, is that the former are inherited from our common experience of the past. The higher archetypes were never part of our past, but faded and are lost in early involution, and our job is to rediscover these archetypes in our own evolution towards Spirit or Source (Wilber, 1997). Can the spirit guides or teachers therefore be part of these higher archetypes?

Wilber seems to be ambiguous about it. In some of his earlier work (for example, 1996), he stated that spirit guides are part of the higher archetypes of the subtle realm. Perhaps he has in mind the Eastern traditions of spirit teachers which the Indian man told Jung about, and where it is part of a spiritual lineage that is transmitted to the student and not the phenomenon of channelling. In personal correspondence with Klimo, when talking about channelling, Wilber had this to say:

At its worst, 'channeling' is a dissociative phenomenon, basically of the hysterical variety. I find a lot of it to be narcissistic – 'I am channeling what God says'– a very primitive state, in my

opinion. And I think analysis bears that out. That's the extreme, and I think 90 percent of what I've seen falls into that category. Some of the sources may be slightly inspired by transcendental subjects or materials, but the line through which it comes is pathological, particularly narcissistic and borderline pathological. But at the other extreme, there definitely is a transcendental domain. One of the ways that people get in touch with it is through a 'crack in the cosmic egg.' It opens up a bit, and basically what's allowed in is an influx of transcendental or perennial truths (Klimo, 1998, p. 273).

Wilber's later work (2017) again touches on spirit guides and other channelled 'beings', and states that the 'beings'

> that appear to be real, separately existing beings or entities (from angelic creatures to saintly figures to taken-for-real aliens to world master and ascended guides) are primarily archetypal forms (in the technically correct sense of causal or subtle primordial forms upon which creation is based), many of which are imbued with an inherent luminosity, creativity, and vitality, and hence can take on forms that appear to be specific individual beings (2017, p. 378).

Wilber's believes that these beings are a reactivation of the earliest levels of interpretation. In effect, these beings are a hold-over or remnant from the Magical and Mythical stages, when such figures are expected to manifest as ontological entities (when in touch with the Subtle stage). "They are archetypal (subtle/causal) primordial forms being interpreted through a Magic-Mythic lens" (Wilber, 2017, Violet meta-mind Para 3). But in fact, the individual is channelling his or her own higher Intelligence, and what separates these 'lower' channellings from higher stages is that there can be genuine input from meta-mental Intelligence, that can be accessed and interpreted from higher stages such as the meta-mind.

On the other hand, spirit guides may be 'real', in an ontological sense. Certainly, some writers propose or are convinced that such disincarnate or non-physical entities exist, often within an

elaborate cosmology – for example, Spangler (2010), Harpur (1994), Steiner (1910/1997) and Rachel (2012). The transpersonal community remains sceptical, and so am I. But I am not willing to rule it out completely. The transpersonal community remains sceptical, and so am I. Each proponent of such 'disincarnate' beings seem to have their own experience and perception – a unique take on the nature and function of such 'beings'. However, as I have had experiences of my own, and understand that nobody knows for real when it comes to matters of Spirit, I am not willing to rule it out completely.

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My parents (especially my mother) were not happy with my new course of action. Imagine a 37-year-old daughter with the wild notion of giving up a perfectly good job and a well-functioning life, to follow an inexplicable and uncertain spiritual path because it was suggested by some 'spirit guide'.

I was prepared for a battle, and I had one. I had done many things in my life that my parents disapproved of, but none had as seriously challenged the foundation of our family as this decision did.

My mother immediately rejected all my ideas about spirit guides and energies and set out to find an alternative explanation. There were two options: The first was that I was suffering from a serious mental illness or mental breakdown because I was unable to deal with what she regarded as the stress of my 'lonely and isolated life'. The other option was that this was an evil phenomenon – something to do with the devil. My father was also concerned, but gave me the benefit of the doubt. The concepts that I was talking about were at least not strange to him. These differences caused serious tension between my parents, and this time there was no hiding from it.

My parents and I came to an agreement that I would consult a psychiatrist, and they would come with me to a channelled meeting with my spirit friend with the help of Cari-Ann.

It was a pity that the psychiatrist we consulted had no idea about the phenomenon that Grof and Grof (1989) termed a 'spiritual emergency'. This refers to spiritual crisis a client may be experiencing that is not pathological. It can be distinguished from other psychoses in that it is a spiritual problem, and not a mental disorder with a spiritual or religious content; for example, a paranoid schizophrenic may have delusions about a wrathful, punishing God (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000; Canda & Furman, 2010).

Spiritual development can proceed in a slow and measured way, sometimes including non-ordinate states or altered states of consciousness such as peak experiences, but which can easily be assimilated (Storm & Goretzki, 2016). This is termed spiritual *emergence.* But then there are transpersonal experiences. These go beyond normal ego boundaries and the everyday awake state that can present as abrupt disruptions, and which can cause a crisis or a spiritual *emergency*.

Roberto Assagioli (1989, pp. 34–35), after describing the type of existential crisis that I previously mentioned, discusses a spiritual awakening, and differentiates as follows:

> The opening of the channel between the conscious and the super-conscious levels … and the flood of light, energy, and joy which follows, often produce a wonderful release. The preceding conflicts and physical sufferings, with the psychological and physical symptoms which they generated, vanish sometimes with amazing suddenness. … In such cases the spiritual awakening amounts to a real resolution.

> But in other not infrequent cases, the personality is unable to rightly assimilate the inflow of light and energy. This happens, for instance, when the intellect is not well coordinated and developed; and the emotions and imagination are uncontrolled; when the nervous system is too sensitive; or when the inrush of spiritual energy is overwhelming in its suddenness and intensity. An inability of the mind to stand the illumination, or a tendency to self-centredness

or conceit, may cause the experience to be wrongly interpreted … and the inflowing of energies may have the unfortunate effect of feeding and inflating the personal ego.

This spiritual crisis or emergency may temporarily influence or disrupt the person's ability to function and may leave the person feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with normal life. It may cause a short or transitory psychosis. Such a person may also experience new spiritual insights that may be challenging, both philosophically and culturally (Grof & Grof, 1989; Collins, 2008).

A spiritual emergency can occur spontaneously or can be triggered by emotional or physiological stress, an accident, psychedelic drugs, or some meditative practices. Examples of types of spiritual emergencies are near-death experiences, shamanic journeys, a psychic opening, intense spiritual energies such as Kundalini, and channelling (Grof & Grof, 1989), such as in my case. Klimo (1998, p. 2) defines channelling quite broadly as

> the communication of information to or through a physically embodied human being from a source that is said to exist on some other level of dimension of reality than the physical as we know it, and that is not from the normal mind (or self) of the channel.

Channelling may cause a spiritual emergency, but I did not think that was the case in my situation. Even so, some acknowledgement from my psychiatrist would have very much helped me and my parents to understand the ideas and concepts I was grappling with. My psychiatrist, after one visit, believed I was either bipolar (I had bouts of mild depression before, and this could be construed to be a manic or even a psychotic episode), or possibly prefrontal epilepsy could have triggered my experiences. She also prescribed antipsychotic drugs. I refused to have a brain scan or to take any of the proposed medication. Not because I was afraid of her diagnosis being correct, it was not, but because I knew that once I started on this road I would probably never shake off the suspicion and possibly the stigma of being mentally ill.

The medical model of Western psychology and psychiatry does not leave much room for spiritual experiences that fall outside of the norm (Nwoye, 2015). As Grof and Grof (1993, p. 138) put it:

> Traditional psychiatry does not recognise the difference between mystical and psychotic experiences. All unusual states of consciousness are essentially seen as pathological. There is no acknowledgement that any dramatic experiential states involving states of consciousness could be potentially therapeutic and transformative. Psychiatry thus routinely and indiscriminately uses controlling and suppressive approaches to terminate such experiences (Grof & Grof, 1993, p. 138).

For this reason, transpersonal psychologists have lobbied for a special category in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association* to provide for spiritual problems such as mine (Lukoff, 1998). It has been included since DSM-4 as a V-code:

> This category can be used when the focus of attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to an organised church or religious institution (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 725).

I was comfortable that I was not mentally or psychologically ill and I experienced no spiritual crisis. I continued to work and function normally for the previous few weeks. I did not quite know what I was dealing with, but I understood that no help was going to come from the medical profession or psychologists.

As agreed, my parents met Cari-Ann and through her, my spirit guide. He basically repeated our earlier conversations. My mother's main purpose was to see if this was evil, but she came away

from the meeting feeling relieved. She had asked God to show her if this was evil, but she had no sense or feelings of evil during the meeting – at least then. However, the visit did not change her mind about the validity of the spiritual process.

Not having much of a choice, my parents reluctantly agreed that I could come and live on the farm with them. They loved me very much and had supported me throughout my life, including through some bad times. This time would be no exception. If this were a mental illness, which my mother strongly suspected, then they could at least keep an eye on me and step in if required.

I sold my house in record time, gave away my furniture to family, and only kept my pretty, personal things. My mother and father helped me to move to the farm. I also kept my car – my spirit friend showed me a little movie clip in my mind's eye, criss-crossing the country in my little red car. Little did I know that I was about to embark on a journey in many ways.

Chapter 5
My Blue Heaven

I now had two spirit guides. In addition to my Russian 'guy', I connected with a teacher angel. It was quite easy to distinguish between the two, as each had a distinctive and different 'feel' to them. They also had different areas of focus. The Russian guy would primarily concern himself with offering assistance and guidance on a personal level. He was my go-to guy. The teacher angel would act as an instructor to facilitate my understanding of spiritual matters, and he appeared only during instruction time. His communication was clear and I had no problem understanding him.

The whole idea of Spirit and spirit teachers or spirit guides is somewhat problematic and difficult to define or to describe.

I could refer to Spirit as the Holy Spirit, because that is what it is, but I immediately run the risk of boxing it into a Christian context. This is because it is a concept that the Christian Church has consolidated for itself and which it has been trying to explain for 2000 years, and in my opinion, not doing a very good job of it. On the other hand, if I refer only to 'spirit' it conjures up the idea of ghosts, or worse, evil spirits. It is almost the same as people confusing spiritualism (believed to be calling up dead people) with spirituality (the understanding that we are more than physical bodies) – which often includes the search for God.

So, what is Spirit? There are different theories and experiences. Wilber (1993) refers to Spirit as both the Source or Ground of Being, as well as the goal and the summit for our spiritual strivings. Therefore, both immanent and transcendent. He uses the analogy of a ladder – it is both the highest rung on the ladder of evolution, as well as the subsistence from which the ladder and all its rungs are made. For me, since I am theistically inclined – probably because of my upbringing – Spirit has always been part of the God-system, and as such indefinable. I see it as that part of the God-system that interacts with us as humans.

I knew from the beginning that the personas the Spirit presented to me were not real. It was as if they were characters in a play. I was not really talking to a Russian with a strange Russian name, or a master angel with violet eyes. In the years that I have been working with Spirit, I have come to understand that Spirit is adaptable and sensitive to what we need. It communicates and reveals itself in a way that makes us comfortable as individual human beings, and it communicates in whatever form or context we expect it to.

We often have connotations to certain images, depending on our religion or culture and what we were taught. For example, some people will immediately connect the word 'Spirit' with the idea of angels, and others with the idea of ancestral spirits. Spirit will work with those images. If you expect to experience angels, you will. If you expect to communicate with your dead father, you will. If the idea of an Indian shaman works for you, an Indian shaman will communicate with you. If you expect an evil spirit or an alien, you can get that too. I suppose, in some respects, this *a priori* Spirit reminded me of Jung's archetypes, or organising principles, which manifest, depending on the individual personal experiences and external or cultural factors, in dreams, symbols and myths (Jung 1965), but I would only later explore that in detail.

A big surprise for me was that Spirit shared my particular sense of humour. Apart from all the serious discussions, we shared many laughs and funny moments. I had never previously considered that we as humans derived our sense of humour and ability to laugh from God-Spirit!

I had no expectations about what I was dealing with – especially not from spirit 'people'. Yet, especially in the beginning, I was grateful to work with an 'Intelligence' that had something 'human' about it. As I became more comfortable with the interactions, and as my understanding grew, most of the temporary human side started receding.

To make matters somewhat simpler, when I referred to the communication process with Spirit, I referred to Spirit as 'the teachers', because for me this was what the process was about.

The instruction process was initially in the form of dictation. I would connect with my teacher in charge of my instruction process and I would write down what came through to me. I soon noticed that the information I was getting was tailored to what I already knew and understood, so it was a continuation of what I had read or thought about during the years before I was directly connected to Spirit. Some of my impressions of spiritual matters or life principles that I had not understood before, were corrected and clarified. I soon began to see that the information was presented in clear building blocks. Occasionally my teacher would stop the process and refer me to what we had covered before, saying that I needed to understand a particular aspect more fully before we could continue.

The dictation process created tremendous trust in me. Not only was I receiving information and insights that were new to me, but there were also new words that I had never used or encountered. My own level of understanding of what was being taught was remarkable – it was as if the information connected to the very core of my being.

The dictation process was extremely tiring. It required great concentration to keep my own mind blank and not to allow my own thoughts or impressions to distort what I was receiving, and not to pre-empt anything we were working on. The energy in the space that I was working in also exhausted me physically. Especially in the beginning, I could only do an hour or so at a time – and no more for the rest of the day.

My physical body needed to get used to processing and holding a much faster and lighter energy than it was used to: that was my impression and interpretation. I started to spend more time – many hours – in a meditative state, where I simply did 'energy' work. I became quite disconnected from my surroundings for hours. Wilber (for example, 2000b) discusses these subtle energies, and states that each state of consciousness carries its own energy or body (which correlates to the Upper Right quadrant). He does not provide any details of what it feels like and so I am left to draw my own conclusions.

The focus of my teachers during those months was to delve into the beliefs we humans have about God and ourselves. We covered situations in detail, every idea, and where and how these beliefs manifested. I thought that I had never worked so hard in my life!

Yet, how did they all tie in together? And what was I supposed to do with this information?

I struggled to 'connect the dots', but realised something else about my teachers. They do not easily hand out information and solutions, no matter how connected or tuned in you are. I needed to work for it and work at it – because it is likely that only then will there be true understanding.

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Initially, I promised my parents that I would give myself a year for the whole process. Six months later with a head full of new ideas and fresh insight, I was happy to wait and see what else unfolded.

In the meantime, my parents had come to the difficult decision to sell their farm. On many levels it made no sense to hold onto it as neither my brother nor I had any plans to farm. An offer from my father's cousin prompted this decision to sell, and it meant that the farm would stay in the family.

The day of the move was revealing for me. This was community spirit at its best. Neighbours and other farmer friends volunteered and arrived with their trucks, pick-up trucks, and labourers. The women packed boxes, and the men loaded up furniture. We had tea and coffee and conversation during the whole process. Once in town at our home, everybody offloaded, and the women unpacked, washed and packed away crockery. By that evening we had moved in.

The move went off without any drama, but it was difficult for us emotionally – especially for my father who had to let go of a part of his own history. We were all unsettled and the new surroundings made my lack of direction more pronounced. The pressure from my parents mounted.

They were keen to see me return to normal life and to start working again. They were afraid that if I left it too long it would be very difficult to get back into the mainstream.

I felt that I had not quite finished with whatever the process was. It did not make sense that I had to uproot my whole life just for six months, and then return to work as if nothing had happened. They pushed and prodded, but I resisted.

A welcome respite from this tense impasse came through an invitation to a fortieth birthday party of an old university friend in Plettenberg Bay – a popular holiday spot in the Eastern Cape Province. After the weekend, my friend and her family invited me to Port Elizabeth[1] where they lived (a short drive from Plettenberg Bay). And because I had the time, I made the effort to look up my cousin, Elana, who also stayed in Port Elizabeth. I had not seen her for years.

I spent a night with Elana and her family, and as two mature women, we got along well. She had a flatlet attached to her home that they normally rented out to students, but it was empty at the time. To me, the flatlet started to look like an attractive accommodation option.

What I was busy with could easily be done there, and the sun, surf and sea, and even the wind (in the case of Port Elizabeth), greatly appealed to me. It was also far from the tension at home.

I arrived in Port Elizabeth (Figure 18) and moved into the flatlet and Elana's life. She and her fiancé opened their home to me, and I immediately fell in love with Elana's two amazing daughters who were teenagers at the time. The family was open and exuberant, but more importantly, nobody was fazed by my ideas or behaviour. Elana promptly instructed me to stop apologising for what I had come to refer to as my 'weird sh*t'. This introduced a new freedom for me – I did not need to hide what I was doing. I was free to speak about whatever I wanted to say – without measuring the impact on and reaction of other people.

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[1] Port Elizabeth has been recently renamed Gqeberha. However, for sentimental reasons, in this thesis I have continued to use 'Port Elizabeth'.

Whenever we had the chance, Elana and I found a restaurant with a sunny spot – preferably with a sea view – where we drank numerous glasses of white wine and talked about life. I also had the bonus of having an old university friend and her whole family nearby. With her I could draw on 20 years of friendship and there was not a need to explain much.

Figure 19: My blue heaven - Port Elizabeth.

&

The next six months proved to be really rewarding. While the adults were at work and the girls at school or busy with their sporting activities, I had long days that I did not have to account for. So, my time was my own, and nobody disturbed me. I could fully immerse myself in my meditation and teachings and could come to grips with the new concepts that were given to me.

My communication abilities had grown with my lengthy meditations, and I had become more accustomed to the higher or subtler (Wilber, 2000b) energies. Thus, the method of instruction

changed, and it was no longer in the form of passive dictation. Instead, my time with my teachers turned into active discussions, and frequently long periods of quiet contemplation, while I mulled over the ideas in my head. Sometimes there was just an inner Knowing or Realisation.

I meditated in all seriousness, some days for up to eight hours. I would just come out of the meditative state to take a body break, and then settled right back in. The meditation seemed to be quite structured. It was not that I knew what I was doing, or had any plan or goal, but my experiences were very interesting and I kept wanting more. In addition, I felt that I was not the one controlling the process or the experiences, but some Higher Intelligence or Spirit was in charge.

Wilber (2000d), drawing on the old Greek philosophers, discusses the idea of involution and the evolution of Spirit, and the ideas match closely to my own understanding of the process. As Spirit-in-action or Eros pushed me ('upwards') towards the remembrance and experience of Spirit, Spirit simultaneously in a process of involution or efflux started to flow ('downwards') towards me. It created a push-and-pull sensation within me. It is difficult to explain, but that is as best I can offer. My meditation technique seemed to be geared to this process, which the teachers through Cari-Ann had taught me some months earlier. It was a very basic and rudimentary method, and was geared to connect me to Spirit and allowed me to be flooded with Spirit energy. On reading Goleman (2012), it seemed to be a mix of the practices of Eastern traditions, but it worked for me.

I shared my process a few years later in a blog post, after spending some time making sense of the experiences (Van Wyk, 2012a):

Connecting with your Higher Self

We will start off with a very basic meditation process, and even if you have not practised any meditation techniques before, it does not matter. You have no need for chants or special breathing techniques or even postures.

You will need some quiet, dedicated time, about 20 minutes or so to start off with, and make sure nobody bothers you during this time. Phones especially are irritating and counter-productive, and so are cats jumping on top of you.

Make yourself comfortable on your bed or on your couch – not so comfortable that you will feel the need to sleep – but comfortable enough so that your body does not bother you along the way. I, for one, cannot sit with crossed legs for long before I get so stiff that I must interrupt what I am doing to change my position – and that breaks my focus. Do not fall asleep. Rather stop the process and try again when you feel a little more awake.

Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths. Count them in your mind, about five should do it – five in and five out. Then focus your mind and bring your attention to the point between your eyebrows. That is a connection point and it will help you to focus. If at any time during the session you get distracted and you find yourself with your thoughts 'way out there', just bring back your focus to this area.

The intention is now to connect God-Spirit/Higher Self [what I call the soul] with your body – and you invite God-Spirit to literally enter and connect with your body. Say the words in your mind to be clear. It sounds almost too simple, but do not underestimate this process: it is potent.

Imagine the top of your head – your crown – opening up, and as you do it imagine a white light – the Spirit light – flowing down into your head. (If you prefer, you can imagine this to be a Godly, golden liquid). As you do that, focus on your breathing so that you 'inhale' the Light as it is starting to stream down into your body. With each successive breath, as you inhale bring in or pull down more of this Light into your body; when you exhale you relax and allow the Light to flow down into your body. You do not have to get too technical, you can just breathe normally while visualising the streaming the Light,

but I find that this way helps me to stay focused. But do not breathe too quickly or too deeply, or you will start to hyperventilate!

Visualise the Light filling your head, then the back of your neck, then streaming down your throat, pooling into your chest area, filling your lungs, your heart, running down your arms to the tips of your fingers, filling your solar plexus area, your stomach, all the way down to the apex between your legs – then down your legs, your knees and pooling in the soles of your feet.

Bring your attention back to the point between your eyebrows and spend some time just sitting and experiencing this Light filling your whole body. If you feel you want to spend more time in this space, or if you find that your mind is wandering to chores still to be done, you can repeat the exercise. This time after you brought in the Light, you can also visualise the Light spilling over your head, your shoulders, as if you are under a Spirit waterfall. Just sit with it, immersed in this Light in the Spirit-filled space.

When you feel you have had enough, slowly rub your fingers together or flex your toes to bring yourself out of the Light space and back to your normal surroundings. Come out slowly, because as you do this more often, you will go into this space even more deeply, and it will become more disorientating when you come out of it.

Try it out, see how it goes. … Just remember you cannot mess it up. It is not really your process – your job is to do the invitation. The rest is up to the God-Spirit and your Higher Self.

Wilber (for example, 2000b; 2017) distinguishes between *states of consciousness* and states experienced during a spiritual practice such as meditation – which he calls *state-stages*. He normally makes provision for four stages: psychic, subtle, causal and unitive consciousness/non-dual stages. When I consider my states, I can roughly divide them into these stages, although psychic and subtle

seemed to be running concurrently in my case. In Wilber's writings he sometimes refers to the psychic as the lower subtle state-stage, and perhaps the possibility of a concurrence of the two could be one of the reasons for his decision.

In my discussion I will keep the **psychic** state-stage, because it had very distinct features. First, I began to experience chakras, or 'energy vortexes'. I was aware of the concept before the whole process started – even if only intellectually. I had read a book on the subject by Caroline Myss (*Anatomy of Spirit*), and I knew what each of the chakras meant in relation to our bodies and spiritual lessons. But now it was a very different scenario. I could feel these energy centres buzz or swirl or vibrate. Sometimes one at a time for days, sometimes with all of them in one meditation sitting. As I started with this structured meditation approach, these vortexes was very closely related to my Cleaning Up (see below) – another element in Wilber's conception of spiritual development.

Wilber (2017) also describes this state-stage as one where psychic phenomena are being felt. Based on notes I had made, I wrote the following in respect of feeling connected to Spirit and my interpretation of this early psychic state-stage (Van Wyk, 2012b):

> If we are connected, then how do we recognise it? How much more of the Connection can we explore and experience? For a start, I thought I would make a little checklist of clues on how to recognise our connection to God-Spirit and our Higher Selves [soul]. This checklist is by no means exhaustive, and it is based on my own experiences, but I thought it would give us a good start.
>
> So here are my ideas. You're connected if …
>
> 1. You ask for help or guidance and you are you able to identify such guidance when it comes your way – connecting the dots so to speak. You pay attention to messages from seemingly random people, words in a song that catch your attention, a scene from a movie, or a book that you pick up.

2. You can identify the answers to your questions *within* yourself – you become better at distinguishing between your own mental noise and those special, delivered insights that ring as clear as a bell, "Ah, that's it! Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't I *see* it?" And you begin to realise that those crystal thoughts pop up when you least expect it – doing chores, showering, not thinking about anything specific and not being emotionally all charged up. Then, there it is.

3. You are willing to pay attention to old, painful memories that pop up unexpectedly and you discover much-needed courage to confront them, recognising that they may carry the seeds of the issues that you are struggling with today. You know those memories – those that feel like you are touching a live wire and from which you immediately recoil.

4. You realise that you have been acting like some cats do, unwilling or even unable to look at yourself in the mirror and discover that you are strong enough to be completely honest with yourself – even if you come face-to-face with your own shortcomings, poor judgement and bad calls.

5. You are dissatisfied with easy solutions, obvious opinions by others and 'stuck' thinking. Something within you wants to explore different questions and different answers, outside of your comfort zone. You start paying attention to thoughts in your own mind that at first seem really 'way out'.

6. You have started to develop, for reasons you cannot explain, a sense of when things are wrong or a bit 'off', or conversely, an inexplicable sense of the rightness of a situation or a decision. On occasion you may even have experienced a little frisson running through your body when you feel that you are on the right track, or a 'buzz' in your solar plexus area.

7. Once in a while, you experience a moment when you move completely beyond judgment – the judgment of people and situations – labelling them good or bad, right or

wrong, even if you're allowed to. You find yourself in a 'space' where you recognise that everything is perfect exactly as it is, even if it is unpleasant or painful.

8. You find yourself increasingly in moments outside of time – where you catch yourself being miles off somewhere else. Sometimes you were daydreaming, but often you could not even remember what you were thinking about. But it leaves you with a sense of well-being, or perhaps even bliss.

9. You have experienced strange sensations in your body that you cannot explain and which you feel you cannot talk about to other people – such as the feeling that the top of your head is on fire. Or perhaps a sensation that something is pushing down on your head, or perhaps there is a prickling sensation/strange pressure at the back of your neck or between your eyes. Sometimes your palms or the soles of your feet tingle for no reason. (As an aside: the more you move into the connection space and process, the more of this you would come to experience. This "sensory activation" is part of the process.)

10. You have become aware of some or all these aspects and are hungry, even driven, to experience more of them.

Wilber (2000d) describes the psychic state-stage as the state of nature mysticism because it is still so close to the gross or physical realm. People report a feeling of oneness, or being part of nature – feeling that is all connected. But I had very little of that, except on one or two occasions when I went for walk on the beach and felt very close to some dolphins I saw – but nothing earth shattering or deeply moving. Perhaps it was because I was raised on a farm, where nature was ever-present.

Another aspect to this psychic state stage was the energetic explosion in my body. Currents were just running through my body, often through the chakras. As I said before, these subtle energies can be quite draining and tiring, but as I became more practised, I became used to it – although it never became mundane. On one occasion it almost became overwhelming. I was deep in meditation,

with energies coursing through my body, and all of a sudden my head split open and I had some sort of a fit, and my body shook uncontrollably. I could not say how long it lasted, but I was present the whole time. Afterwards, I still felt as though half my head and brain had 'disappeared' for a long time. I phoned Cari-Ann and said: "I think I'm really losing my mind this time! The strangest thing just happened." I have since read accounts of the kundalini energy rising in the Hindu yogic tradition, and I suspect that is what happened. Wilber also calls mysticism in this psychic state-stage the path of the yogi, so that could be what I experienced.

As I said, the **subtle** state-stage started to develop concurrently. Wilber (1996; 2000d) describes this state-stage as the state of deity mysticism. This is the place of gods and goddesses, angels, and religious figures such as Jesus and Buddha. This is the state-stage of the figures or 'objects' of devotion. Wilber (1996, pp. 61–62) states that "this realm is universally and consistently said to be the realm of high religious intuition and literal inspiration; … of symbolic visions; of blue gold and white light; of audible illuminations and brightness upon brightness; it is the realm of higher presences, guides, angelic forms; Ishtadevas … all of which … are simply high archetypal forms of one's own being (although they initially and necessarily appear 'other'".

It does not matter which religion or creed, or what you expect the figure of devotion to look like. This is the stage where you will encounter it. When I discussed earlier that Spirit will manifest according to what makes sense to you, this is the state that I was talking about. The subtle state-stage is where different cultures and religions interpret and experience this state-stage differently. It depends what you expect to find and what you deem sacred. If you were raised as a Christian, you would expect saints, angels, or perhaps even Jesus, to appear to you. If you are Hindu, perhaps an elaborate god or goddess. Of course the subtle state is available, as with any other states, as a temporary peak experience. The person having this glimpse will further interpret whatever they may

encounter, in terms of their current *stage* or level of consciousness. I had my spirit guides, one of which presented himself as a master angel, whatever that might have meant.

There is a spot between one's eyebrows (the sixth chakra, also sometimes called the third eye) where, under the right circumstances, one can see 'stuff' – energies pulsating and colours – as Wilber says (for example, violet, white, gold). On occasion, instead of my teachers talking at length, a shot 'movie clip' would be shown and I instinctively grasped the principle communicated to me.

For me, primarily and most importantly, this state–stage was where I met my own soul, which I refer to as my Higher Self. It was a deliberate process: The teachers formally introduced me to a Presence, which they said was my soul. I was coming face-to-face with the highest part of me. They encouraged me to connect with and derive wisdom from it. I was not yet ready to trust it, though, and I did not know what to do with it and how it would all work. At that point I had the teachers with whom I had built a relationship, and I thought my soul and I could do with some advice and guidance – seeing that my life was disrupted. Besides, my soul was silent at that stage, and I did not quite know how to talk to a part of myself without it getting strange, even if it presented as a separate, objective part of me.

I encountered the next state-stage several months later, even if I was not aware of what it meant at the time. This Waking Up was not step-like with discreet stages, even if in hindsight I can spot the progression. It was somewhat jumbled together. Every day's meditation could bring new brand new experiences, and at some point in the process I encountered the quiet Witness. This, according to Wilber, is part of the **causal** state-stage. If I remember correctly, it started at night. Often I could not sleep properly, and then I would find myself halfway between sleep and wakefulness. My body was asleep, but sometimes I could hear myself snoring softly, but I would be fully conscious in a quiet space – just Witnessing.

Wilber describes this formless state:

[E]ven thoughts and images drop away, and only a vast emptiness, a formless expanse beyond any individual 'I' or ego or self. The great wisdom traditions maintain that in this state – which may seem like merely a blank or nothingness – we are actually plunged into a vast formless realm, a great Emptiness or Ground of Being, an expanse of consciousness that seems almost infinite. Along with this almost infinite expanse of consciousness there is an almost infinite body or energy – the causal body, the body of the finest, most subtle experience possible, a great formlessness out of which creative possibilities can arise (2000b, p. 17).

This summarises my experience of this state of consciousness.

I did not make too much of at first. For me it was a separate state compared to what happened during the day, with all the visions and colours swirling. It was a quiet resting place – just being in the company of Spirit. If I really have to think about, this was the state where I began to understand that love is not an emotion, although as humans we experience it as such. Love is a state of Being, a Knowing, the prime underlying essence of God. It was also in this state that, in a moment merging with the Mind of God, all I knew was Creative Potential. If I blinked, worlds would appear. If I pointed a finger and moved it, swirls of matter would rise. The quiet Potential. So if God in the Bible says, "I am who I am and what I am," what He means is "I am love, and I am a creator." Or I interpreted it as such.

As for **unity consciousness or non-dual awareness**, which according to tradition is the highest state-stage (Wilber, 2017), I had my first glimpse of it during this time. One evening, deep in meditation, and my body severely strained because some energies were pulling and pushing so much that I felt as I would crack open at any time. And there it was. A mass of golden fire, of God I thought, just came and completely enveloped me. I felt as though it was merging with me. I felt myself surrendering, I lost any capacity to think – no thoughts, feelings – and everything just stopped. There

was no 'I'. There was no 'Thou', just Awareness. I do not know how long it lasted – probably an hour. I came out of it so overwhelmed and in awe. And speechless. I still find it difficult to talk about and I still do not really know how to interpret it. This merging with what I call Source would continue to happen intermittently, but it was not anything that I would actively pursue. First, the force of the energy was overwhelming. Second, I thought it was a special occasion to be savoured each time, and third, I did not want to bother God all the time with 'little old me'.

I am aware that I went through all of these state stages in a relatively very short time. Most traditions advise and require years of diligent practice. I did not know why mine happened so fast, and I still don't. All I know is that these enlightenment or Waking Up experiences were not the final goal and not the end of the story. I still had much more Growing Up to do.

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I kept in contact with Cari-Ann and I could run some of my new ideas past her. It was interesting for us to see that her process and her information were similar to mine, and yet her process was approached from a different angle. So, when we discussed our ideas with each other, our individual perspectives grew as the result of working with the other's ideas. "This is what I'm getting. What have you been receiving?" We had at least one teacher that overlapped, and even if we had different life experiences and paradigms, many of our ideas matched. That was simply extraordinary. We also had the bonus of our teachers frequently joining in the discussions. They came through one of us at any given time – thereby enhancing our understanding of the concept we were discussing.

Often Cari-Ann could validate some of the ideas and experiences I went through, and she was used to me phoning her in a panic, when I was concerned that I was losing my mind. As my connections to Spirit grew and developed, so did my strange experiences. If I had not had Cari-Ann, I truly do not know what I would have done. The validation and support kept me going.

Port Elizabeth turned out to be the most perfect spot – and my teachers and I got a lot done.

Concurrent with the spiritual lessons (which shaped my intellectual and spiritual perspectives), my teachers and I needed to work on my emotional issues. Life and all its blows had left scars and we needed to work through all the hurts and hang-ups that I had acquired through my (almost) 40 years. My earlier small problems were not allowed to distort and colour the new perspective and wisdom I needed to develop. So, we systematically went through all the hurts, which like many other people caused me to build walls to protect myself from the world.

I mentioned earlier that Wilber (for example, 2017) includes Cleaning Up as part of the spiritual development process, and I had my own share of cleaning up that needed to be done. I had spent the previous ten years doing a lot of it, especially after my divorce when I had to reassess who and what I was. But this interaction with my teachers, and my meditation, brought up old hurts and issues that I was not conscious of.

This process stripped me to the core, and I discovered a number of 'foetuses of unfulfilled hopes and dreams' that had died before they could grow to maturity. The remaining disillusionment and cynicism had festered inside me, and I needed to wash it way. I needed to heal all the old wounds that made me hard and inflexible. With my teacher's prodding, all my defences were destroyed, and all the old, hidden pain was exposed. There was no other way but to cry away the pain. It left me open and exposed and very vulnerable, almost like a snail without its shell.

Emotionally, I was starting life all over again. I needed to find a new way of dealing with hurt and personal attacks, and to not erect barriers that kept me locked in as much as the barriers kept others out. My teachers were allowing none of that. I learnt that it was all about keeping perspective – my primary teacher was very good at teaching that. I thought there was probably no more competent a therapist than Spirit who knew everything about me in any case - and did not allow me to hide, especially from myself. The process was brutally honest and relentless.

Whenever I went into a panic or off on a tangent, my teacher's favourite retort was, "Don't be ridiculous!" Nothing sweet or spiritual-like. Yet, underlying it all, which I had previously thought impossible, there was a loving kindness and acceptance of my faults. In fact, one of the first admonishments I had was to stop my incessant self-criticism – as it served no purpose.

As I removed the barriers between me and 'life', there was an unexpected spin-off, as suddenly I was having unguarded conversations with people. I said things that I would never have said before. The cringe factor was rather high while I struggled to come to grips with this new 'barrier-free' me. I was fully aware that I had passed the limits of what other people would consider 'normal', and as much as I tried to manage other people's perceptions of me, it was no longer working.

In hindsight, there were many things I did wrong at that time. In my over-eagerness and in my excitement about all the wonderful things that were happening to me, I failed to realise that some of the experiences and information that I had was not meant to be shared, and if so, not in the format that I was receiving it. A little deeper into the process I came to understand that there were more appropriate ways of explaining things, and I learnt to be more circumspect. At that stage I was dealing with two very different perspectives. In time they would slowly merge, and I would switch between them more easily and learn some much-needed prudence.

I was spending much time 'in my head', and I decided a little exercise might be warranted. I had never been keen on jumping up and down, and so I decided to try yoga. It was then that I discovered my name should have been Tin Man the way I squeaked and rattled. Although it was difficult, I enjoyed it. I had a kind and gentle yoga teacher who had studied with a master in India, so I had the impression that he knew what he was talking about. I was going through so many experiences with the energy shifts in and around my body, and which I struggled to make sense of – that I wondered if the yoga teacher could help clarify some of them.

So, I arranged a coffee date with my yoga teacher, and I tried to explain what I was grappling with: "So, what is the trick? What do you suggest that I do to make my interaction with these energies a little easier?"

His reaction? "I am sorry; I am not allowed to share this information with you. When we study with our master, we agree to keep this information to ourselves and not to share it with outsiders."

I was quite taken aback. I had been sharing rather deep personal experiences, and yet he thought he had the right to withhold crucial information from me. Wasn't information about God in any format supposed to be universal and accessible to everybody?

We talked about his objectives and where he wanted to go with his process. His goal was to merge with the Godhead, at which point he would be fully enlightened and the need for endlessly repeating life in new incarnations would fall away.

Okay. I understood the concept, but I remembered that I had occasionally merged with Source (which I suspected to be my name for his Godhead) – not fully, but there was a direct connection. However, as I understood it, if you merge fully with Source (or the Godhead as he called it), then you disappear as an individual soul and the whole soul journey will be over. Not only your cycle of incarnations here on earth. My yoga teacher might have been ready for the 'merging', but I was not quite there. But perhaps I had insufficient knowledge or understanding at the time, and I was prepared to accept that.

"What feelings do you have when you communicate with God and Spirit?" he asked me. I was thinking of the best way to explain the almost inexplicable, when he prompted, "Is it a feeling of bliss?" Yes, there was a feeling of bliss.

"Then you are not dealing with the real Godhead, only the god assigned to earth." I was uncertain about that one.

He continued: "And there is no way you can truly merge with the real God if it is not facilitated by a master teacher." But I have teachers ... "No, such a teacher must be on earth. That teacher paves the way to enlightenment."

I did not agree. I did not accept Jesus as my way to God, nor would I accept any earthly teacher as my ticket to God – no matter how enlightened such a person was. Even my spirit teachers did not set themselves up that way. Of course, I accept guidance and their expertise. But nothing they had ever taught me left me believing they were the path to God, or that I had any need for such an intermediary.

Becoming a yogi was not going to work for me in this lifetime. It would have been to have a living, breathing human teacher, except, as with all religious thinking, you keep encountering the limitations and prescriptions set by other people – masters or no masters. I thought I preferred my way.

I still enjoyed the yoga, even if I was not really any good at it. But I promised myself that if one day I had sufficient understanding of these types of mystical processes, and someone wanted to know how it all worked, I would freely share what I knew. (This is one of the main reasons why I am completing this project.)

So, I asked one of my teachers what was going on with my body.

"Are you scientifically minded?" he asked, rather unnecessarily, knowing that I was not. I had never been interested in science and I knew nothing about how different energies work.

"Well," my teacher said, "Imagine that you are a tree. We are simply draping different colour strings of light around you and testing them as we go. At some point, we will switch them all on and you will light up like a proper Christmas tree."

And I had to be satisfied with that answer for the time being.

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Towards the end of that year in Port Elizabeth, things started to change for the worse. I was running out of money and the means to support myself. It had been more than a year since the process had started, and I had initially promised my mother that I would reconsider my sabbatical after one year. Was I done? Would this be the end of my journey?

I did not want to leave Port Elizabeth as I really loved it there, so I started investigating the possibilities of securing a job to support myself. Yet, nothing seemed to work out. I was left by my teachers to discover this for myself. My process did not seem so positive anymore. Whatever plans I tried to make were a waste of time. However, this thing was not going to end before the time was right – and it was not right then.

Sometimes I felt overwhelmed. Nothing was turning out the way I thought it would turn out. I had no clear idea of what I was supposed to be doing and where I needed to go. All I knew was that my money was running out and I had no control over my life. I understood that I was required to surrender control over my life and leave it to the process that had been set up, but how could I do that? My own sense of control was exactly what had kept me functioning all my life. I could always rely on myself to figure out how to deal with situations and crises.

My teachers told me that I was suffering from a serious case of distrust. No kidding. They tried their best to reassure me but pacifying me only worked up to a point. I am still amazed that people can talk so easily about giving their lives to God. In practice it looks completely different. It is a good thing God doesn't take us up on all the offers.

My friends Chris and Unali from Johannesburg checked in with me, wondering why they had not heard from me. They did that from time to time, so when I became overly quiet they would worry and call to see how I was doing. I said to Chris, "I am really happy to speak to you, but if you want to know how I am doing, then I don't know. If you want to know what I am busy with, then I don't know. If you want to know how much longer it is going to take, I do not know. If you can have a

conversation with me that doesn't include any of these questions, I'm happy to chat with you." Chris and Unali could always work around that one.

It was difficult meeting new people or making new friends. It is a conversation killer if you do not know anything about your own life. A little later in the game, I perfected the art of vagueness; people hear what they want to hear. Still, it did not make for close connections.

My cousin Elana, in whose flatlet I was still staying, always told me that I was not very pretty when I cry. And it was all too true – unlike her youngest daughter who cried beautifully and to great effect. My eyes, on the other hand, scrunch up and stream tears, leaving my eyelids swollen and puffy. Elana's solution for during a melt-down was to issue a command for the girls to cut cucumber slices for my eyes, while I continued crying. So, pressing a cucumber slice on each eye, I would continue pouring out my sadness, blinded, and I interrupted my eye therapy only when I needed my hands to make a point. I was not convinced that cucumbers worked – but the thought counted.

Elana forever endeared herself to me by trying to see things from my point of view. Instead of doubting my Spirit-teacher stories, she took issue with the teachers – demanding that they act and resolve the situation!

In addition to the ugliness and tension between my parents and me, my life was falling apart and I did not know which way to turn. It was problematic either way. I could not turn back – there was nothing left to go back to – and if my process turned out to be 'a wild goose chase', I was also in trouble. Either way, I was going down. I really had no choice but say to myself, "Just let go of this incessant worrying, just let it go and see what happens." In a cloud of black humour, I found myself quite interested in seeing how completely a life could collapse.

I had a little money left, and a few months to sort out myself and to find a solution. My teachers told me that they would not let me sink. But their idea and my idea of what that meant was radically different. When my teachers told me at the start of the process that it would require some

sacrifices, I had no idea what that meant. But I was beginning to get an idea. Not being able to support myself financially and having to go back to my parents for financial assistance would be very problematic. In fact, it would be more like a drowning.

Just before Christmas in 2005, I met Alex (not his real name). He was also one of the best teachers I could have hoped for – although in a way neither of us expected.

About a year before my process started, I had a dream. In hindsight it was prophetic. In the dream I was travelling on long, winding roads with unknown destinations and with unknown travelling companions. We arrived at a little town in the middle of nowhere just as the town fair was wrapping up. I met a psychic woman whom I consulted. I paid her with the last of my funds. A smoky spiral appeared with a man's head at the top end. I recognised it as a spirit guide. One question was uppermost in my mind. What more do I need to know? What else do I need to learn? He pointed to his eyes and said: "It is all in the perspective."

The Journey

Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials … The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage (Campbell, 1949, p. 97).

Chapter 6

My Brother's Keeper?

The New Year found me still in Port Elizabeth after spending a strained Christmas with my parents in Prieska. Our disagreements remained unresolved and I left as quickly as I could.

I was preparing for university. With no clear plan for the coming year, and not being ready to go back to work, I decided to register for a few courses as part of an Honours degree in Psychology. This was something that I had always wanted to do. Port Elizabeth had a good university, and I was accepted as a student. At the very least, I figured, studying full-time would give me a legitimate cover while I continued with my process (whatever that meant).

Elana and her fiancé had, in the meantime, bought a new house which also had a little garden flat. We all spent some time moving. Their relationship was strained at that point and had been for some time, and so I was not going to become too comfortable in my flatlet. I did not then have any alternatives, and I decided to take one day at a time.

I loved being part of their family. I had lived on my own for a long time, and I found it wonderful to share the everyday experiences with people that I really liked and loved. The girls were a delight, and Elana involved me in all the fights and discussions that went with having teenagers in the house. I was part of the family – and a valued member.

In the meantime, my life became more interesting, at least enough to take my mind off some of my own anxiety.

A few days before I left to spend Christmas with my parents, Alex picked me up in a coffee shop. A large, attractive man – about my age – approached me with a young man in tow, who looked to be his son. "Do you mind if we sit down? There are no open tables available, and there seems to be space at yours."

It is rare for anyone to approach me in a public place such as a restaurant or a pub. I have spent much time eating out since I do not cook. Through the years I developed a 'do not approach' aura – which only the very drunk, clueless or really daring ignored.

I was still considering being rude in response, when he seated himself down, rather unconcernedly. After a cool start to the conversation, I discovered that it was impossible to remain 'standoffish' with this man. He was warm and funny and quite interesting.

Alex was also fairly new to Port Elizabeth and was a very busy man. He had spent most of the previous year trying to establish a new enterprise and had built the first factory as part of a new industrial development project. But that project had not worked out with his overseas business partner, and so he had started a new venture in conjunction with a large church organisation. They hoped to develop a sports stadium for the local community.

At dinner a few weeks later, Alex confided that he was a man with a past, which included a criminal record and several years in prison. He did not feel the need to hide anything from me and I was not very shocked. I thought him to be quite extraordinary, with deep and painful stories to tell. Yet, he had an almost childlike joy and warm delight flowing from him – which I thought was surprising after what he had been through.

As a young man, Alex joined the defence force. Great physical ability and natural leadership saw him accepted in an advanced Special Forces unit – the Reconnaissance Unit. It was something of a maverick unit, and most outsiders like me considered the 'reccies' (as they were known) to be a bit crazy. A few years later he became captain in charge of the unit's specialised training. It was a tough course, which only the very best managed to complete. In those days, the South African Defence Force was still in active combat in South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola, and Alex had been involved in some serious military action.

At 28, he had had enough of the army and set out to pursue his entrepreneurial ambitions. His background did not pave the way for a conventional way of life, and he soon became involved with a syndicate that undertook money laundering and trafficking. In hindsight, he realised that his military activities had provided an adrenalin thrill that was sorely missing in his ordered and uneventful life. Thus, he found his 'fix' elsewhere. He had two small children, and for reasons of her own, his wife at the time apparently reported him to the authorities. Alex was arrested and convicted and sent to prison for several years. Being the man that he was, and not being happy to spend years in prison, Alex conspired with some of his old army friends, to help him escape. He staged a fake heart attack and the prison authorities rushed him to hospital. This gave his friends the opportunity to rescue him from hospital. In the process, however, a gunfight ensued, and a prison guard was shot and wounded. His freedom was short-lived. He was re-arrested, again convicted, and this time for an even longer prison sentence. Eight or nine years later, Alex was granted a surprisingly early parole and he had to start again from scratch.

We spent one long evening where he told me about his prison experiences, which were funny and brutally painful. But what amazed me was the absence of bitterness and blame on his part. He made no excuses for his behaviour; all he wanted was to move on and to create a new life that was successful enough to live down his past. I was touched by his openness and honesty, even though we had known each other for such a short time. I was as open as I could be about my process, bearing in mind that I was not sure about what I was doing. Alex, although he tried as hard as he could, did not really understand what I was trying to explain. But, through our honesty, we established a foundation of trust that would stand us in good stead in the months ahead.

We also discovered a common passion: he had designed and built a trailer with audio-visual communication equipment and satellite communication abilities. The trailer was equipped with solar power and functioned without electricity. The idea was to use such trailers to broadcast or

communicate in rural areas – which lacked sophisticated infrastructure. Our discussions led to the idea that I would develop the audio-visual programmes that were needed to accompany the trailers.

I thought that Alex was a creative genius – with a true entrepreneurial spirit. He could see the possibilities in an idea unlike anybody I had ever come across before. He was also full of big plans; nothing small would do.

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Elana and I spent much at Alex's home. Often other people would be present – house guests, business associates, or just random people Alex had met and invited for dinner. He loved cooking and entertaining, and we would find him in the kitchen where he was at his happiest.

Getting to know Alex was an extraordinary experience. He was joyful, funny and larger than life. But he also introduced a new perspective into my life. And it was not as coincidental as one might have thought. Many of the ideas and principles my teachers and I had been working on for the past year were apparent in this new friendship. It was almost as if my teachers said, "We have covered the theory; now do the practical application."

Alex was very caring and nurturing and these elements were sorely lacking in my life. I was so alone, bereft of my normal support systems – and he stepped right into that space. He was inclined to see how he could fix other people's problems, and for a short time I allowed him to take care of me. It was so tempting to believe that he could fix everything and that he would protect me from the bad things, whatever the future brought. I had always been self-sufficient and independent, but at this point I wanted to pass on the responsibility of having to make all the decisions and I did not want to carry my burdens alone.

Perhaps I had been wrong all along, believing a woman should be independent and not rely on a man. Maybe I could pass all the responsibility (and especially my financial difficulties) on to

him. Alex was the epitome of a man in the traditional role as protector and breadwinner – and this became ever more appealing.

Strangely enough, when the first real act of protectiveness came along, it was I who did the protecting.

His arrangement with the church in which he had invested a considerable sum of money, and much time and energy, had turned sour. The pastor, on behalf of the church, publicly denounced him in the local newspaper, and, using his past as an excuse, distanced the church and congregation from him. This immediately irritated me, and I wrote a scathing and sarcastic letter to the pastor. I made it clear that he was making a mockery of the fundamental principles that the church taught. The letter went like this:

Dear Pastor

It was with great interest that I read in the newspaper today about your position regarding the proposed stadium. In particular, I was interested in your stance in respect of Alex and his involvement in your project.

One specific that concerns me, however, is your position that while Alex's past cannot be held against him if he is a changed man, he could no longer be allowed to be associated with the church building project. Let us forget for the moment that you knew about his past from the beginning – and that you still welcomed him into your church.

Such conditional forgiveness to my mind goes against every teaching of Jesus, and you are His earthly spokesman. It seems as if, when Jesus was dealing with sinners, he said: "You are now forgiven. However, since you have been such a bad boy, it is perhaps best for you to leave this community, because people will talk you know. And of course remember that you will be paying for your sins for the rest of your life, even if you wanted to use your God-given

abilities in the service of God. The fact that I have forgiven you actually means nothing, but it sounds nice, doesn't it?"

You could have positioned yourself differently. In your role as the teacher of Jesus's truths, you could have said to yourself, to the members of your church, and to any other interested parties, that perhaps you had been given the extraordinary opportunity to show people what Jesus really meant when He challenged those who thought they were without sin to throw the first stone. You could have used the opportunity to teach about forgiveness and a divine grace that surpasses human understanding. And do you know what? People would have respected your integrity and the fact that you had the courage of your convictions. The same goes for your congregation, which must wonder about the incongruence between what you preach on a Sunday, and what you say elsewhere when under pressure.

Alex has paid his dues for the mistakes he made in the past, and he paid dearly. Whatever problem you and your organisation may have with the way the business proposals were structured, should be independent of what you profess as your faith. Perhaps your church should reconsider your mandate from God. (Jesus had a reason for chasing the moneylenders from the temple.) The role of the church, as I see it, is to provide spiritual leadership to its members and not to engage in business, however altruistically it is positioned.

I wrote and faxed through this letter without Alex's knowledge, and he was horrified. I had no remorse. Today, I think it was perhaps a bit strongly worded, but my outrage at that time knew no bounds. I learnt subsequently from Alex that the pastor and some of the senior members of the church had apologised to him several months later and expressed a willingness to make amends. But by then the damage had been done.

Alex was deeply hurt. Besides the public humiliation, I thought what hurt him most was the loss of his almost childlike belief that because of the cleansing power of Jesus, he would find a home

without judgment in the Church. There is no doubt that God forgives, but Christ's congregation is not that forgiving.

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Alex and I had a destructive fight and my 'you-are-my-protector' bubble burst in my face. All his pent-up frustration exploded in my direction one night, and I saw a different side to him, which left me a little afraid of him and of his rage. I cried for a week until I decided the time had come for me to toughen up – I was a mature woman, and it was time for me to stop running like a scared rabbit when I was in a confrontational situation.

But this incident taught me something important; I had no safe place to run to. There were people who supported me, but they could not fix my world and make everything right. I had to do it myself.

I let go of my need to look for help from other people. I got myself into this situation, and I needed to trust that I would find my way out of it again.

To me, the idea of a protector was simply an illusion – an attractive one, but it was not real in a meaningful sense. Protection might have worked in past lifetimes when the environment demanded that I needed physical protection, but since nobody wanted to kill me and I was not in any physical danger, who could protect me from what?

It was a turning point for me in my relationship with Alex. Never again would I expect him, or anyone else for that matter, to carry the responsibility of my well-being again. This was exactly the lesson my teachers wanted me to learn. In the months to come we would share resources and comfort each other, but I would never ask again him to shoulder the responsibility of my life.

The jury was still out on whether I could trust God to protect me. This begged the question: Protection from what?

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Because of so many past rejections and the latest debacle with the church, Alex went underground and tried doing business without telling people the truth about his past. I had serious reservations about it, not only because I thought it was inherently dishonest, but, more pertinently, the truth has a habit of coming out in any case.

I noticed something about myself that somewhat amused me. In becoming open and transparent and with no barriers, I noticed a similar spin-off in my environment. I could not lie anymore; neither could other people who were connected to me. It was not for lack of trying – lies continued to be told. However, it was as if there were a constant spotlight showing up every untruth.

It was unfortunate for Alex. Faxes were accidentally sent from his office to the wrong people, which exposed the conniving behind the scenes. These incidents derailed potential business prospects. But information Alex needed about people who were plotting against him and discussing him behind his back, also became known. So, the new 'transparency syndrome' favoured no one – it just happened. I warned Alex, but he did not believe me.

In May it emerged that an old case of theft and fraud was still pending against Alex and an old friend and associate. Alex was reluctant to discuss the matter and did not seem worried about it, and so I wasn't immediately concerned. His financial difficulties appeared to be more pressing.

I was surprised to discover that Alex and his partner had already been convicted the previous year. All that remained was the sentence hearing which had been postponed several times, as his co-accused (perhaps deliberately) did not attend the hearings.

On the day of the sentence hearing in June, Alex phoned me from Pretoria in a state of panic. Earlier in the day, the prosecution and magistrate had become impatient with the no-shows of Alex's co-accused, and the court had decided to split the court docket into two, which allowed the magistrate to sentence each of the accused on his own. Alex's sentence hearing would take place the following day while the officials of the court tried to trace the co-accused. I offered to appear as a character

witness and accompanied by his current business partner immediately caught a flight to Pretoria to appear in court the following day.

It was easily one of the worst days of my life. I had never been in court before, and to make matters worse I was on the wrong side of the law – supporting a man convicted of theft. As we were waiting for the court proceedings to begin, I could feel the tension and sense the fear that seemed to be permeating the place. Alex and his attorney were talking in hushed tones, discussing the possibility of an appeal against the guilty verdict and the sentence that was about to be handed down. They seemed confident – perhaps too confident.

Not only did the magistrate sentence him to serve, effectively, six months in prison, but more significantly, denied him leave to appeal his conviction.

The court orderlies asked Alex to turn around and they handcuffed him. He glanced back at me, his face screaming panic and helplessness. I stood frozen in shock and utter disbelief and watched as they marched him off towards the holding cells.

I was allowed to see him briefly before they transported him to prison, and I arranged with the guards to quickly run to the car to fetch his toiletries. Alex tried to give me some instructions, but he was barely coherent. We were both in shock and unprepared for what was happening.

Trying to be reassuring, the attorney kept talking about other legal remedies, such as bringing an application before the High Court to apply for leave to appeal. According to him it would take only a week or so, but even one day was too long.

Lost and very confused, I returned to Port Elizabeth and found that burglars had broken into my little flat and stolen almost everything I owned. I still had my laptop though, but the place was no longer safe. As I had to look after Alex's dogs – there were seven of them at his home – I moved into his home temporarily. I started going to his office premises during the day, which doubled up as a

secondary residence where his brother and nephew lived (Alex supported them financially), as well as 13 more dogs.

In my rush to grab Alex's things from the car I forgot his hair brush (big mistake) and the insulin he needed for his diabetes. By then Alex's sugar levels were dangerously high because of a combination of factors, but with stress being the most important factor. Fortunately, soon after his incarceration, the prison authorities arranged for him to transfer to the on-site hospital, and he spent the first three weeks of his sentence there.

Being in prison hospital made it easier for Alex to make a phone call and so the daily calls started – to me and to the office. By then things were starting to go seriously wrong at all levels and everyone was panicking.

It became my job to track the leave-to-appeal process with the attorneys, and it became quickly apparent that it was not going to take a week or two. One morning, after a week of platitudes from everyone, Alex asked me: "Just tell me the truth about what is going on. Not what you think I want to hear, but the truth. Then I will know how to position myself, and I will know what needs to be done." I think this turned out to be the single most important favour I could ever have done for Alex. Not that it was easy – often the messenger of bad tidings is the person who faces the rap, and this was no exception. Being screamed at, even if it came from a deeply frustrated place, was not doing it for me.

One by one the people at the office started leaving. There was no money to pay salaries, and there had not been for some time. Creditors started knocking on the doors; everything was under threat – the furniture, the house, the car. Understanding exactly what was happening, Alex tried to save what could be saved – but with insufficient resources, we on the outside and acting on his instructions could not do much.

On the home front there were serious needs. Soon there was no money left, not even for food. I did not have any money left either. Paul (not his real name), one of Alex's long-time employees, said, "I don't have any money. And do you know what? I'm not even ashamed to say so because it is what it is: I do not have any money."

So why was I feeling so ashamed and embarrassed?

Perhaps it was because we are taught to make our own way in life. We judge people by how self-sufficient they are – how many financial resources they have been able to accumulate. We pride ourselves if we can say that we never need to ask anybody for money. We are quite disapproving of those who seem not to have their lives in order and whose misfortune and neediness (for whatever reason) spill over into our lives and demand a response from us.

But things go wrong. It might be a marriage that disintegrates, a business that collapses, a breadwinner that died, medical bills that need to be paid, or in Alex's case, a business owner and provider who finds himself in prison. Life is full of such surprises.

We now had to confront the fact that we were in desperate need of help and support.

Alex's church group arrived a week after he had been sent to prison and presented us with an afternoon barbecue (or braai as it is called in South Africa) at the office. This event was in stark opposition to how we felt, as office braais are normally social events. People put away their troubles for a while and take a little time off to relax and have a good time. Paul said he felt as if we were celebrating something, and it made him feel very awkward. We did not want to be ungrateful, but uppermost in our minds was that we had hardly any food in the house, and we had no idea how to feed the dogs – all 20 of them. But the church group was happy about offering support and when we saw them afterwards it was mostly when they came to pray for us (which I found irritating). We had enormous fires to put out and were fielding many queries and calls. During all this chaos, whoever was at the office would go into a prayer meeting for an hour or so to pray for Alex's release. Prayer

is very useful, but the church group's version of it was of little help – except it left those at the prayer meeting feeling pious because God was going to free Alex and everything would return to normal.

Before the sheriff of the court came to repossess Alex's furniture, we had a chance to raid his deep freezers to make sure everybody had food to eat. Elana bought groceries and dog food, and Alex's business partner pitched in with a little money here and there. On Alex's instructions, we pawned some of the trailers and so we struggled by. A little food from many different sources goes a long way.

I was amazed at my discovery of a shared camaraderie – the few of us that were left were all 'in the same boat' by trying to just stay afloat. Nobody was too concerned about paying house payments or car payments. It was all about having enough food to eat. Whatever money came into our little system would be distributed, and we all took just enough for our basic needs. Food, a packet of cigarettes, and some petrol for the car was sufficient. Everybody shared, and nobody took more than was needed. But as time passed, the strain began to tell. Some members of our little system started making their own plans, and slowly they became unwilling to share with the group. When the hogging of resources started, the system fell apart.

About three weeks after Alex went to prison, I went to Pretoria again for a meeting with clients to discuss the trailers. Responding to a desperate request from Alex, I decided to stay for a few days to see if I could speed up Alex's legal process – which was taking far too long. There were many documents to be prepared and these were moved between the clerks of the different courts. I could do some of the legwork instead of leaving it to court couriers and intended to follow up and pressurise the officials to speed things up.

Alex usually phoned me several times a day to check on the process and to instruct me on what more I could do. I had a natural respect for the law and due process, but soon moved through my own reticence – even approaching the magistrate on his smoke break to ask him to speed up his

part of the process. He was not happy with this, but I did not care. Every single day counted, and each one was a day too long for Alex to be in prison.

I could visit Alex on Saturdays and Sundays and went through the tedious process of gaining entry to the prison's visiting area. Even though a visit lasted about an hour, it would take an additional hour and a half to get through the required procedures. I would watch all the families, the wives and small children – all waiting to see their loved ones. It was similar to hospital waiting rooms. We all smiled at one another, except we did not really talk and share our worries and fears as one would normally do in a hospital. How does one start the conversation? "What is he in for?" I burned to ask how they were coping at home and how the children were dealing with a father in prison, but it seemed too personal and I did not want to invade people's privacy. Or perhaps the silence was a matter of collective shame, and we all dealt with it as best we could.

Alex was not allowed contact visits for the first few months, so we had to talk through a glass window and an intercom system that usually did not function very well. It was very frustrating because what we both needed was physical contact – just the reassurance that we were not as alone as we felt.

As always, Alex had some interesting stories to tell. He was reluctant to discuss the conditions he was living under, except for brief comments about overcrowded cells and the other prisoners' excessive smoking. I was not sure if he managed simply to disconnect from his surroundings, or if he was trying to spare me the unsavoury details. Perhaps both; I did not ask. But even in prison he remained interested in other people and could always find quirky stories to tell – and peculiar people to talk to. He made friends with one of the cooks in the kitchen, and with food being a scarce commodity, I gathered it was important. I received a phone call from Alex: "My friend Simon in the kitchen is waiting for an appeal to come through. He does not have enough money to pay his attorney. Can you find out if the documentation has been sent through and where they are in the process?"

Alex took an interest in the guard dogs as he was missing his own dogs desperately. Apparently, the dogs were released into the exercise yard in the morning, and to his horror, had to spend the whole day without water until they were brought back for the night at 3 p.m. Alex ensured that they had water, and bones, which I assumed were courtesy of his friend Simon in the kitchen.

On one occasion Alex arranged for a special face-to-face visit under the pretext of discussing his business and family responsibilities. It was arranged by the social worker in whose office we met. I entered through a side door not normally open to visitors, and Alex, released from his cell, waited in the passage for me and for the arrival of the social worker. It was, however, awkward. All around us were orange-clad prisoners staring – at me especially. We were not allowed to touch because I was a 'business associate', and any hint of it being a personal visit would sabotage the plans. I took in the cold steel bars subdividing the passages and smiled uncomfortably at the curious eyes. I glanced at Alex, noting that he had lost weight and looked a bit pale.

"Orange is not your colour," I observed dryly. He just stared at me blankly, his sense of humour momentarily displaced by the sheer desperation of his situation.

There is nothing funny about being in prison. Prison is designed to punish and humiliate people, even if it is euphemistically called correctional services. It is not designed to rehabilitate prisoners and ensure functional human beings by the time they get to leave again. It is a belittling and demeaning system, and the guards get sucked into the mind-set. They have enormous power over human beings who happen to be prisoners of the state, and who are not in a position to argue or take issue with arbitrary pettiness.

After each visit I was allowed to buy Alex some phone cards and cigarettes, even if he did not smoke. He used them to trade with on the inside. One Sunday morning after our visiting time was over, Alex asked me to buy him a diet coke. He was not really allowed such luxuries at the start of his sentence and he had not earned 'enough good points', but he was taking a chance. I bought the

can of coke, but when I wanted to give it to him with the phone cards and cigarettes, the guards would not agree. We asked nicely to allow him this small favour just once, but they refused to agree. When we had to start pleading for this one small favour, I suddenly became very angry. I refused to allow ourselves to be degraded to the point where we had to beg for a can of coke. I told Alex to let it be.

I simply refused to sink into that mind-set of shame. Whenever Alex started apologising for the situation or saying that he felt ashamed, I would stop him in his tracks. I am not quite sure why I had such a strong reaction to the situation – but I was adamant. If possible, I would not allow this man to walk out of prison ashamed of who he was.

I had much time on my hands to think and work through ideas about judgement and the way we treat people who break the rules.

As a society we deal with the rule breakers by excluding and discarding them – and in the process we create in them a deep shame and embarrassment. We invalidate them. It is one of the cruellest and most unloving things we can ever do. We do it because we want to believe that justice was served and in order to feel a little safer. We never consider alternatives to deal with people who break the rules of society – making people feel ashamed will keep people in check. It is a good short-term solution. We all have a basic need to belong, and only the threat of being excluded or shamed will keep most people in line. And we start very early; we do it with children when we make them stand in the corner of the classroom to make them behave.

But at what cost? What do we do with the rule breakers after having degraded and shamed them? How do we make space for them in our society after they had done their time, paid their dues, and finished with their punishments?

For me, rules continue to be problematic, and for those who break them equally so.

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My cousin Mike and I (on my mother's side) go back a long way. He and his wife opened their home to me when I arrived in Pretoria when Alex was in prison, and they generously provided me with their time and resources. Mike is more of a soul brother than a cousin. He understands my family, especially my mother, almost as well as I do – as he lived with us during his high school years in Prieska. We spent long evenings talking about Alex and his situation, about judgment, and about my new and strange ideas. Mike was of the opinion that I was not crazy, but, as he put it delicately, perhaps a little misguided.

He did say one thing that meant a lot to me, and it also made me think: "You may have no money, but you're not down and out." So, what was the difference between the beggar on the street and me? Perhaps I was not yet at the point where I felt completely helpless and hopeless. There were desperate times when I wanted to give up, but my teachers did not provide me with a soft place to fall. I was reminded that it was up to me. I was not powerless. I would get all the help that I needed, but it would not replace my own efforts.

Up to this point, my parents had no idea what was going down in my life. Not telling them was a deliberate decision on my part, as I did not want to discuss my involvement with Alex over the phone. However, before I had the opportunity to discuss the situation with my parents in person, events overtook me. By staying with my cousin Mike and his family, I knew it was just a matter of time before the truth came out. There have never been secrets in our family and I did not expect it to be different this time.

As anticipated, I started getting phone calls from my parents. Somehow their immediate concern was that I was on the verge of going to prison. I explained carefully and deliberately, but their panic knew no bounds. My father wanted to know if I had now become dishonest and 'crooked'. My mother was convinced that I was in the grip of a dark, evil force: "This is evil. I pray to God that you go to someone who can cast out these demons in you."

The devil and evil talk had never been part of our family and for my mother to suddenly revert to such a primal and archaic place was heart-breaking. I never wanted to speak to her again. How could a mother even think this about her child whom she has known for almost 40 years?

I have never believed in a devil and my mother knew it. We often had discussions about this at home. I believe that the evil that men do stems from the absence of love and compassion, and to me, believing in the devil is the ultimate blasphemy. Anyone believing in a god-like phenomenon that is powerful enough to undermine God has to admit that they believe in two gods. The devil has always been a symbol for the things that are wrong in the world; it is a convenient place to park the responsibility for our own bad choices.

I knew that the situation with my parents was going to be very uncomfortable for Mike, and I did not want to impose on him and his family any longer. Yet, I needed to stay in Pretoria for a while longer until Alex's legal process was done. Despite my misgivings and reluctance to involve more people, my father's sister, Aunt Marie, and her husband, Uncle Mike, opened their home and their hearts when I arrived on their doorstep with my 'sordid' story. I asked God for a small place of safety, and I was given a wonderfully nurturing place, as well as all the support I could have wished for.

Throughout the weeks of alternatively waiting and then running around with court papers, the only thing that kept me sane and rational was writing. It was the only thing I had to help me make sense of what was happening. I was an emotional mess, and lost weight that I could ill afford. I could not eat properly despite my aunt's wonderful nurturing and the caring environment. The stress of the estrangement from my parents, and the pressure and emotional needs from Alex were taking their toll. The waiting and the uncertainty were nerve-wracking. The legal process had to end at some point, but no one knew when.

In the meantime, ever the entrepreneur, Alex started working on the idea of a world-class exhibition centre. It was something he had had in mind for a while, but now with time on his hands

and nowhere to go, he could develop the idea. In prison he had met an old friend who used to be an architect, and this man helped him design the plans and the layout of the expo-centre. They took the idea a step further by constructing a model made from X-ray plates which they cut-to-measure, and from matches and other materials they had sourced from who knows where. They mounted their 'expo-centre' on a board and had a professional-looking architect's model. Alex brought it as a show-and-tell one Sunday when I visited him. While developing his business plan, Alex could tap into the skills on offer by several other prisoners, and he co-opted anybody who was willing and able. By the time Alex left prison, he had made a good start on his new project.

To me, one of the most profound questions asked in the Bible is after Cain kills Abel. The Lord confronts Cain about Abel's whereabouts. In return, Cain asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*The Amplified Bible*, 1954, Gen 4:9). God does not provide a clear answer to that question. I think he left it up to us to decide the answer in various situations and at different times.

We hear people say that they trust God, but not people. And it is sometimes true that placing our trust in people leaves us disappointed and with feelings of betrayal. People have their own agendas and paths and their objectives are not necessarily the same as ours. Consequently, it may not be in their interest to conform to our expectations of what they should be or what they should do.

Yet aren't people the instruments that God-Spirit uses to send us the help we have asked for?

A few months earlier, a female pilgrim (or missionary) arrived in Prieska with no car and very few belongings. She hung around at the local coffee shop all day. To cut a long story short, my parents provided her with accommodation for the night. The next morning, after breakfast, and after a short (let's be generous here) inspirational message, my parents asked her where she was going next. She told them she was heading for Cape Town but was first stopping over at a town about 400 km away. When they asked her how she would get there, her answer was that God would provide.

Somewhat dumbfounded by this answer, my parents had their own little conference on the side. They decided that my father would take the lady to a neighbouring town that was en route to the town she had mentioned. After a 130 km trip, they arrived at the main petrol station in the neighbouring town. My father spotted a big car filling up, and so he walked over to the driver and asked him where he was going. He told my father that he was driving to Cape Town. This was most fortunate, as it meant he would be driving through the town the lady had in mind. So, my father explained about the female pilgrim who was heading in that direction. Then, typically, almost cheekily, my father added, "She said God would provide, so I am just helping God to do his job since He seems to be struggling. Will you please give this lady a lift?"

I do not think that being my 'brother's keeper' necessarily means forking out money every time it is asked for. It is about seeing and acknowledging a need and responding appropriately. How much is one required to contribute? When is enough, enough? It was a question that would haunt me for a long time. It would come up repeatedly, not only for me, but also for my parents and other family members who helped and supported me. But at that point, I wasn't ready to give up on Alex.

Exactly two months later, Alex's leave to appeal was granted by the court. After struggling to raise the required funds, I posted bail, and fetched Alex from prison.

Chapter 7

Clearance

We returned to Port Elizabeth feeling a bit disorientated. The relief and euphoria we experienced after Alex's release were short-lived. Alex no longer had his own home, but his brother and family were still staying in the house that formed part of the office premises, and so he moved in there. I returned to my flatlet at Elana's house. I needed a bit of space and some breathing time to come to grips with the events of the past two months. I was drained of emotion and had no financial resources. My parents and I were still not speaking, so I was uncomfortable going to them for help. At least Elana and her fiancé made sure I did not starve.

Things were not going very well for Alex, either. He had to see if there were any pieces left to pick up, but at least he had his plans for the expo-centre and was determined to make this new venture work. Our relationship started developing problems. The time Alex spent in prison complicated matters between him and me. For two months we were solely focused on each other, living in an exclusive little bubble. Within such a deeply connected space there were no barriers and no shame – just a deep love and commitment to each other to get through the dark place we were in. So, what do you do in the aftermath of such a traumatic time? How would such involvement translate into normal life? The fundamental problems remained unresolved, which made a normal relationship almost impossible.

We started to withdraw from each other. Alex became increasingly upset with me, and his irritation found relief in snapping and criticising me. I understood his frustration and the source of it because I was going through the same thing. What made it even more difficult for me was that I too was at the end of my emotional resources. I had to deal with Alex and his crises, with the constant friction between my parents and me, my confusion about my own life, and all the uncertainty around

me. It had all taken its toll. Alex knew very little of what had happened to me, and what I had had to deal with while he was in prison – because I did not tell him. I did not want to burden him even more; he had enough on his plate.

Alex made a point of reading a passage from the Bible to me. It was 1 Corinthians 13 (*The Amplified Bible,* 1954): "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

I did not know whether I should laugh or cry.

After several weeks of no contact between my parents and me, my father arrived unexpectedly in Port Elizabeth and asked me to go back home with him. He and my mother were very worried about me, and the family grapevine had reported that I was looking terrible. They wanted to ensure that I got all the help and support I needed. I knew my mother put him up to it, probably because she knew I would not have spoken or responded to her, but that I would to my father. At the same time, I knew they loved me deeply and were very worried about me. I also knew that I needed to give the three of us a chance to talk things through. I had a lot of explaining to do.

I spent a month in Prieska with my parents and we spent hours discussing, arguing and fighting about all our disagreements – my involvement with Alex, my unwillingness to go back to work, and my strange ideas and beliefs. It was not something we could resolve easily. The only way to heal the division would have been for me to stop the whole process and to return to work and a normal life. I was not ready to do that. But, despite all the terrible things we said to each other, my parents and I loved each other deeply and they were not prepared to give up on me.

Alex drove up to Prieska to fetch me and he met my parents. They were willing to keep an open mind. Uppermost in my mother's mind was the intention not to allow her family to unravel to the point where we could not be put back together again. Disinheriting or casting a child off because of serious differences was not on the cards, – even though tempting. I had the idea that she took her cue from the parable Jesus taught about the father welcoming back his prodigal son, and she and my father would welcome me back time after time, even if the situation took a turn for the worst.

I returned to Port Elizabeth to discover that Alex had started seeing another woman. I could not believe he was doing it. We had not resolved anything yet. I knew I was a little unreasonable, but I could not believe that he had moved on without giving us time to settle our unresolved problems. I have never felt so powerless.

For the first time I understood what Abraham went through when he had to sacrifice the one person he loved above all – just to prove to God that he was an obedient and trusting servant. The Bible makes us to understand that this was such an admirable thing, but I discovered there was nothing sweet or even stoic about this exercise. In their eagerness to make the point about Abraham's love and obedience to God, the old writers conveniently left out was Isaac's reaction when he discovered what his father was up to. It was great for Abraham who proved his trust and commitment to God, but bad for Isaac whose father had offered him as a sacrifice. The story does not tell us about Isaac storming down the mountain with the intention of finding a new father – one who would love him enough to refuse such a sacrifice, just to prove a point.

I had already sacrificed almost everything – my life, my parents, my reputation, my credibility, and all my money. Why was this expected of me? Why did I need to let Alex go if we were both suffering so badly? I had no idea where our relationship would end up, as we were both in a crisis and there no clear way ahead. But life without him was unthinkable, and the thought of another woman in his life was unbearable for me.

I resented not being in charge of my own life, and it was not the first time. "Change the plan," my teacher told me.

"What?! What do you mean by 'change the plan'?" I said.

My teacher replied: "You designed it. You change it if you want. You know and understand enough by now; you understand the implications. Change it if you want to."

What was this now? What do you mean I designed it? Or did I?

Understanding or not, I at least felt that I had choices again. I am not simply an Abraham or a Jonah – I had some control over my own life again and over the decisions I made. Even if they were the wrong ones, at least they were mine. For 18 months I felt as if I had no control over my own life, but something shifted at that point in my relationship with Spirit. At the very least, I knew if I threw enough tantrums they would let me be!

Yet, despite my attempts to re-establish our connection, the relationship between Alex and I would never be the same again.

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My mother asked me the following question: "Why, if this is the Holy Spirit, is it so destructive? Why are so many people being destroyed in the process? Nothing that comes from God can do so much harm." She was referring to the intense suffering she and my father had endured while trying to make sense of what I was doing, and which was so foreign to the way that we normally lived and behaved as a family. I also suspect she referred to the drain on their resources, and their growing fears that I was going to ruin them financially. I could have added the hurt that Alex and I had caused each other, and the sheer unfairness of it all.

A good question, but no quick and simple answer.

As part of my course-work at the university a few months earlier, I came across the chaos theory. Unsurprisingly, it resonated with me immediately. The basic idea is that a system – like life

itself – does not like equilibrium and is very sensitive to triggers that might set it off. The system explodes and turns into chaos. But the beauty of it is that even amidst the chaos and destruction of the system, there is an inherent order to it. The system inevitably settles down again, but into a new form. It is a system – or life – renewing itself.

It seemed to me that if we as humans, or life itself, want to create something new, the old 'system' must first be destroyed. We first must break down or loosen the old structures, the old ideas, the old patterns, and from that point on establish something new. Scientific theories aside, life does not like us to repress and hide the problems that we should be facing. Sooner or later they will resurface and create huge difficulties.

It is far better for us to confront the problems when we need to, than to wait for an outside trigger to unleash the chaos. If we face our problems in time and if we were our own triggers, we could perhaps control the size and the impact of the fall-out.

Sometimes things need to get worse before they can get better. This part I understood, because by now I was familiar with the concept of the sometimes chaotic creative energies that my teachers had explained to me. But it was impossible to explain this to my mother who was in no mood to hear that her life, which was being 'destroyed' as she put it, resembled some arbitrary mathematical theory.

The fights between my parents and me had a certain rhythm. One moment (and I'm saying moment, but it could be a whole day or evening), and all gloves were off. The words were vicious and hurtful. Then, as if in a ceasefire, calm and peace would prevail, and we recognised that we actually loved one another deeply. Granted, it would only last until, say, the following evening, when we would continue where the fight had left off.

These arguments centred around one crucial aspect – who was in control of my life. My idea and my parents' idea of how I should live my life were poles apart. They wanted me to go back to

work. I was not ready to give up my process. I accused my mother of being a control freak, which she denied.

I was in a very difficult position. I understood the idea of 'He who pays the piper calls the tune'. I grew up with this notion and this was what I was up against. I had no money and only the germ of an idea of what I wanted to do during the next six months. My parents were willing to lend me the money to pay off the debts I had accumulated, on condition that I return to work. My negotiations centred on the fact that I could use the same amount of money to keep myself afloat while I figured out what to do next.

Their money. My life.

I expected them, if they were willing to help me, to let me decide what was good for me, and to discover my way forward – even if they did not agree on the course I intended taking. It was a tall order for any parents. Then again, I was almost 40 years old and clever and experienced enough to know what would work for me, even if it went against conventional wisdom. But they had lost their trust in my abilities to make good choices for myself. Nothing in the past two years had convinced them that I knew what I was doing. Fair enough. I did not know what I was doing, although I would never have admitted that to them. That would have provided them with a foothold to manoeuvre me into a corner.

But I had another need. I wanted them to love me and support me even though I did not live the life they approved of. I felt almost as if I could not trust the love someone had for me if that love could not accept me as I was. I could not trust a love that didn't allow me to be me.

The fights were taking their toll. My parents perceived that I had a wall of stubbornness and obstinacy about me. If they could break through and destroy it, perhaps I would see reason. But there was no wall and I felt every blow of their constant battering. Between Alex and my parents I had run out of defences, and I did not have the strength to absorb any more punches. There was a moment

when I had a mental picture of myself on my knees, with blood dripping out of big, open wounds: "Dear God, they are finally going to get their way, I have nothing left."

Almost immediately, I had another thought. *They can take everything away from me, but not my right to choose for myself.* Nobody can make me change my mind if I do not want to. This was the first time I truly understood the fundamental, intrinsic right that we all have – the right to choose.

I underestimated my parents. Then again, maybe I did not. They agreed to lend me the money for whatever purpose I felt was needed.

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It was a frustrating few months for me, with no clear way ahead. Within myself I was adamant though. I wanted some stability again, a sense of normality, my own money, and my independence. I had no idea of what I was supposed to do with all the teachings and writing that I did. At that time, all I wanted was a job.

Unexpectedly, an opportunity arose. There was a vacancy at a school in Prieska for the last quarter of the year. The previous teacher had resigned to go overseas, and they were rather desperate to find a substitute teacher until the end of the year. Would I consider it?

I found the idea quite appealing. I had always enjoyed working with children and taking the teaching post would allow me to experience a normal workplace again. Although I had been training adults for most of my working life, I had some experience with teaching children during my year as an English teacher in Taiwan. But even more appealing, the job in Prieska would allow me to move out of Alex's sphere and gain some much needed perspective. It would give me space to work out my confused feelings.

I am told that there are adults who fear me, but nobody informed these children. They ran circles around me. The primary-school children especially, were a wild and exuberant bunch. In the first week I realised that enforcing my will and my discipline on them was not going to work. It was

me against 30 children in a class, and it was just too tiring. I spent 80 percent of my time trying to get them to sit still and to keep quiet and too little time on teaching. What I remembered about school and what I was dealing with were poles apart. In the past, we disciplined children using the tools of fear – hidings and shame –to keep them in check. But these children did not suffer from either, and I had no intention of creating such negative emotions where they had not existed before. Deliberately humiliating a child is something I would never do. (Poking a little fun was different.)

When I was about nine years old, I came face-to-face with shame. In my class there was a girl who really struggled with her schoolwork. We were learning the rudiments of English, our second language, and the piece of reading we were dealing with contained the word 'jump'. Angela (not her real name) did not understand the teacher, and eventually the exasperated teacher called her to the front of the class and tried to get Angela 'to jump'. The girl did not understand and the teacher kept on repeating the instruction to jump, and yet Angela did not understand. Eventually the ridiculous situation got to everyone in class and we all laughed, including me. The shame and humiliation on that girl's face was something I have never forgotten. In fact, years afterwards, even as adults, I struggled to look her in the eye. She died of cancer in her early thirties.

I was not keen on screaming at my class, which I suppose was an option. I could threaten them with visits to the principal's office or with notes to the parents, but that would be 'passing the buck', and was ineffective. I had to find a solution that would work in class.

So, what was a teacher to do? My mother and I were intrigued by the question, and for the next few months we spent hours thinking up ways to control the children so that I could teach them. I very much enjoyed being with them and that did not help my cause. They quickly realised that it was very easy to make me laugh, and that encouraged them even more.

It was wonderful to be part of such joy and goodwill. Prieska had seen me come and go for years, but this was the first time that I really felt part of the town community. Overnight, I became

Juffrou and everybody on the street would greet me and would know who I was. I had to clean up all my bad habits, especially my language, to make sure that I did not set a bad example. The bad language was usually well managed, except when I forgot I was talking to a 13- or 14-year-old, and when the odd swear word would slip out. I only realised what I had said once I saw the wide-eyed expression on the child's face. This was too good to be true!

My mother had been a schoolteacher at the same school for more than 20 years, and the same children she taught were now the parents of the children I was teaching. There was a sense of continuity, and I was following in her footprints. When the children ran home to tell stories about their day in class, their parents could reminisce about their days in class with my mother. It became a warm circle of old and new memories. I loved being part of that.

I started to change the language in my class. When the children became too boisterous or when they talked too much or did not do their homework, I would remind them that they knew how to behave, that they were not infants, and that they knew how to be quiet and to sit down when were told to do so. Reluctantly, they would agree. I encouraged them to assess their behaviour, and I asked them to choose their own punishments when they broke the rules. They were not very imaginative: they stood in the classroom corners, wrote out lines, ran three times around the school building after school – being all the punishment they had been exposed to up to that point. But they never chose to be sent to the principal's office or had me involve their parents. The beauty of my new system was when they chose to write out a piece five times, they could not be angry with anybody but themselves. It was interesting to see that the choice to stand in the corner was becoming less popular by the day. At first glance it looked as if it was easy punishment, but nobody chose it twice.

The idea was to move the responsibility for their discipline back to them. Instead of my working so hard to enforce the rules, I tried to encourage some self-regulatory behaviour. I imagined the process would take a little longer, probably with a lot of challenges, but it could be worth it. It

seemed that my system was working because as the term progressed, I was noticing that instead of blaming friends for whatever went wrong, they were acknowledging their own part in the noise levels or arguments.

I had the grade five children, and after placing the class in groups, designed a board game based on all the right and wrong things they could do in class. According to the 10- and 11-year-olds, the right things included keeping quiet and listening to the teacher, helping a friend with school work, buying the teacher flowers, and telling her that she looks nice. The wrong things were much more imaginative and included spitting, pea shooting, jumping on the desks, and running around naked. One group designed a card that read, "Alicia kissed Colin. You decide if you want to move one space forward or one space back."

The high school children were slightly more manageable and I connected with the children on a different level. I was teaching life skills to grades eight and nine. Quite early in the term, I had talked to the grade eight learners about stereotypes. After the discussions in class, they wanted to know when they were going to have physical education part of their curriculum. I had been postponing it, hoping they would not notice! I was daunted since I knew little about sports and most other physical activities.

In keeping with my theme on stereotypes and how to move beyond it, I decided to have the boys play netball and the girls play touch rugby. Two of the star rugby players in class would act as coach and referee, and similarly, two girls would act as coach and referee for the boys playing netball. To my surprise, they were enthusiastic about the idea. I was developing some reservations, but I had started the process and could not back out.

A few days later, I had the balls organised and we were picking teams. Being part of a small-town school and mindful that it was important to integrate all the race groups (it was still a sensitive issue), I ensured that each team was represented by all race groups. The boys were enthusiastic and

surprisingly agile. Only one boy refused to play because of the sissy connotation and no cajoling or attempts at bribery worked – so I let him be. (Fair enough, I tried to bribe him with a milkshake, so perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised.)

All the girls, on the other hand, got into the spirit of things with much screaming and yelling, but with passion and surprising aggression. The referees tried to keep, with plenty of head shaking and despairing glances coming my way about their teams' behaviour.

I rushed between the boys on the netball field and the girls on the rugby field. I had plenty of exercise myself and ruined my shoe heels in the process. About halfway through the period, I returned to the noise on the rugby field and discovered that the girls had re-divided their teams along racial lines. They were now playing White against Coloured, and the game had started to take on a different tone. I stopped play, called them over, and told them that racially based teams were not a good idea and that they should revert to their original teams. Then one girl asked, "But then, how will we know who belongs to which team? That was the problem earlier on!"

Oops. I had forgotten to organise two sets of sports bands in 'team' colours so that the players could distinguish between the two teams.

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Teaching in small town and being involved in the school and the community, made my own process a bit more problematic. If I had been discouraged before from talking about my spiritual journey, it had now become unthinkable – if not impossible. I was so deep into the process (which had become so complicated and multidimensional) that I could not find any words to express what I was going through without sounding as if I had gone crazy. That self-imposed silence, coupled with my attempts to protect Alex by hiding his desperate situation and my involvement with him from everyone I knew, forced me into secrecy. I became increasingly aware that my embarrassment and

shame about my dysfunctional life and inability to pay my own way, were creating an almost insurmountable barrier between the people I love, and me.

My parents and I still had unresolved problems, but when they saw how well and 'normal' I was at work, my parents finally abandoned the idea that I was mentally ill. There was nothing wrong with the way my brain worked. I was grounded and 'normal', except for the apparently abnormal interaction that I had with Spirit. I was hiding it as best as I could, but the suspicion remained that my connection with Spirit was not God at work.

A few weeks before Christmas, my parents' bedroom accidently caught fire. My brother and I managed to limit the damage by containing the fire to the bedroom, but everything was black from the smoke, especially the spider webs in the forgotten corners. My mother was embarrassed about that, and promptly used the feather duster to flick them away in case visitors arrived.

On the Sunday afternoon, a week after the fire, a small tornado hit our town. I watched the trees bending and the branches breaking due to the strength of the wind. There was a large 50-foot cypress right in front of the house that was whiplashing back and forth until it was uprooted. It fell down in front of the window where I was standing (Figure 19).

Figure 20: Disaster zone: A toppled tree in front of our home in Prieska.

The wind toppled several trees and destroyed many roofs in the town. After it died down, everybody drove around, checking out and discussing the damage. When people stopped at our house, I invited them in with, "Welcome to the Van Wyk Disaster Zone. Would you like to see a) an uprooted tree, or b) a charred bedroom?" I contemplated charging an entrance fee; we were going to need a holiday after all of this …

Another big electric storm followed a few days later, and we felt we were in the grip of a huge outside force. What meaning could we derive from all this destruction? Suddenly, I had empathy for the people in biblical times who attributed natural disasters to God's displeasure, instead of natural phenomena like El Ninos and shifting tectonic plates. Have we displeased God? Hardly. But the thought must have crossed my mother's mind too, considering the possible evil forces at work through her daughter. This is because she decided that we all should go to church for a change.

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With the school term over, the topic at home turned again to what I would be doing next. The school had not found a permanent teacher but I was not sure about wanting to continue with teaching. I thought that I had used up all my capacity to discipline the children, and now somebody else needed to take over.

Unexpectedly, my job hunting ended. About six months earlier, my uncle Mike had lobbied on my behalf for a position at a government department where he still had work-related ties. Nothing came of it at that time, but they called again, and, suddenly, I was in the process of being employed.

There was one problem, however, and it was a big one. I needed an impeccable record to get a security clearance. Already, my three-year hiatus had been difficult to explain, which luckily my new would-be boss had decided to ignore. The security clearance, on the other hand, would be different. It is a long and involved process. The agency's security vetting officers delve into one's life

so deeply, that nothing can remain hidden. They *inter alia* interview your family and people that know you, check criminal records, credit records, and take fingerprints and a polygraph.

I had been judged so often and for so long by the people I was closest to; did I now want to allow a whole organisation to judge me? It was not a case of deciding whether I could or could not do the job, as employers are entitled to determine. It was never an issue; my previous experience and abilities fitted the job perfectly. But now my life would be judged. It felt as if I was being evaluated as a human being. Was I good enough to be working for this government department?

In principle, I rejected other people's judgement of me and of my life, but that was an intellectual process. On an emotional level, it was different. And I was not being oversensitive; I strongly suspected that in terms of their criteria I was going to fall short.

I had to make a decision. Do I continue with this process? It would mean either opening my life and everything I had been through during the past three years, or stopping the process and saving everybody (especially my uncle Mike) the embarrassment if I was refused a security clearance.

I did not have much choice. It was the only option on the table.

The security clearance process started. Right from the start I decided to be open and transparent about my world and what I had done during the previous three years. Even if I tried to hide it, someone, somewhere, was going to refer to Alex, and I was not prepared to phone everyone and ask them not to say speak about him. And besides, the people I know and who had always been close to me, did not function that way. I decided not to discuss the more spiritual aspects of my life – my relationship with God and Spirit was mine and had nothing to do with my prospective employers or their security requirements. I did not anticipate that God or my teachers would require me to sell state secrets!

Even though the employment process might have amounted to nothing, a part of me was relieved and ready to let go of the secrecy and the embarrassment relating to my life. It was bound to be a cleansing process.

It started off reasonably well. My vetting officer was a clear-thinking woman and she could not find any legitimate reason to deny me a security clearance. The fact that I was open and disclosed the details made me even less of a risk; nobody would be able to blackmail me with my 'secret life'. The head of her department was less tolerant, and my vetting officer was sent back repeatedly to get one more little detail, and to ask more questions – until there was nothing left to say. One of the reasons they refused to provide a security clearance to me was that I refused to distance myself from Alex. Even if he and I were not on speaking terms and I had no idea if we would ever speak again, I refused to dismiss him as an irrelevant past. That would be dismissing my own past as irrelevant and unwanted. It had become a matter of principle for me. In addition, nobody was going to tell me who I was allowed to have in my life and who I was not allowed to have.

The other reasons for not clearing me had little to do with my past situation or with me. The head of the department's husband was going through a very public trial, and consequently I seriously doubted her objectivity. One of the interesting things about being in a situation where you are being judged by society at large, is that you almost feel as if you have to take a stand and become judgmental of others, or people could think that you have no values. If you become tolerant of other peoples' mistakes you could be seen as somebody who does not know right from wrong.

The department head was now starting to play the person and not the ball. Different sources in the department told me that the security department had no grounds to deny me the clearance, and yet they were not clearing me – and probably hoped that I would go away and forget about it. I was staying with my uncle and aunt in Pretoria, and it was becoming a stressful time for all of us. My uncle Mike told me one morning that, at the risk of sounding pessimistic, perhaps I should consider

looking out for something else. I considered it, but then told him: "It is not over until I say it's over, and I'm not at that point yet."

Long ago, my teachers had taught me how to deal with obstacles. If you were a river or a stream and big rocks appeared in front of you, it is pointless beating against them to make them disappear. Eventually, you will have carved your way through them, but there is an easier way. You simply move around the obstacle, and find a different angle to the problem.

To break the impasse, I started phoning the decision-makers in the department, and firmly pushed my way in and confronted them: "I believe that there are still doubts about my security clearance. Could I make an appointment to see you so that we can discuss the concerns that you may still have?" They were quite shocked and flustered – what I proposed was unheard of. That did not get me anywhere, so I decided on a different tactic. There was an appeal process in place in the event of my security clearance being denied. I would be able to lodge an appeal by progressively going three levels up. My plan was to phone the office of the first senior manager and inform him that there were problems with my security clearance, which if denied, was going to end up on his desk anyway. So perhaps he should investigate what the problems were.

My uncle Mike, who still had much influence and knew all the chiefs, told me to leave it to him. He phoned the senior manager's office and explained the situation. He set up an appointment, but also informed him that he was simultaneously making appointments with the more senior managers. His strategy worked and the next morning I got my security clearance. I started work the following week.

Spitefully, my clearance had a caveat. While on my first year of the standard probation time, I would be watched for any involvement with Alex since I would be vulnerable in a relationship with him. I was irritated – but not too troubled. I would deal with it when the time came in the same way that I had dealt with the process so far – with honesty and transparency.

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Two years later I faced the same spiteful department head in a chance meeting on the same day that her husband, who had been convicted, heard his sentence. The newspaper headlines proclaimed his guilt on every second street pole. We shook hands and looked at each other, remembering when I was judged because of an association with a man I love (who had a criminal record). I got some pleasure from the situation, but I also remembered how painful it was and thought how much she must be suffering while pretending that everything was okay. There was a loss of innocence and a shame acquired through no fault of her own. I hoped that she could see in my eyes the compassion I felt for her, because there was nothing to say, really.

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Just before I started working in Pretoria, my parents and I had a discussion about the destructiveness of my process, which by then was a recurring theme. My mother was still waiting for an acknowledgement from me that my decisions were delusional and wanted an apology for everything I had put them through for the previous three and a half years. But I had no intention of apologising and acknowledging that I had been wrong all along. However, I felt enormous regret for their suffering which occurred as a result of the process I was going through. Still, a part of me felt that they had brought about their own suffering. In their unwillingness to believe me, they excluded themselves from an extraordinary experience. Their insistence in believing I was evil or insane had caused them to suffer, not me. I knew it was not as simple as that, but I had to deal with my own hurt and disappointments because of their judgement.

At the time of the discussion, I was irritated and in no mood to listen again to any of the stories about mental breakdown or evil. So, I made it very clear, "No more talk of my being mentally ill or of having a nervous breakdown. We all agree by now that there is nothing wrong with my brain or my ability to function normally. And I am not evil. Have you ever come across an evil person?" My

mother admitted that she had not. I continued, "So on what basis do you find that I am filled with evil? What in me is evil?" She did not have an answer to that. I continued further, "So, okay, if I am not insane and I am not evil, then what have I been doing these past three and a half years? Could it be that I have been telling the truth?"

I was tired of trying to explain the process and tired of taking the responsibility for a divine plan that as the 'human' Sonja – I felt I had no part in designing. I went on, "You know what, if you have a problem with these last few years and my process, then you take it up with God. You tell the 'boss' that you are unhappy with the way he made you suffer." I knew I was being unfair calling in the big guns – but my irritation knew no bounds.

Getting all worked up again was getting us nowhere, so I tried a different approach: "The process is very similar to what Job in the Bible went through. There was a divine wager going on between God and the devil. Job, who was completely ignorant of that fact, was put through the painful process of having his trust in God tested. Everything he had was taken away. His friends had plenty of well-meaning advice and opinions on how he could perhaps have displeased God. But Job knew that this process was between him and God. He did not quite understand it, but there it was. Not that he was taking his suffering stoically and uncomplainingly – he had his own fights with God and what God was putting him through."

My father had a question: "What was our role in this whole story then?"

"Somebody had to feed Job while he was sitting in the ashes with sores on his face," I said somewhat facetiously, but not altogether untruthfully.

My mother had a problem with my analogy: "You do not even believe in the Bible, but when it suits you, you liken yourself to Job. It is a bit arrogant, I think."

Perhaps, but I thought that my analogy of Job, despite my mother's objections, was quite apt. Not that I was particularly 'righteous' or that important, but Job's story tells of a man's suffering and

being unaware of the reasons for it. It is also the story of a relationship between a man and God that was built on trust, and a space between a human being and God where no one else can go.

But for me, and more importantly, Job tells the story of the death of the old self, and the re-birth of the new. It is a process that is often referred to in terms of three days – the day of death and the day of the rebirth or resurrection on the third. Nobody, however, ever talks about the second day. But being 'dead' or in limbo is excruciating.

Imagine three years of your life during most of which you had no idea what you were doing, where it was leading, and what the result would be. Imagine that during most of that time you did not know where you would be the following week, or even the following year. Imagine that for much of those three years you had no money and your efforts to earn some failed. Imagine that for most of that time you were dependent on other people to feed you and to clothe you, and to provide you with a home.

Elana told me I was one of the most patient people she had met. I had no choice but to become patient. I stopped complaining and accepted that I was exactly where I needed to be.

The second day – the process – takes as long as it needs to.

For me, it took that long to clean up outdated thoughts, beliefs and patterns – those that no longer served me. Life is full of rules and regulations, some written, and some based on 'this is how we do things' – dictated by our family, our society, our religions, and our government. Every time I allowed someone to tell me what choices to make, I relinquished my own responsibility for my life, and gave away my power.

To help me move into full ownership of my life, all the certainties and structures that provided those certainties were removed or shifted, and so my dependency on external answers was shaken. I had to go within to find my own wisdom and guidance, and in the process discover my own truth. I am ultimately responsible for my own life, and my own choices. I have to confront the consequences

of the decisions I made and which I will continue to make. There is always accountability, and mostly to myself.

It would take as long as required for me to heal old hurts and find forgiveness for myself and others. It would take time to shine a light on all these unwanted feelings and to force them to disintegrate and disappear.

Before we can get to the new self we have to dismantle and destroy the old. If it is not destroyed, it is not truly a new self, just a renovated one.

And that is why it was so destructive, Mom.

The 'second day' left me with a brand new awareness of who I was, and slowly, and a little hesitantly, I started integrating my new self into my life.

The Return

When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy (Campbell, 1949, p. 193).

Chapter 8

Goodbye Teachers, Hello Soul

My family heaved a great sigh of relief when I was finally ensconced in a job and in my own place in Pretoria. I started working for a small government department. My new boss and most of my colleagues knew my uncle who had recommended me for the position. They helped me to settle in and provided me with a comforting space. The job was not too demanding, and I had time on my hands – to think and mull over what the past few years had meant.

"You travel light," said my friend Chris one evening as he removed a small overnight bag from the boot of my car. I had to smile because it was so true. I was literally starting from nothing. I was in my own Land of Begin Again. Thanks to the goodwill of family and friends (Figure 20), at least I had some decent clothes and my basic needs had always been met. But I owned nothing, and I was surprisingly satisfied with this. My teachers told me they would not let me sink, and despite my fears and misgivings I survived. I cannot say that I was happy or content, or that I did not feel profoundly embarrassed at times when I had to stand with cupped hands asking for help. But, because of all the help, I never drowned.

More significant for me was the discovery that my ego had all but disappeared. I was stripped of any pretentions and of so-called 'false pride', which, I suppose, was not a bad thing. Yet, when I compared my life then with who I previously had been, and where I had come from, I could not help but feel a profound loss.

Figure 21: My friends Chris and Unali, and I: They were my support system through difficult times.

In my past life, I had a good career, a close relationship with my parents, uncles and aunts and cousins, and I knew where I fitted in. I had a circle of friends based on mutual interests and shared experiences. I had a life. I had certain roles to play in terms of which I defined myself and how others perceived me. It was all gone now, and I was in mourning.

Yet, despite the emptiness, I did not want to rebuild what I had lost. I was tired down to the depths of my being. Now that all the drama and the survival struggles were over, I discovered that the process had taken a toll. There was also a deep hurt left after the confrontations with the people that I loved.

Those involved on the periphery of my process were still waiting for answers, and I did not know what to tell them. Now that I was back at work, and had nothing to show for it, what was it all about? I did not know. I understood about the old self and new self, but I had not discovered what the 'new' was. All I knew at that stage was that I was extremely relieved and grateful that I had a job again and that my life had reverted to some semblance of normality.

Before rebuilding my life, I first needed to let go of the baggage of the past few years – all the anger, frustration, feelings of loss, hurt and disappointment. I needed to work through all those emotions to gain some perspective and to discover some underlying meaning. As Wilber (2017) put it, I had serious Cleaning Up to do.

I was enormously relieved that a continued friendship with Alex had been outlawed because of the caveat on my security clearance. It protected me from his unrelenting demands for help, which he was usually successful with. I needed to move out of his life and the inevitable crises. He had an endless capacity for attracting problems which I could not resolve. In fact, I thought they would probably get far worse before they got better. To put my life back together again, I had to set aside the love and worry that I still felt – and pretend that I did not care.

I knew I was not the only person who had made bad choices, especially when it came to men. But I expected more from myself. I was not perfect, but I used to trust my own judgement. Now I faced more of my own imperfections.

After serious soul searching, I realised that I had bought into the expectation that I needed to be perfect – yet does perfection exist? If it does, what is perfection? Your idea and my idea of perfect beauty will differ, and so will our ideas about the perfect job, the perfect love, and the perfect life. So, what is absolute perfection? Who defined it? Unconsciously I had placed a tremendous burden on myself to be just that – perfect. And I was left with deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and disappointment.

The 'seesaw' between the human perspective and the spirit perspective continued to occupy my mind, until I came to a solution. I made peace with my own failings, I accepted the different aspects of me, and I let go of the need to criticise or judge any of the aspects.

I am a kind person, but I can also be mean. So, which one am I? Actually, I am both. I am not always nice, I am not always fair, and I am not always loving. Different people bring out different aspects in me as there is a whole range of emotions and behaviours in me – all living side by side. I prefer being the kind person and I try to find her inside me, but I have made peace with the mean person who emerges when a situation triggers me. If I can make peace with the fact that I am not perfect and will never be, then, strangely enough, I can make peace with other people who are also imperfect.

A softness develops and grows when I do not judge myself. When I treat myself a little more kindly, and when I accept the mistakes or the wrong things I say and do, then that same softness, a loving kindness, seems to extend to others of its own accord. Today, I look at myself and own the wrong things and the hurt I caused myself and other people. Tomorrow is another day; tomorrow I will do a little better.

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Towards the end of 2009, my father, who had not been well for several years, became seriously ill. He had become old and frail. He wanted to get to 70 years old, which was in December of that year. We made plans to celebrate his birthday with something really special, so we organised a weekend for my brother and I and all the other children that he and my mother had helped raised, to come for a visit. After spending a week in hospital my father was very weak and we nearly cancelled the visit. But my mother pointed out that he was 'not dead yet', and he could rest as much as he wanted, and no one would mind. After a lifetime of dealing with his serious heart condition, we were all a little irreverent – including my father.

He managed to get to his 70th birthday, and two days later he died at home. My mother and I spent those last few hours at his bedside, just being there for him while he struggled with this age-old rite of passage. As emotionally prepared as he was for his death, he fought it to end, and did not quite 'go gently into that good night'. It was excruciatingly difficult to witness, but in a strange way I felt honoured and privileged to be part of the experience. There was no more fitting way to show him how much I loved him and how much I appreciated his unconditional love for me. I wrote the following (Van Wyk, 2010):

The Station Master

Figure 22: View of the railway track from our front stoep.

On the family sheep farm deep in the Karoo, not far from the house, runs a railway track on its way to Namibia. In its heyday, it was used by more than 30 trains a day each way, and the rumble of the train used to mingle with the normal everyday sounds – to the point where we did not notice it (Figure 21). A little to the left, there used to be a small railway station complete with a station building and the station master's house. In the old days, all the farmers from the neighbourhood came there to load their sheep up for the markets in the big cities. It was a friendly and social place, with tea and homemade rusks. It was centred around the station master, Kees, who had stories to tell and who shunted the trains with consummate ease.

When my father was young, single farmer, Kees, who was about ten years older and much wiser in the ways of the world, was a constant companion. The bond continued as the years went on and when my father had his own children, Kees's children became our companions and childhood friends. It was a short run across the veld to get to the station

building where we had to stop to ask for Kees's permission to cross the track to get to his house on the other side.

But the railways made way for big trucks and highways, and one by one the small stations shut down (Figure 22). So did our little station. Kees moved on and retired in town. We all grew up and moved away and before we knew it, my father was about to turn 70, and was dying.

Actually, reaching that age was in itself a miracle or a testament to his sheer will to live. My father called it grace. He struggled with a heart condition all of his life and, according to medical opinion, should have died by the time he turned 30. My father's "imminent death" lasted for 40 years and was a normal part of us growing up, and we had long stopped fearing it. Yet, when we were finally confronted by his death, the reality of it still caught us off-guard.

A few weeks before he died, my father wrote down some of his final thoughts on a piece of scrap paper – preparing for his funeral, yet again. I think he knew that this time it was not going to be a dress rehearsal. Not surprisingly, he was man who spent a lot of time thinking about life and death and the meaning of it all, and his notes reflected that:

The journey through life can be compared to a train journey. Contrary to what most people think, it is a spiritual journey. The physical aspect is simply there to anchor the soul, because the soul on its own cannot grow or learn lessons: the soul cannot divorce, or be imprisoned or go bankrupt. Along the way you stop at various stations and pick up provisions – experiences, insights. When you get to the last station, you get off the train and send it to the scrap yard. Then you take your little bundle of provisions on your back and you walk on to your destination – eternity.

In the final days, Kees re-entered our lives, still strong for a man of his age, and still jovial and full of stories. The visit was not a surprise; it's a small town – things get around – and we appreciated that he wanted to bid an old friend goodbye. But Kees continued to visit, more often than we would have expected. I was bit mystified.

Two days after his 70th birthday my father passed away. When we stood at his grave in the old family graveyard on the farm, overlooking the railway track and the old station, Kees's visits suddenly made sense. I realised that the station master had come to shunt the train for the last time. The train had now been sent to its final resting place; my father had disembarked and, with his little bundle, had gone on to *his* final destination – eternity.

Figure 23: The old railway track with the abandoned railway station.

But the shocks were not over yet.

Two weeks later, my beloved uncle Mike died unexpectedly. The two men in my life who had supported me, worried on my behalf, carried me through really difficult times, were both gone. I mourned deeply for both of them.

The death of my father brought the two different streams of belief, that of my mother's and mine, head to head. It is one thing to argue and disagree on the different religious and spiritual perspectives, it is another when someone you love very much dies and the question stares you in the face: what happened to my father now that he is dead? It was simply unthinkable that such a gentle and loving man would not be welcomed home by God, even if his beliefs did not conform to a prescribed religious path. My mother found peace knowing that, ultimately, God was all about amazing Grace.

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I settled back into my normal life in Pretoria. I continued with my meditation practice, although not quite as intensely and often as I did in Port Elizabeth. It had become a routine experience. I would experience shifts in consciousness, normally about three times, but sometimes four. It is quite comforting, and always special. I experienced the shift as a gentle take-off, like a take-off in a plane – which then levels out. It is soft and sweet. Or I would experience a twitch in my leg or upper body, and I would be at a different level of consciousness – normally ending the Witness stage. Occasionally, I would move into non-dual awareness, but it was not a goal. If I had enough time, and it takes a long time for me, I would go into that state of consciousness. But I kept it for special occasions. It was my moment of connecting with Source. (My meditation cycle usually takes about one and a half hours at the time, but two hours and more if I move into Nondual awareness or merging with Source.)

As for the teachers, their playing an active role in my life had gradually been diminishing. In my determination to regain control of my life, and because my world had become quite uneventful, I had less need for their advice and opinions. And now that I had settled down again, I was not so keen on asking anymore – as a small part of me was apprehensive that I might receive new instructions that would upset my life all over again. I had experienced more than enough of wild schemes; I was still recovering from the previous difficulties.

Instead, I developed an increasing compulsion to look for answers and insight in myself. I did not find the idea daunting or strange in any way, perhaps because my teachers had often encouraged me to move in that direction. At the same time, though, something else, something different, was happening. There was a new and distinct higher consciousness that was entering my normal thought processes and day-to-day functioning, and it was replacing the teachers.

Gradually, and over a period of months, this shift was taking place. The switch between the human consciousness and the soul consciousness became easier. It was starting to become less differentiated and started to feel more like one consciousness. This was not easy, and it had profound effects on my physical and mental state. There were days that I experienced a fugue state: it was a feeling of being spaced out. I was sort of functioning – I drove to work, sat at my desk, went for a meal, all the normal things, but I was not quite present. It felt as if gears in my head were grinding, and I was often alarmed by what was happening to my mental state. I felt as if I was breaking apart – especially during very intense experiences. I would then simply say to this soul consciousness, "Just let up; it's too much," and the intense shifting experience would temporarily subside. It was responsive. Of course, I did not quite understand what was happening, since I had no frame of reference at the time. I just went with it. I did not have much choice or control over what was happening to me.

But I started to notice things. I had access to some information immediately. Where previously I had to meditate to tune in to get insight into a situation, it was there readily available. I was starting to speak with a different voice – with a different perspective. It was especially noticeable with complete strangers. At this time I noticed that I had started some sort of a 'practice'. As I mentioned before, I spent many evenings alone in my favourite restaurant. I would use the time to think, contemplate about my life and my situation, and what this all could possibly mean. It was my favourite thing to do. Sometimes I would strike up a conversation with other diners, but usually if they were also alone. But strange things started to happen. Strangers, often people who have never been to this restaurant, would appear for an evening, and within minutes they would tell me about a deep issue they had been grappling with. And I had an immediate understanding of the underlying question or fear, or even shame they were walking with. I would just start talking about it to them, and in the process provided clarity or resolution – whatever they needed. Some, I never saw again, but when I did, we never talked again about the issue they were grappling with.

I, Sonja, would like to think I suddenly got so clever, and insightful, but I was as astounded by the ease these insights came to me. I was aware that I was speaking from a different perspective. It was if that troubled person was encouraged by his or her own soul consciousness to somehow end up with me to get some perspective or whatever that person needed at the time. I just need to pay attention, even if I really was not in the mood for company. I was somehow doing God's work. My soul's work. And I just let it be and took it as it came.

I noticed another thing. I did not need to think about what I was supposed to do next – in terms of a job, studies or any life decision. I would have a thought or a desire to do something, and I would easily and with full confidence act on it, even if I did not know where it would lead or what the exact outcome would be. I would just trust my 'instinct'.

I had previously struggled with the question of who oversaw my life, and it had been confusing to differentiate between my agenda, my teachers' agenda, my soul's agenda, and God's plan. Who was in charge? Whose pawn was I? Whose tune was I dancing to?

It turned out that the answer was surprisingly simple. It was all about the soul, the higher-self. Replace all the words such as 'God's will' and 'God's plan' with the 'soul's will', and the 'soul's plan', and we move closer to the truth. This was my single biggest discovery and would have the most significant impact on my life in future years.

This type of soul consciousness settled in over a few years, until I was not even aware of it happening. It became my new normal.

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I last talked about Wilber's structures of consciousness when I started this journey. I was at the second-tier structures at that time, at the integral level, with a self-actualised and centauric worldview. It has been several years since then, and it is reasonable to think there might have been some further development – which leads us into the third-tier structures. Wilber (2017) describes the process of development as transcend and include, or as 'differentiate and integrate'. Using Robert Kegan's conceptualisation, Wilber states that growth happens when the subject of today is the object of tomorrow. It is possible to identify a structure through which one had passed, and to trace the elements and characteristics of that structure (as much as one can do, without being biased and subjective). I think I had done that with the second-tier structures, and I am now looking to make sense of possible third-tier structures.

What to make of third-tier consciousness? Does it even exist?

According to Wilber (2017), third-tier structures start to develop when they are conjoined with the state-stages, which are the Psychic, Subtle, Causal and Non-dual states. At first tier and second tier, the structures and states of consciousness were largely independent of each other. One

could have an experience or tap into any state of consciousness, although one would interpret that experience from the structure of consciousness that one operates. Anyone has access to any of the states of consciousness, even Nondual awareness. But in third-tier structures the states and structures of consciousness conflate, and we now move into the transpersonal bands or structures.

From a theoretical perspective, Wilber (2017) identifies about four structures in the third tier. He conceptualises them as follows: *para-mind* (indigo), which is the union between the para-mind and the psychic (gross) state; *meta-mind* (violet), which is the union between the meta-mind structure and the subtle state; *Overmind* (ultraviolet), which is the union between Overmind and the causal/Witnessing state (clear/white light), and *Supermind*, which is the union between Supermind and the Non-dual state.

A conversation between Wilber and another spiritual teacher and author, Andrew Cohen (Wilber & Cohen, 2006), highlights aspects of this third-tier higher integration: It is a different way of seeing, understanding and feeling. What is key is the development of the mind; otherwise emotions and motivations will not be fully integrated. It requires a way of living that also incorporates the first and second tiers – it is an inclusive way of being. It essentially is a spiritual way of being. At the third tier, "you really feel God is moving in you, and evolution is speaking through you, and Spirit is unfolding through you, consciously" (Wilber & Cohen, p. 6). An important point that Wilber and Cohen also make, is that the third tier is so rare at this stage that it has not yet settled into Kosmic grooves or habits; it still being formed; it is in the beginning stages; it is still tentative endeavours.

In addition to Wilber and Cohen, some structural development psychologists have found evidence that such higher post-post conventional developmental stages exist. For example, Kohlberg and Power (1981) identified a post-postconventional seventh stage of moral development. The highest stage six level (post-conventional) of universal principles of human justice, is joined with a perspective that includes life's ultimate meaning. Such a seventh stage is "based on ethics that goes

beyond, and is higher than, an ethic of justice" (1981, p. 239). Ego-development psychologist Cook-Greuter (2013), describes postautonomous stages that are called Construct-aware or Ego-aware (which is linked to late second-tier structures and late vision-logic) and the catch-all Unitive stage, which relates to third-tier structures as far as she had been able to find evidence for it.

Reading Cook-Greuter's research about the Ego-aware stage, I recall a blog post that I wrote. It expresses how I felt about the ego at the time, and I suspect that I was already in para-mind. Here is an extract (Van Wyk, 2012c):

Ah, Ego! … If a tree falls in the forest and no-one hears it …

Ego is an interesting phenomenon. We can never get rid of it completely, nor should we. It is part of our basic psychological make-up. It defines us as individuals in relation to the rest of the world. It creates the boundaries where and when it is necessary to protect us. It is the sum-total of who we believe who we are and how that translates into being in the world.

It is silly to try and kill it off or suppress it; it cannot be done. We simply must transcend it, and this is the way I think it is done.

First, we let go of the unnecessary and dysfunctional parts of the ego. We notice our ego responses and why we react the way we do. We investigate our belief systems and sift out that which is not true or is outdated. We heal our issues where we can, make conscious decisions to act and react differently, and accept and take full responsibility for what is there. In a nutshell, we find the courage to look in the mirror.

Critically, we understand that there is a difference between who we really are and which parts of ourselves are based on other peoples' expectations and approval. In the process, we whittle down the unnecessary stuff so that we can get to our real, authentic selves. There is the old story about someone asking Michelangelo how he created this

extraordinary sculpture of a horse, and he replied that he simply removes that which is not a horse. The same goes for removing that which isn't the real self.

But then a next phase in our awareness follows, and this is deep, existential stuff.

In essence, ego, because it encapsulates who we are in the world and in relation to the world, relies strongly on validation. We are noticed and recognised because of who we are and what we do in terms of the roles that we play.

There is an old philosophical question – if a tree falls in a forest and there is no one to hear it, does it still make a sound? If there is no observer, does it even exist?

If we remove all that recognition, even appreciation, for example, you are a great parent, you are a skilled worker, and your car that you drive tells me that you are successful at earning money, or you make a wonderful contribution to this cause – we feel invalidated.

And if we are in the world and nobody acknowledges and validates us, do we even exist?

The challenge in this whole process is that if we remove too much (or too quickly) of what we believe is true about ourselves, we become afraid of being left with nothing. And so, we might even regress into the worst aspects of ourselves. That fear of that nothingness, of being no-one, becomes so strong that we try and *make* people take notice, or *force* or *manipulate* our way into situations where we do not belong and which are not good for us … and ego becomes EGO!

If we can let go of the fear of being nothingness and no-one, we discover the true answer: we exist beyond our human ego. The tree knows it exists, even if no-one hears it when it falls.

We validate ourselves. We don't require anyone else to do it for us.

This becomes our new self-concept and the new foundation from which we will design our lives.

Wilber's first third-tier stage, which is the para-mind, did not feature in my consciousness to the extent that I was aware of something new happening. As Wilber (2017) describes, it is the acceptance of the true death of the individual, 'personal' self. It is the first major stage where

actual transpersonal dimensions are included with the personal dimension in an individual's awareness and identity, and not just as a notion, idea, philosophy, peak experience, or spiritual belief – but in a direct, immediate, felt manner. This is a profoundly significant shift in consciousness and is a major reason why this is indeed the beginning of an entirely new (and higher) tier of consciousness, growth and development (Indigo Para-mind, para 12).

This may be a new way of being in the world, and certainly I was conscious of the interplay between me and Spirit at all times. That part was noticeable and profound.

But my description of my experiences that I have just shared seems more like meta-mind to me. From my understanding of Wilber's (2017) explanation and combining it with Cook-Greuter's ego development theory (2013), the third-tier violet meta-mind is a stage of 'feeling awareness' and felt wholeness – "particularly a unity of intellect and feeling, knowing and being, in an unbroken, seamless conjunction" (Wilber, 2017, Violet Meta-mind, para 1). It is an all-encompassing, wildly inclusive stage to be in. The features of this stage are the capacity to rapidly scan data, contain a luminous visionary awareness, and possess profoundly creative processes. It also features the seat of the soul, and a sense of luminous and radiant forms and patterns (Wilber, 2017). This was certainly the case for me at the onset of this stage, but it had gradually diminished as I integrated all of these 'separate forms' and separate teachers.

Cook-Greuter rather eloquently and accurately describes the Unitive stage as follows, although it would include both the meta-mind and the subsequent structure of Overmind:

Individuals at this level are now able to witness the whole song and dance of prior ways of understanding and meaning making with compassion and equanimity. They understand the need of the personal ego to ensure a sense of permanence and substantiality while at the same time recognizing the illusion of this desire for permanence. The previous way of viewing reality solely from the self's perspective and through the medium of language is transformed. The new paradigm has a universal or cosmic perspective as an organizing principle and as a steady place from which meaning is derived. It is non-centred in the ego, although the ego is available as a perspective when useful. Unlike state experiences that gave people glimpses of mystical or unitive experiences, now these are steadily available in the witnessing stance. Unitive individuals experience themselves and others as part of ongoing humanity, embedded in the creative ground, fulfilling the destiny of evolution. The two sides of the Pascalian paradox are integrated: feelings of belongingness and feelings of one's separateness and uniqueness are experienced without undue tension. They are simply changing perceptions of the unending possibilities of being. At this level of integration, adults can look at themselves and at other beings in terms of the passing of ages, of near and far in geographical, social, cultural, historical, intellectual and developmental dimensions. They can take multiple points of view and shift focus effortlessly among many states of awareness. They feel embedded in nature – birth, growth and death, joy and pain – are seen as natural occurrences – patterns of change in the flux of time (2013, p. 87).

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Following the meta-mind, one would expect to start integrating the Overmind, which is a structure reflecting the impersonal Witness. However, I have one concern where it comes to Wilber's growth path, and that concern includes Wilber's stance on, and conceptualisation of, the soul. His position is sometimes problematic and seemingly contradictory. It is stated that he completely ignores

the role of the soul (Teklinski, 2013), a fact he denies (Wilber, 1997) and which he addresses quite substantially in his later work (Wilber, 2017).

Even if Wilber (1997, 2017) makes provision for a soul, he sees the soul as something we encounter in subtle states or structures. It is the last personalised version of Spirit, or the last individual consciousness. Wilber (2000b) distinguished, as per the perennial philosophy, between the gross (physical), subtle and causal realms. Now, when it comes to the self, Wilber distinguishes between three different lines of self, relating to the realm in which they operate. First, there is the frontal self, which operates in the gross physical realm. This is the domain of the ego. Second, there is the soul or deeper psychic self, which operates in the subtle realm, and then, third, the Self or Witness, which operates in the causal realm. These lines operate and develop separate from, and alongside, each other (Wilber, 2000b).

The frontal or ego self evolves in this lifetime and dies off after a lifetime. The soul self, or the deeper psychic being 'behind' the frontal self is that which evolves between and over different lifetimes – if one entertains the idea of reincarnation. The Witness Self, according to Wilber, is something different: It never evolves, is never born, and it never dies – it does not enter the stream at all (Wilber 1997, 2000b). These three streams develop at their own pace, but somewhat hierarchically – from the ego to the soul, to the Witness. Thus, the Witness evolves later and *supersede*s the soul (Wilber, 1997). The Witness Self is supreme in that it holds the three realms together and prevent them from flying apart. As Wilber puts it, "even though the three domains can show relatively independent development, they are still held together, and drawn together, by the radiant Self, the purest Emptiness that can impartially reflect, and therefore embrace, the entire manifest domain" (Wilber, 2000b, p. 127).

Once an individual moves through (transcend and include) the subtle structure (meta-mind), the soul self dissipates and collapses (with the individual consciousness) into the Witness or

Overmind structure to continue into non-dual awareness and Supermind. In other words, if an individual continues to evolve to the Ultimate or Unborn Spirit, one has to leave the soul behind in the subtle structure and state. Failure to do that is to have a spiritual pathology that Wilber calls a 'soul addiction or fixation', and it is the soul's inability to die off and discover its True Self. He calls this the dark night of the soul (Wilber, 2017).

In what may seem to be a bias towards non-dual realisation, Wilber relegates the soul to a somewhat inferior status, as there is no personhood in the mystical end-state of non-dual awareness. The soul in the subtle state or structures is merely a stepping stone to the Witness and non-dual Absolute (Teklinski, 2013; Wilber, 2017). However, in Wilber's later work (2017), he states that Integral Theory, as a metatheory, provides for the hypothesis that the soul may transmigrate or reincarnate between lifetimes. Wilber states that is possible that the soul can "exist in a continuing fashion from one life to the next (until final Liberation)" (2017, Gross to Subtle dysfunction, para 3). As the ego stores lessons of this lifetime, the soul stores ongoing lessons from one life to another. Therefore, the soul starts a new life having developed up to a certain level of development, and continues from that point on during the next lifetime. Teklinski (2013) goes further and states that the soul is the "facilitative agent' of any development during a lifetime.

For me, whether the soul continues between lifetimes, or as Wilber contends is a temporary soul personality which is superseded by the Witness or the True self, is not incompatible. From my directly felt experience and teachings, the soul does continue between lifetimes, but when the time is ripe, the soul (merged with the individual consciousness and in a human body), is eager to continue the development towards the Witness/True Self and to experience itself in this fashion and beyond. It is a point which Wilber also alluded to when he states in *Eye of The Spirit* that the "… ego is that which evolves in this lifetime; the soul is that which evolves between lifetimes (or if you prefer, evolves to the *superconscient in this lifetime* …*" (1997, p. 327, my emphasis). In other words, he

therefore makes provision for a soul that transmigrates or reincarnates, yet also for a soul which may become enlightened (together with the individual consciousness) in one particular lifetime.

As for the soul, Wilber writes insightfully that:

Because the soul (for either reason) represents the 'between lifetimes' enormous stretch of possibilities, it is always seeing beyond the present state or condition; always seeing beyond the present state or condition; always envisioning something higher, wider, deeper, brighter; always bringing brilliance of creative insight to each and every moment; refusing to settle for what is and always asking 'What can be?' It is the state (and self-sense) immediately above the head of the ego … although deciding to act on it (by transforming its state center of gravity from gross to subtle) is a decision only the ego can make" (Wilber, 2017, p. 427).

For me, the discovery of the soul is a precious one, and not one that I relinquish easily for the next growth step. In fact I resisted it, even not consciously. I had been experiencing a 'neutral' or Witnessing state in the normal course of events, and that made me feel detached, isolated and divorced from the normal going-ons in life. I thought I had been so isolated and alone for so long, and the last thing I wanted was to be just a spectator to life. I also thought it may be somewhat boring, and I had more than enough time (when I die) to be in what I thought would be a limbo state. I was quite ambivalent. I wrote the following blog post, reflecting on how I felt at that time (Van Wyk, 2013):

In the projection room

I have had this picture in my mind on and off during the past few years: I am in a movie house, but I'm in the projection room, standing with the Projectionist. Before us in the darkened room there are several screens, each with its own life movie going on – you know – the life situations that are unfolding, the life dramas we are all familiar with, the people that we know or get introduced to in a new scene …

As I am watching the different movies, I feel compelled (and sometimes I choose) to join at a particular point, moving out of the Projectionist space into the movie itself. Once I am in the movie, like all the actors, I forget that it is actually a movie, and it becomes real to me – normal life. I get sucked into all the dramas, feel all the heart-wrenching emotions, get confronted by scary stuff. It is not make-believe and I am real and authentic.

But then, at some point, as suddenly I had immersed myself in this movie, I am removed again and back in the projection room, again standing with the Projectionist, looking at the movie continuing and knowing that my part in the movie was over or maybe temporarily suspended. I am not required or do not wish to be part of the story as it continues to unfold. Those are the times when I rest, when I heal, when I let go of the memories of the dramas that I was just part of. Often there is a sense of relief "Thank God it's only a movie!"

Then there are times when I am back in the Projectionist's room, unwilling, and frustrated that I'm not in my *own* movie any more. I am frustrated with this double life, with this "then I'm in and then I'm out" dual perspective. It seems that everyone else is part of his or her own movie, except me. I only get to play parts in other people's movies, temporarily experiencing life as everybody else (and usually dealing with the difficult bits!). I am left to watch and observe as the movies continue without me.

But then, if I do get my own new movie, what would my movie look like? What would the experiences and the storyline be? Who would play in it with me? No doubt some of the actors in the other movies where I made guest appearance, would do the same for me … But what story do I want to script?

Is it up to me to script the story, or will it be written for me? … I don't know. There is this new open space, ripe with all kinds of creative possibilities … and a new kind of responsibility.

I am left with the question, and I suppose a choice: Is my life movie a sum of all the parts I play in other people's movies? Or do I get to have my own once again, this time where I will be the script writer, the director and the protagonist all-in-one?

It will probably be a combination of the two, as with everybody else, I suspect.

However, I have been starting to change my mind because the subtle/meta-mind stage had become very uncomfortable for me. This structure of consciousness is so full and encompassing that I struggle to contain and manage it – and a more detached, neutral position is required. I have begun to realise that the only way out, is by moving forward, and growing more. I am not yet sure how to go about it, as none of the older growth processes had been done consciously, as opposed to now that I am aware of what is at stake. I have already started to simplify my life, and I consciously have been removing myself from other people's dramas and have tried to avoid creating dramas on my part – to the extent that it has been possible. Other people's and my own dramas and experiences, I find to be exhausting and overwhelming, and also difficult to shake off and move beyond. Those emotions and after-effects linger. I am connected to the world, and I am filled up by it.

Yet, the simple idea of an Overmind structure intimidates me, and from Wilber's description of that advanced structure makes me uncomfortable to even think that I can even consider that level of development. Or is that false humility? I have not made up my mind about this notion. Perhaps I will check in with myself in the future.

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What do I make of the spirit guides? I had to ask myself a brutal and profound question. Were they ever really separate beings – the ones I called teachers? It is not my intention to prove the validity of channeling and my experiences with spirit guides. I am simply recounting a phenomenon that I experienced as my reality. I did not know, and still do not really know what it is and how it can be explained. I can merely speculate, with the help of theorists such as Jung, Assagioli, and Wilber what it could mean and where it could have originated from. It was included in the story to explain the choices that I made.

For me, the best possible explanation lies in the soul or transpersonal self. Both the soul and the higher archetypes, according to Wilber, are found in the subtle domain or structure of consciousness. It could be that there may be some interaction between the soul consciousness and the archetypal spirit guides. The soul, as the bridge between the human and higher energies or structures of consciousness, facilitates some form of communication from the archetypal and subtle domain. It is the source of what Assagioli (1965) calls higher feelings, states of contemplation, and illumination. And Wilber says that the archetypes are the "Forms of our own highest potential, the Forms of our own true nature, calling to us to remember who and what we really are" (Wilber, 1997, p. 359).

This facilitation by the soul using the archetypal spirit guides will continue until the soul is sufficiently integrated with the human being itself, and the archetypal spirit guides are no longer required, as the soul can take it from there.

If it were my own Higher Self or soul that produced these spirit guides, then I could see why the different 'spirit teacher' personas might have been necessary. If, in the beginning with my limited understanding, I had thought that it was me (or even a part of me) who oversaw the process, I would vehemently have resisted the situation. As a human I would never have made the choices that created such trouble and painful upheaval. I simply did not function that way. It was only through the trust I

had in my external-to-myself guides or teachers that I overcame my natural resistance. Only because of that trust could I move into a higher place of understanding and insight. If I had thought it was all my doing, I would not or could not have accepted the responsibility.

The big surprise was that by trusting my teachers – separate beings or not – I was guided straight back to myself, or Myself, in the end.

I must settle for my favourite way of dealing with God and Spirit. When I ask if it is this way or that way, then invariably the answer is all of them, and then some. There were archetypes, teachers and the soul, and a part that I probably still do not understand.

Chapter 9

Reflections

It is time for me to step back and to reflect on my story and the underlying experiences and processes that created it. As with stories, mine has a beginning, a middle, and an end, although nobody is able to describe a completed life. I cannot be sure how it will all end as I am still in the process of living – perhaps a new story is developing. We only appreciate our own inclination to tell life stories when some traumatic or life-changing event takes place and we try to impose some coherent structure on our everyday flow of experiences (Crossley, 2000). It is then that a "narrative principle invokes a humanistic image of the self as a teller of stories, of heroes and villains, plots, and images of actors performing and engaging in dialogue with other actors" (Crossley, 2000, p. 532).

Within this storytelling and meaning making of it all, there were some broad themes and questions which started to filter through, and which I needed reflect on to get closure on this part of life. This chapter aims to provide that closure.

Spiritual development as a transformational process

During those tumultuous years, my friends and family constantly questioned what I was busy with, and why was I doing whatever I was doing. I had no answer, and I would just reply that I was going through some sort of process. "But what was this process?" they would ask. I did not really know.

This process, however, is 'as old as the hills'. It's an archetypal thought embedded in our collective unconscious – the idea of the old self transforming into the new. The idea is echoed in the image of the phoenix that dies in the fire and rises anew from the ashes. It is the story of Job who has everything taken from him, and who after a desperate struggle is given a new life. It is Jonah being swallowed by the whale and being spewed out after three days. It is Jesus dying and being resurrected

on the third day. It is the subject of many hero stories. It is an idea that manifests in nature – the caterpillar transforms into a butterfly; the death of winter prepares for the birth of spring.

But there is a space, a process, between the old self and the new. The old self does not die and then is miraculously born into the new. That would be like one, two ... skip the rest ... ten. It takes nothing less than an excruciatingly painful process of transformation. This is the space where we start to ask serious and meaningful questions. Who am I? Why am I in this situation? What does this mean? How does life – my life – work? What am I doing here? What is the point of it all? And we find ourselves in an uncomfortable, uncertain, and deeply painful place.

Sometimes this chaotic inner turmoil is mirrored by a chaotic life situation during the period of transformation. We watch as relationships disintegrate, we watch as secure jobs vanish, we are at odds with the people around us, we lose our financial security, and so the list goes on. It feels as if everything is falling apart, which is true – everything is falling apart.

The process is the story of the spiritual journey into the new self. But it is also a human development story. It tells the story of the death of the old ego, and the rebirth into a deeper and fuller mode of existence (Le Grice, 2013).

At the heart of it, it speaks of transformation. Prominent transpersonal psychologist, Frances Vaughan, describes transformation as:

> … transformation really means a change in the way you see the world – and a shift in how you see yourself. It's not simply a change in your point of view, but rather a whole different perception of what's possible. It's the capacity to expand your worldview so that you can appreciate different perspectives, so that you can hold multiple perspectives simultaneously. You're not just moving around from one point of view to another, you're really expanding your awareness to encompass more possibilities … (Schlitz, Vieten & Amorok, 2007. p. 19).

It is the transformation of consciousness, perspective, and identity. The individual's basic meaning and purpose in life is transformed. (Hartman & Zimberhoff, 2009). For Wilber (2000b), spiritual transformation is identical to spiritual growth and development: In the Growing Up path, as each stage of consciousness is traversed and left behind as we move onto the next level, it creates a little mini-death for the old self. There is a period of disorientation as we learn to let the old stage go and learn to embrace and navigate the new stage of consciousness (Wilber, 2017). We need to let go of our old worldviews, and their beliefs and perspectives, and this requires the dismantling of the old life. And this may all sound very theoretical, but as my story illustrates, especially when it came to my involvement with Alex, it has real life implications. He was instrumental in breaking down all previously held ideas and beliefs about life rules, moral values, and unexamined beliefs, and created a space where new perspectives can develop.

This what I meant when I tried to explain to my mother why Spirit is so destructive. (There is an expectation from a lot of people, and I would include myself, that Spirit is benign, sweet, loving, and a preserver of all the stuff in life that is good and true. That is true, but it only half of the truth. The other side, the creative side, is messy and destructive because growth works that way.)

Not only are different stages difficult to navigate, as we transform from the previous to the next one, the restructuring of the self between the groups or clusters of stages, which Wilber calls first second and third tiers, is profound. Wilber 1997) quotes Claire Graves, who first conceived of these tiers, and who said that the move between the first and second tier is a monumental leap. The second tier requires a wider, more complex and integrated way of thinking and being. The move into the third tier stages – even more so. The third tier requires that we start living as spiritual beings. As the famous quote goes: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience" (Unknown). At this point, the individual knows that not only do they have a soul, but they know they are their souls – housed temporarily in a body. It is not a

conceptual issue, but a real lived experience. It requires a complete re-orientation, a complex new perspective, and being-in-the-world.

My process, as I documented in my story, is the move into the third tier structures of consciousness. As I have incorporated my Waking Up experiences into my normal life, it conjoined the underlying structures of consciousness and created a new growth in me. I have begun to experience myself as a participant, a co-creator in the ongoing creation of the world. It has brought a new sense of responsibility because every thought, every word, and every action carries its own weight.

This was the process into my new self.

Myth and myth making

This transformation process, as I have said, is often expressed in old stories and myths – for example the phoenix rising from the ashes, and the old Biblical stories. I discovered a new appreciation for myths. Although I had left all the myths of my childhood religion behind, or so I thought, at times I could not consciously express my thoughts about a situation. But the myths could explain what I was feeling or experiencing. So I have used the biblical story of Job, of Jonah and of Abraham to communicate difficult concepts. In the case of parents, who were raised and functioned in the same mythical tradition, they understood the point I was trying to make.

Myths serve different functions. For Ricoeur, myths may have a historicity to them, but also serve a symbolic function – "the power of discovering and revealing the bond between a man and what he considers sacred" (1967, p. 5). Myths therefore serve as record of "humanity's spiritual heritage, and they have inspired all the great religions and cultural worldviews" (Le Grice, 2013, Chapter 1, Approaching Myths, para 1). From a psychological point of view, Le Grice, in the Jungian tradition, states that myths are shaped by the archetypal dynamics of the psyche which are applied to many different levels of human experience. In this sense, the physical adventures mirror inner

psychological processes. They are stories which help individuals and cultures to orientate themselves to meaningful lives (Le Grice, 2013). Considering myths from a spiritual and religious perspective, mythic stories and parables aim to subvert and change or rearrange our unconscious worldview so that we can understand the 'truth" of what is taught. This is at a "wisdom" level (Ricoeur & Kearney, 1978). If myths do not fulfil this purpose, it leads to over-reliance on institutional doctrines, rituals and literal interpretations (Rohr, 2015).

However, in today's world, how relevant are old myths or old religious stories? Do they still speak to us and help shape our worldviews? Le Grice points to an alternative:

> But if for you the old religious signs and symbols no longer have the authentic credibility they used to have, you are forced to find your own way through life, to find your own life meanings, your own personal myth'' (Le Grice, 2013, Chapter 3, Nihilism & Mythology, para 4).

Le Grice's idea of the creation of personal myth draws heavily on Joseph Campbell's (1949) exposition of the monomyth and the universal hero's journey. Campbell worked deeply in the depth psychology tradition, especially Jung, and traced the hero's story as an individuation or spiritual, even mystical, process. Campbell articulates a formula of the hero's adventure, but it is a loose one, with differences for each individual, and different emphasis on different aspects of the hero's journey for each individual (Le Grice, 2013). In a nutshell:

> The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man* (Campbell, 1949 p. 30) (emphasis in the original).

Creating a personal myth therefore is recognising that instead of ancient heroes fighting external battles and fulfilling quests, "we contemporary heroes must go inside, into our own psyches. This requires no less courage, perhaps more" (Dufrechou, 2013, p. 207).

In living all of my experiences, I have often felt that the story itself had a sense of familiarity, that it had been written already, and all the other characters or role-players and I only needed to show up. I discovered that Campbell's mythical journey can provide a broad framing for my own process or story and also provide some coherence to the experiences (Crossley, 2000). Campbell describes the hero's journey in 17 distinct steps, but I thought going into detail was beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, I have simply used the three main stages as a framing tool, that is "separation-initiation-return" – and I have renamed it as "The call-The journey-The return".

The Separation or Departure: The Call

The call to adventure is introduced by a herald of some sort, often spontaneously in dreams (Campbell, 1949, p, 51, 55). In my case, before the actual direct call from spirit guides, there were a few incidences which forewarned me – although I did not know what it meant at that time. I often had dreams of travelling – by aeroplane, by boat, in cars – and then I had a dream about a psychic woman who introduced a spirit guide, which turned out to be prophetic. This 'herald' can also manifest as "some extraordinary experience, encounter, or epiphany" (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2009, p. 9). However, it can also come from a mundane source, a chance meeting, reading a book, or even an accident or blunder (Le Grice, 2013). The herald may sound the call to some high historical undertaking. Or it may mark the dawn of religious illumination. In mystical terms, it marks what has been termed 'the awakening of the self' (Campbell, 1949, p. 51). It can take the form of any type of mystical experience – what Maslow would call a peak experience or a glimpse of Wilber's states of consciousness. However, such an experience transforms one's perception and understanding of the

nature of reality, and can be life altering. Thereafter, one's life course is shaped by the new understanding that the spiritual experience revealed (Le Grice, 2013):

> But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration – a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (Campbell, 1949, p. 51).

What is required is a "psychological detachment from the values, expectations, and accepted patterns of life of the mainstream culture" (Le Grice, 2013, Chapter 5, Beginning of the Journey, para 1).

Campbell states that for those who heed the call in the mythical hero's journey, supernatural aid is often available. This aid is often supplied by magical helpers, such as an old crone or old wise man or wizard. In my case, I had the spirit guides, who I called the teachers. The separation or call marks the recognition that the old world is being left behind and new experiences are on their way. This possibly makes for a new world or a new self – a metamorphosis – a willingness to die to the ego-self (Campbell, 1949).

Initiation: The Journey

As the journey continues, the hero faces trials and tribulations, confronts monsters and slays dragons, and encounters many obstacles that are not always easy to overcome (Campbell, 1949). On a deeper psychic level, the hero faces the process of "dissolving, transcending or transmuting the infantile images of (his) personal past" (Campbell, 1949, p. 101). This stage involves the purification of the self, and where the senses are cleansed and humbled. Energies and interest are concentrated on transcendental things, but

… the question is still in balance: Can the ego put itself to death? ... The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and perilous path of initiatory conquest and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and monetary glimpses of the wonderful land (Campbell, 1949, p. 109).

The hero comes to see past life's dualities and his mind is opened to "the inscrutable presence which exits, not primarily as 'good' or 'bad' with his childlike human convenience, but as law and image of the nature of being" (Campbell, 1949, p. 114). As the journey continues there may be some temptation which the hero needs to overcome to allow him to continue his journey. Was Alex part of this temptation? Or was he a dragon to overcome?

At some point the hero must confront whatever holds the ultimate power in his or her life. Often depicted as the father, it really is about the father principle, which reflects the old order and established truths. "In psychological terms this presents the challenge of throwing off the dictates of the controlling superego, the internalised moral code, which is the negative aspect of the father archetype" (Le Grice, 2013, Atonement with the Father, para 4). External authority and 'thou shalt' is replaced by an inner moral code and authority (Le Grice, 2013). What is really required is the release of the attachment to the ego, which is difficult. The dying of the old self, the old ego, makes way for the ultimate boon and the goal of the journey – the birth of the new self.

The hero obtains the ultimate prize or boon, and in Campbell's terms, the new self. When I consider my 'boon', I am left with my newly discovered soul-self, my Self. And if nothing else came out of this whole process, then to me, this is the core of the matter.

The Return

Returning home is not always that easy. It can be the most difficult part of the entire journey (Hartman & Zimmerhoff, 2009). Sometimes the hero does not know when to return, or the hero does

not want to return and have to be fetched, such as in my case when my parents came to fetch me and arranged a new teaching job for me. The question also arises: what is one supposed to do with the boon? There may be an expectation to share new knowledge with the rest of the tribe that stayed behind, but there is also self-doubt and an unwillingness to face the skepticism (Moody & Carroll, 1997). Ultimately, it is up to the individual to decide how and what to do with his or her experiences, and to be ready for the next journey. Although there are three distinct phases, the hero's journey is not a strictly linear model:

> Although it obviously take place in linear sequence through time, the nature of the journey is essentially cyclical … the stage of the monomyth do not occur just once, but is repeated at different levels within the larger heroic adventure that is your life. You will likely experience many 'calls to adventure' (Le Grice, 2013, Chapter 5, Beginning of the Journey).

Maps

Every journey, even a hero's journey, could use a good map. It was exactly what I did not have. I was lost without any idea of what I was doing or where I was going. That confusion stayed with me for a long time until I found the writings of Ken Wilber. I then thought that perhaps I could use a map retrospectively and try to plot my journey after I had come home. This is what I did. Wilber's advantage over other spiritual development models was that it very deliberately integrated Western and Eastern traditions, as well as psychological development models. It seemed to be, at least for me, a sensible and encompassing map to trace my own experiences. I found Wilber's map to be quite useful and in my view accurately described and explained my own experiences. Throughout this process, however, I was mindful of the critique of his model – especially concerning his hierarchical and stage-like structure. Do I set myself up in an elitist position? Do I consider myself 'better than' somebody else when it comes to spiritual development? Is there any value judgement on my side

when I consider the development stages of others? These were the questions which I grappled with throughout.

On the other hand, Wilber's is a growth and development model, something which I personally was always interested in. I wanted to see how far I could push my own personal growth, and I have worked hard at it throughout my life. But it is a personal process, and I try not to place any value judgement on anybody else who is not interested in such a process.

But there is an uneasiness that people may feel when we start to position people hierarchically when it comes to God-Spirit or the Ultimate. Who is the most faithful? Who translates teachings the most truthfully? Who does God love the best? I call it the gold-star approach. Yet, I don't believe God is in the business of comparing people to each other, and people to any preconceived ideas that must be followed. We would not all be so different then, each with our own strengths, weaknesses and interests. We all develop and grow at our own pace and challenges. But perhaps Wilber (2000b) is right when he says that once a development map is known, people tend to grow at a faster and more focused pace. Based on my own experiences, I tend to agree.

As for other possible maps, I will share a few thoughts: I did not connect with Jung's individuation model when it comes to the transpersonal. I, like Wilber, believe that depth psychology only goes so far. It is necessary to incorporate the personal subconscious and elements of the collective unconscious for a healthy sense of self – especially when it comes to the shadow work, as Wilber (2017) calls it. But it does not go far enough. Second, the neo-Jungians would like to elevate Jung's model to a spiritual and transpersonal model in search of a transpersonal Self. In the process, for example in the case of Washburn (2004), they elevate the pre-personal, subconscious and archetypal material to transpersonal elements (Wilber, 1997). Washburn's (2003) model requires a U-turn at the time of the existential crisis (such as I had in the beginning of my journey) – to return to Dynamic Ground as a regression in service of transcendence. Based on my own personal

experience, which is all I can talk to, I did not encounter or experience any real lower archetypal figures or images, and did not deal with unusual unconscious material more than usual. A study by Thomas, Brewer, Kraus and Rosen (1993) investigated spiritually developed individuals to ascertain which of the two models, Wilber or Washburn, would best describe spiritual development. In this study, evidence pointed to Wilber's stage-like progression.

I found Assagioli's work to be insightful, and consider it to be an accurate psycho-spiritual development model – as far as my experiences are concerned. In his *Psychosynthesis* process, Assagioli proposes two development goals: The integration of the personal self (similar to Jung's individuation process) and a further developmental goal – the integration of the Transpersonal Self or Soul. Assagioli, *contra* Jung, makes provision for a super collective unconscious which is where the aspects of the transpersonal Self that need to be integrated can be found. Although I did not know about Assagioli's work when I started this thesis, I have come to value his model and would like to explore it more in terms of its practical application.

Grof (1998) built his model on clinical experience where he experimented with mind-altering substances and breath work. My experience does not relate to his model, except to say that I have always been sceptical of any mind-altering drugs that induce spiritual experiences. I have little doubt that such experiences exist (Harris, 2014; Taylor, 2017). However, in my experience, dealing with any influx of spiritual energies without adequate preparation is a psychological risk. I found that I could deal with the disorientation and loosening of self-structures only because I had a very strong sense of self at the outset. I had to ground and affirm myself many times when I was concerned about my mental health, and I could do it because I was adequately prepared psychologically. In addition, I am concerned that psychedelic use may be what some transpersonal psychologists refer to as a 'spiritual bypass' (Boucouvalas, 2016), trying to avoid dealing with unresolved personal problems

or simply trying to escape reality. This is not what spiritual development should be. In fact, such spiritual experience may make unresolved issues worse.

In the final assessment, I valued Wilber's approach and I found his map to be useful in tracing my own journey.

The problem with rule breakers

My friends would ask me why I became involved with Alex – it so outside of what we consider 'normal'. We *inter alia* consider ourselves to be law-abiding citizens, we live by certain moral codes, and we have values which we stand by and teach young ones. I gave this a great deal of thought, and the answer is complex and multi-layered. The answer starts off with me at the start of this journey and I was being drawn to a poem by Kahlil Gibran – always a favourite of mine. His *The Prophet* is probably one of my own foundational moral texts. Here is an extract:

On Crime and Punishment

Then one of the judges of the city stood forth and said, Speak to us of Crime and Punishment.

And he answered, saying:

It is when your spirit goes wandering upon the wind,

That you, alone and unguarded, commit a wrong unto others and therefore unto yourself.

And for that wrong committed must you knock and wait a while unheeded at the gate of the blessed.

…

Oftentimes have I heard you speak of one who commits a wrong as though he were not one of you, but a stranger unto you and an intruder upon your world.

But I say that even as the holy and the righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you,

So the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.

And as a single leaf turns not yellow but with the silent knowledge of the whole tree,

So the wrong-doer cannot do wrong without the hidden will of you all.

Like a procession you walk together towards your god-self.

You are the way and the wayfarers.

And when one of you falls down he falls for those behind him, a caution against the stumbling stone.

Ay, and he falls for those ahead of him, who though faster and surer of foot, yet removed not the stumbling stone.

… (Gibran, 1923)

I mused about this piece of wisdom for some time, not knowing that I would be confronted with this scenario some months later. Following Gibran, I thought it would be wrong for me to judge and dismiss people who made mistakes, even criminal offenses. Those thoughts were uppermost in my mind when I encountered Alex. But there were other reasons: Besides the fact that he was a joy to be around, I think what drew us together initially was that we were both 'outsiders', that is, "those people who are judged by others to be deviant and thus stand outside the circle of 'normal' members of the group" (Becker, 1966, p. 15). Alex, because he was considered to be a criminal, and I because I broke all kinds of social rules and expectations. We were both outside the city gates, so to speak. Even if our transgressions were materially far apart, both of us were left as the 'other 'in other people's perceptions.

What Alex found out the hard way was that once you committed a criminal offense, you are perceived to be a person without 'respect for the law'. Becker points out that "[t]reating a person as though he was generally rather than specifically deviant produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in the image that people have of

him" (1966, p. 34). If he hides his past from business associates, he is deemed untrustworthy, to say the least. If he was near a missing handbag, he is considered to be the thief. Everything that goes against the message of Gibran, I thought.

When we were children, we used to play 'cops and robbers'. The players were divided into two groups. When a robber was killed, he had to roll over and play dead and was out of the game. But when you have players like Alex, who refuses to play dead and who gets up and continues playing, it badly distresses the group members – who then 'killed' him. He was playing against the rules. Even if they try to kick him out of the game, he just ignores them and their objections and continues playing. Other robbers notice that he is getting away with it, and they then also refuse to play dead. Soon the whole game is dysfunctional and that cannot be allowed, can it?

So, how do we deal with rule breakers in our society? We can imprison them. Another option is to shame them. Wilber, for example, has an issue that shame has all but disappeared from our culture. He ascribes it to overzealous therapists who circulated theories that shame in any form is bad. He sees shame as "a crucial part of any well-functioning culture, acting as it does, as a filter between the lower sub-human drives of a person (for food, sex, and power) and the higher drives of love, care …" (Wilber, 2017, Chapter 9, Dysfunctions of the 1st tier structure views, Infrared archaic, para 6). People should be made to feel ashamed when they put their own selfish and primal needs before others. Wilber may be right, especially when shame is used in a socio-cultural context as a moral sanction (Raba, 2017). However, when it comes to ex-convicts like Alex, it is even doubtful that shame is a predictor for non-recidivism (Hosser & Windzio, 2008).

I have an aversion to shame, especially as "an intimate experience wherein the subject becomes an object of external norms and thus loses his inner freedom and autonomy" (Raba, 2017, p. 47). It is a debilitating emotion leading to feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem, and alienation (Shaughnessy, 2018). It is not to be confused with guilt – when someone did something wrong and

that wrongful act is judged and some reparations can perhaps be made (Kaufman, 1974). Shame refers to the person not being good enough, or acceptable, and not conforming to others' expectations (Shaughnessy, 2018). "Shame is the experience of being fundamentally a bad person" (Kaufman, 1974, p. 369). When it is internalised it creates great psychological pain and influences self-identity (Kaufman, 1974; Brown, 2006).

I have had to fight those same shameful feelings, although my transgressions were more subtle. I did not break written laws (except being associated with Alex, perhaps). Instead, I transgressed against what my immediate society and culture expected regarding religious values and beliefs. Some friends and family would look at me, and when I said something about my spirit guides or used similar spiritual talk, they would avert their eyes and change the subject. Sometimes it was because it was uncomfortable to hear, but sometimes it was because they loved me and hated seeing and hearing me that way. Perhaps I was mentally and psychologically unwell? It left with me the feeling that I was not acceptable, and not good enough anymore. I therefore had to struggle with these shameful feelings, and fought hard not to take it personally. I did not want Alex to also internalise these shameful feelings. As Raba (2017, p. 39) states: "… shame is genuine only if the individual approves the external standards which define right and wrong. Without this internal acceptance an individual perceives herself as a mere object of moral laws but cannot have an emotional reaction to them."

I am not unique: A few studies have shown that many people who have had spiritual or non-ordinary experiences are reluctant to talk about them for fear of being disbelieved, ridiculed or thought to be mentally unwell (Brown, 2000; Porath, 2006). Porath investigated ten participants' experiences who had an unintentional or unexpected mystical encounter, and states (2006, pp. 216–217) that

… people who have had mystical experiences are aware of the potential for stigmatization if they share their experiences within certain social environments, including their own families. What is paradoxical is that most of my participants also alluded to their mystical experience as being the most profound or most positive experience of their life.

Such fears and concerns often makes spiritual growth unnecessarily complicated and difficult.

The Afrikaner and I?

The question arises – to what extent do I still identify as an Afrikaner? Do I share a cultural identity as to "common values, customs, practices and experiences" (Delport & Olivier, 2003, p. 180)? After my 'process' I ended up in the old Afrikaner heartland and previous seat of power – Pretoria, the executive capital of South Africa. I then worked in a national government department. As part of the government's deliberate attempts to make their workforce more reflective of population demographics and to appoint and promote people of colour, I was not left untouched. I was forced to make sense of what it means to be an Afrikaans speaking woman (perceived to be an Afrikaner) in the changed dispensation. I also needed to make sense of the Afrikaner's history without indulging in what Steyn (2012) called a willful ignorance – an ignorance contract. There could not be a pretense that I was not complicit in the subjugation of other race groups in South Africa or at the very least, that I had not benefitted from such a privileged position. It has not always been easy, and I still have a complex mix of feelings. But do I want to reconstruct myself as "victim of marginalisation and embrace a defensive and exclusivist ethnicity" (Blaser & Van der Westhuizen, 2012, p. 386), as apparently some Afrikaners do? No, not really.

I am not alone in the endeavour to make sense of being an Afrikaner. For example, Delport and Olivier (2003) reported a mixture of negative, neutral and positive feelings towards their Afrikaner identity among Afrikaner female students. Lombard (2020) self-reflexively looked at what it means to be an Afrikaner woman, and found that she acquired her views on race and gender and

class from her socio-historical milieu and its role-players. And so did I. My Afrikaner identity, to the extent that it exists, was formed in a very different socio-historical environment, so creating a very different experience of that identity compared to that experienced in other parts of South Africa.

We can take the perspective that Afrikaner's worldview needs to be 'decolonised'. From this perspective decolonisation would mean a change from a Eurocentric, Whites-as-superior worldview to a pluralistic and inclusive worldview. It requires the inclusivity of Black African voices, opinions and knowledge systems. It requires that the Afrikaners as colonisers, especially during the Apartheid years, need to actively engage in such a decolonisation process. It is argued that white South Africans, and the Afrikaner, are still stuck in colonial ways of thinking, observing and doing. We have not yet engaged with the relationships with our countrymen, and revised our own identity as South Africans (Quayle & Verwey, 2012; Painter, 2015). We have yet to move from the post-apartheid era which started in 1994 with its focus on reconciliation and forgiveness – the so-called 'rainbowism' – to a deeper, more structural transformation (Greffrath, 2016).

Studies have shown that there is still a substantial proportion of the Afrikaner that is unwilling and unable to come to terms with the loss of power after 1994 (Steyn, 2004; Blaser, & Van der Westhuizen, 2012). "The nationalist ideology that shaped the old South Africa, like all ethnocentric narratives, placed the Afrikaner in the centre. They were the most important population group; they were in charge" (Steyn, 2004, p. 154), but now they have been ousted and side-lined.

Van der Westhuizen (2013) looked at White Afrikaans speaking women between 30 and 60 and found that ideas about White superiority and Black inferiority still influence their interpretation about the past and the present. Steyn (2004), in her studies on Whiteness, found that Afrikaners engage in 'White talk' as they deal with the dislocation of their identity, and in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves: Afrikaners cannot deny that Apartheid was put in place in their name, as and such they are accountable for it. These strategies of White talk is used to justify their special place

and previous history. The 'myth' of the Afrikaner has collapsed, and instead a new myth is being constructed to "keep their worldview (hierarchical) intact and to sustain high levels of material, psychological and emotional comfort in the community" (Steyn, 2004, p. 151). As Steyn (2004) highlights, strategies in the ethnic discourse, for example, incudes talking about the "good old days of way back when" (p. 152), "new name changes abuse the country's history" (p. 155), and "White Afrikaners are the victims yet again, as always" (p. 156). Ethnic markers in such White talk highlights predominantly the issue of language, but also Christianity, Afrikaner history, rugby and literature/art.

Van der Westhuizen (2018) refers to the opprobrium of the Afrikaner and advocates the encouragement of that condemnation and shame in order for the Afrikaner to acknowledge the damage they have done to other race and ethnic groups in South Africa. "White individual's shame before the eyes of Black people opens the possibility of restoring and creating social ties in ways that breach apartheid categorisations" (Van der Westhuizen, 2018, p. 3). I still occasionally meet people who reflect the values of the quintessential Afrikaner. I have to ask if shaming (this time relating to shame at an inter-personal level and as a moral sanction) the Afrikaner works, and will work, in an attempt to reconcile them with their past and force them into nation-building? I am not convinced that shaming the Afrikaner works or will work. I also do not think that shaming has any good long-term prospects. In my interaction with conservative, White Afrikaans speaking people, who still consider themselves to be Afrikaners, I see very little evidence of such shame. Instead, I see a new resolve to make sure that their group 'survives' despite all pressure, and to find their own solutions and do things for themselves (for example, the creation of the Afrikaans workers' union Solidariteit); people have migrated 'inwardly', finding their own safe spaces in the larger community (Blaser & Van der Westhuizen, 2012). That earlier described stubbornness and obstinacy is still very much part of the make-up of Afrikaners. Inducing guilt which allows for penance by means of reparation might be a better strategy (Brown, 2006; Raba, 2017). In a later paper, Van der Westhuizen (2019) uses a

different strategy to urge Afrikaners to reflect upon how the system of Apartheid dehumanised other groups and left them with pain and humiliations. We should remember the past and be accountable, and not just expect people of colour people to automatically forgive and move on. She calls upon Afrikaners to remember a shared humanity and urges them to cultivate empathy to connect to others. Importantly, considering the Reformed Churches, and especially the Dutch Reformed Church's complicity in the Apartheid system, Van der Westhuizen reminds the Afrikaner of those church leaders who spoke and acted against apartheid, for example, Beyers Naude and Albert Geyser and urge them to do the same. This last point is important to consider because in the literature on the Afrikaner's difficulties in adjusting to their new identity and place in the world, it is occasionally overlooked that the Afrikaner was never a homogenous group, and there was, within their ranks, a substantial resistance to the Afrikaner nationalist project (Giliomee, 2003).

While noting some of the Afrikaner recalcitrance and after reading Wilber, I believe that South Africa, despite having a constitution with a strong focus on individual rights, inclusivity and the protection of minorities, is home to many different ethnic groups who value their heritage, history, language, and beliefs. It is still, in Wilberian terms, although multicultural, mostly an amber mythic society with ethnocentric worldviews. My cultural group is still the only important group and everybody else is the Other. We may use green, pluralistic language like non-racialism, diversity, inclusivity, the Rainbow Nation – but many in the different groups are still ethnocentric.

How do we encourage or foster a more modern, even post-modern structure of consciousness with a more worldcentric worldview? In my opinion, and speaking from an Afrikaner perspective, one of the reasons we stay so entrenched in the ethnocentric worldview is because of a conservative, fundamentalist religion (Oosthuizen, 2018). As my earlier conversations indicate, there are still many people who cling to the pre-modern interpretation of the Bible.

Afrikaner Christian churches can broaden their approach to accommodate modern rational

and post-modern thinking within traditional theology, and there are many theologians and writers that posit new approaches within the church (for example, Spong, 2001; Du Toit & Spangenberg, 2002; Spangenberg, 2004). Wilber (2006, 2017) advocates a religious 'conveyer-belt' approach in the major religious traditions. He estimates that 70 percent of the world still functions at an ethnocentric stage of development, and that religions own the beliefs and ideas that people prescribe to. To assist in the growth of the spiritual intelligence line, religions should therefore explore modern (orange) and postmodern, pluralistic (green) and even integral (teal) waves of development. According to Wilber, there are individuals in the religions that are already beyond the amber ethnocentric waves and more should be done to incorporate their levels of development. Religious teaching should take place at appropriate ages, and appropriate stages. There is some evidence of the different stages of spiritual thinking already in the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church (Steyn, 2005). However, the centre of gravity has not moved from the fundamentalist, conservative discourse, and therefore the ethnocentric stage of development (Steyn, 2005; Oosthuizen, 2018).

Religions can and should help people develop beyond ethnocentric worldviews, and in particular the Afrikaner churches should do so we ever want to be part of a pluralistic society. As Wilber states:

> [A]n individual needs to move from ethnocentric beliefs to worldcentric beliefs … This allows the individual to adopt a postconventional, worldcentric moral stance and not just an ethnocentric us-versus-them mentality. For an individual with a Christian-faith background, the leap comes in realizing that Jesus Christ can be my personal saviour, but others may find a different path that leads to salvation – that the Holy Spirit speaks to men and women in different ways, in different tongues, in different lands, but is fully present nonetheless (Wilber, 2006, p. 199).

This development of spiritual intelligence – or Growing Up – is not always apparent and is very difficult for people to do, because they do not necessarily know or understand that there are several possible stages ahead of them. Also, Oosthuizen (2018, p. 154) writes: "Few people understand the depression, anxiety, and many other unnamed and unbearable emotions that overwhelm many people's psyche when they lose their religion" (my translation). Such anxiety and fear can be prevented by using Wilber's conveyer-belt, structured approach.

In the final analysis, I have concluded that I do not reject my identity as an Afrikaner such as it is – I have simply outgrown it. I now see myself as part of the global community, a South African woman that happens to be White and Afrikaans speaking in my private and social settings. My worldview has changed to a more integral one, where room is made for all. Everybody is right to some extent, and all have valuable contributions to make.

Enlightenment

At the beginning of my journey, my teachers promised me enlightenment. Did I arrive at that?

As I have explained in my theoretical framework, there are different goals in different religious and spiritual traditions and paths. I started this journey with a more theistic orientation. I conceptualised God in a broad and impersonal way, and my personal goal was to find what this God is, and how they or it works. I was not going to explore via any religious or spiritual traditions. I believed that I could do it myself. In addition, I had no real idea about the nature of the Eastern traditions' idea of enlightenment and non-dual awareness. Having worked through Wilber's works, I have a better understanding what these concepts mean, even if I do not always understand the finer nuances of the Eastern traditions and religions. There are descriptions throughout the various traditions that I have found useful to make sense of my own experiences.

What I discovered is perhaps what makes my story unique. Several writers and commentators argue that we experience what we expect from the onset. We interpret our experiences in terms of

our religious and cultural background, and I cannot argue with that. However, in my case, I deliberately dismantled my preconceived ideas, as much as I was able to, and I also tried to keep an open mind.

The disadvantage of such an approach was that I did not know what I was dealing with, and I did not know how to make sense of the experience. That aspect left me quite confused and disorientated – not about the knowledge gained and experiences, but how to position them in the world of knowledge. I still wondered and pondered about it, right up until I started with this research and read widely about diverse opinions and theories. I was then in a better position to explain my own experiences and the new-found knowledge.

I have come to experience non-dual awareness, where any separation between me and Spirit dissolves. I am part of everything in Spirit, and everything is part of me. Subject and object simply fall away into a Pure Awareness or Emptiness. All thoughts, all emotions, and all awareness as a separate being fall away. However, there are other times when I connect with God-Spirit, Source – and the same experiences or lack of experiences are present. It is only when I pull back or pull out from that state, that I realise what had just happened. I was in the presence and was part of something so big, so powerful, that when I come out of it, I feel completely overwhelmed – and yet so at peace. For me, non-dual awareness (or enlightenment) and merging and connecting with God-Spirit or Source, or the Absolute, are not necessarily different. It may feel different in content, and I have also come to believe that which you experience stems from your expectations. For me, there is no right or wrong way, or lower or higher way to experience any of it. I believe it is the same experience which is manifested for each person, individually.

Underlying all my interaction with my spirit teachers, was the knowledge and awareness that they were part of something bigger. They were part of the interaction and connection with the Source of all things. But this Source was not the super being I would have anticipated him or her to be.

Instead of a judge or a father, I discovered that beyond our physical reality lies a vast, rich and complicated system, made up of infinite dimensions and experiences, and too big for my human brain to process and box into words and explanations. For my own understanding, I think of this 'God-system' as concentric rings: us in our physical bodies, as ice cubes on the outskirts, with Spirit that functions as water and at the highest end functioning as steam, and with Source, the fire core of it all.

When we put ourselves into a deep contemplation or meditation, part of this ice cube starts to melt. We become more 'watery', slowly immersing inwards through water and then steam until we reach the deepest and purest core, or Source. By then there is no form, no substance, simply the purest of energy or fire if you will. The main difference between me and Wilber's terminology as that he refers to this God-system as Spirit, and I make a finer distinction between Godhead and Spirit as different concepts. I still maintain the concept of the Holy Spirit from my childhood religion, Christianity. I believe that Spirit interacts and communicates with us and guides us towards wisdom and insight about all things spiritual, however we want to conceive of it.

As impersonal as this all sounds – it is not. There is a part of this God-system, this Presence, the Source, and the Guidance (which I had come to realise includes my own higher self or soul) that individuates just for me – as it does for anybody else. I visualise it as beam of light streaming from the innermost core through all the multidimensional concentric rings, until it reaches me and envelops me. It is a special and divine channel – designed for each of us individually. For me, the only difficulty (as stupid as this may sound) is what to call the God-system in my prayers. 'Dear Lord' does not work so well anymore because I no longer think of God as the Big Guy – and 'Hey you' seems disrespectful. God probably does not mind what I call him or her or it, not having an ego as we humans do. And I believe that 'a rose by any other name is still a rose'.

But, somehow, this enlightenment turned out to be different from what I had imagined. I do not want to minimise this extraordinary experience, but after many involvements it has taken on an aspect of normalcy. It is a bit 'boring'. Not boring in the sense that there is nothing going on – there are infinite manifestations. But I think the boredom derives from the fact that beyond, in Spirit, there are no emotions, because emotions are essentially a human construct. If I want to stay in Spirit, it means that I need to let go of emotions, the highs and the lows. Love and joy is an innate Spirit experience, but it is a state of being and it is not emotional in essence. Being human, we translate those states of being into feelings of love, compassion, happiness, joy and excitement. And we recognise them only because we are familiar with the opposite – hate, heartlessness, sadness, hurt, fear and anger. I am still working from a human perspective, with a human need for all the emotional interactions and interesting differences that make up what being human is all about. I am not ready – perhaps I will never be – for the perfect stillness and all-knowing Empty consciousness; that is, the Whiteness before it splits into the earth colour spectrum. There is plenty of time for all of that when I leave this body and return home.

For now, I intend to navigate my way through life's difficulties consciously and not get caught up and dragged down by unnecessary dramas. At best, I want to maintain an equilibrium and enjoy the best of life's experiences that are offered to me as a human here on earth. Perhaps the greatest gifts to me have been this: a sense of freedom, and a new perspective.

Yet, looking back, for every event, insight, and experience that I gained along the way, I choose a coloured light that I associate with that experience. I string the lights into different necklaces and drape them around myself from head to toe. If I glimpse myself in the mirror with all the different-coloured lights switched on, I resemble a Christmas tree – as my teachers told me. And if I squint in a certain way, allowing the coloured lights to blend and blur, they seem to merge into a shimmering whiteness.

When I remove all the emotions, the dramas, and my ideas of suffering and pain, I am left with a deep state of joy and love. It is a lightness of spirit that lifts and expands. It becomes an incandescent 'candyfloss', which envelops me and fills me up. I become untouchable, simply floating through and above life's everyday worries and challenges. It is a special state of being; it is the pure essence of who I really am.

I am travelling light.

PART 5:

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the study was to provide a more in-depth understanding of a spiritual development process, to assist those interested in the topic. This would include psychotherapists wanting to help clients in need of assistance and guidance during such a process, or spiritual seekers.

I therefore had three main research questions: (1) What does a personal and individual process entail when one is considered spiritual but not religious? (2) What does such a process entail, and in my Afrikaner context? (3) What extent can such a process be conceptualised in terms of and mapped onto Ken Wilber's spiritual development theories? The answers to these questions are addressed in term of my specific objectives below.

Key Findings

In this chapter the key findings of this exploratory study are presented and interpreted.

The objectives of this study were:

1: Explore and describe the spiritual development process on account of personal experience

- Spiritual development is an uneven, sometimes chaotic and destructive process. New perspectives require the dismantling of old perspectives, often accompanied by the destruction of everything that is held dear. Roles, ego and previously held expectations, whether from self or others, need to be let go of.

- The spiritual development process is undertaken in isolation without the understanding of others. It is left to the individual self to navigate the process and to deal with negative feelings such as rejection and shame. Except for basic human needs – and there is clear evidence of family and friends who were extremely helpful in this regard – limited spiritual guidance or psychological help is available.

- It is an individual process. There may be broad overarching themes such as old-self-new-self or expressed as a journey, but it is a very personal process. Each individual experiences the spiritual development process in his or her own unique way.

- It is a transformational process: higher and further perspectives are developed and cultivated, which are more inclusive of other perspectives.

2: Explore how spiritual development is influenced by societal and cultural contextual factors

- The cultural context in which spiritual development occurs plays an important role, whether acknowledged or not. It affects how easy or meaningful it is. Acceptance by the cultural community, or lack thereof, facilitates such a process.

- The ease of spiritual development in a cultural context depends on the culture's own development – that is where its centre of gravity lies. If spiritual development takes place in a magical-mythical context with an ethnocentric worldview, it tends to think its point of view and beliefs are the only correct ones and is unable to make room for further stages of development. It creates tension and adversity and may induce feelings of shame.

3: Contextualise, conceptualise and explain spiritual development in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory.

Wilber's Integral Theory provides a comprehensive map of the territory I traversed. By tracking and conceptualising my own spiritual development. I found little that I could disagree with. I found Wilber's exposition of spiritual development as four different aspects to be useful in my own explorations. These aspects are Growing Up, Waking up, Cleaning up, and Showing Up:

Where **Growing Up** is concerned, I agree with Wilber that spiritual development is dependent on cognitive development but cannot be reduced to only cognitive development. There must be different factors at play to explain why highly functioning individuals adhere to less developed spiritual thought. Wilber's explanation that spiritual intelligence is but one line of development

separate from other developmental lines may explain this phenomenon. In keeping with this line of thinking, I used James Fowler's Theory of Stages of Faith, which is based partly on cognitive development – to trace my earlier spiritual development in the first-tier structures of consciousness as per Wilber's suggestion. Fowler's theory held true for me until his sixth stage of faith development, which is very theoretical and had little practical application to my experiences.

From the second-tier structures of consciousness onwards, I returned to Wilber's stage model of spiritual development. From the period of self-actualisation at the start of my journey, Wilber's teal and turquoise, which denote integral thinking, rang true and were adequate.

I found evidence of a third-tier structure of consciousness with its main characteristic that we start living as spiritual beings. At this point I not only knew conceptually that I had a soul, but it became a real lived experience with a new perspective. I had integrated my soul and my spirit guides to the extent that they were no longer 'outside' of myself. In Wilberian terms, I would be the meta-mind third-tier structure of consciousness. In addition, the subsequent structure, the Overmind (the structure plus the causal or Witnessing state) was beginning to present in my life.

My **Waking Up** experiences started during the later structures of development of the first tier at the centauric stage and became more marked and noticeable in the second-tier structures. As Wilber describes, the energies of the psychic state started filtering down into my ordinary consciousness, for example when I started having prophetic dreams and heard my name being called in the middle of the night. A full-blown waking up state started later in the second-tier structures of consciousness when I was called to further my spiritual development.

When it comes to meditative experiences, my Waking Up experiences correlate with Wilber's meditative state-stages. However, possibly due to their rapid development in a relatively short space and time, I did not clearly notice the discrete state-stages from psychic to subtle, to causal, to non-

dual awareness during my first focused meditation endeavours. For me it seemed to occur simultaneously then. The stages were marked and followed a clear progression as Wilber described, only once the meditative states had stabilised.

When I consider Wilber's **Cleaning Up** with my own experiences, I concur that 'shadow work' must be done to ensure healthy spiritual development. Exploration and cleaning up of beliefs that no longer serve growth must be pursued as these beliefs my hamper the Growing Up part of spiritual development.

Regarding the debate between Washburn and Wilber about a 'regression in service of the transcendent', I found no evidence for Washburn's (2003) model. At no stage, not even at the centauric stage with an existential crisis where such regressive experiences are likely to be found according to Washburn, did I feel or experience regressive episodes. I had no experiences that could be termed as encounters with the collective unconscious and mythical archetypes of any sort – not even in meditative states. Instead, my experiences were of a transcendent 'upward' type, more in keeping with Wilber's growth model. Healing, for me, was a very conscious and deliberate process and did not require an involuntary break down, nor was any type of spiritual emergency induced. I therefore concur with Thomas et al.'s (1993) study which found evidence that Wilber's model for transcendence is more accurate than Washburn's.

Wilber's **Showing Up** aspect relies on the integral life practices which include all four quadrants being explored and lived continuously. However, I found that this approach may be too theoretical and does not include sufficient nuance. My own experiences show that Life sometimes requires you to *show up* in situations which may not be of one's own choosing. Instead, it becomes an opportunity to contribute to someone or something else, which in turn often creates an opportunity for growth and development for one's self. This aspect was quite well illustrated and explored in my

own experiences, for example my involvement with an incarcerated person and my parents' and family's involvement and their commitment to me.

Limitations and Further Research

There are limitations to this study. It is an autoethnographic study where the focus was on my own experiences. This automatically implies that there is a subjectivity involved – one cannot be completely objective about one's own life. I have taken care to include as many perspectives as possible, yet I admit that I could not, and in some cases care not to, include all possible perspectives in all situations. This creates an inevitable bias and subjectivity in the study. Furthermore, the study remains the experiences and perspectives of one individual and therefore cannot be generalised to the general population.

A further limitation is that I am situated in an Afrikaner cultural background specific to South Africa, and that does not necessarily translate into other cultures. Furthermore, a Christian religious background which initially drove my spiritual development to some extent, may not be translatable to other religious environments.

My own cultural background and situatedness is orientated towards Western European culture. My perspective does not adequately include other cultures' perspectives, specifically indigenous perspectives. On occasion this was because I could not speak authoritatively on other cultures or have an informed opinion, or because of lack of space and the restraint of the project's scope. This, although a limitation, also creates clarity about further research which could be done on this topic.

For example, a research question which could be explored is to what extent experiences of spirit guides and channelling have in common with experiences of callings and practices of indigenous traditional healers. This may be especially relevant in the South African context where

such practices and the belief in them are prevalent. In the same vein, the spiritual experiences and expectations of Black South Africans should be explored, especially a possible dissonance between their historical and cultural heritage and lived experiences in a society that is often Christian religion-based and Western culture-orientated.

I was very ambivalent throughout the project about the inclusion of Afrikaner politics and political turmoil in my story. Not that it was not relevant in the cultural context, but it risked overshadowing the story and the focus on religiosity of the Afrikaner, even if they inextricably linked. Also, I am very political aware, so is my family, and the political aspects could easily have dominated the discussions when it came to the Afrikaner. It became a delicate balance between doing an ethnography on the Afrikaner, and my own spiritual development journey within the context of the Afrikaner (which in all honesty could have been any ethnocentric group with a fundamentalist stance on religion). Further, there have always been many political streams within the Afrikaner community, but they all have a religiosity in common, which is what I chose to focus on.

Third, to explain my political experiences would have required explanations of the history of Afrikaner politics, which is outside the scope of this thesis. This lack of political perspective can therefore also be seen as a limitation to this study.

Further, as I have explained in my story, my parents raised us to be gender neutral – no specific roles or expectations were required for either myself or my brother. Consequently I navigate life quite 'gender blind'. In this autoethnography I therefore did not consider spiritual development in terms of gender. It was a study about my own experiences only, and I did not consider the role that gender relations played in my story any possible differences pertaining to spiritual development between genders. As such, my gender blindness can be considered as a limitation to this study, but may also provide an awareness of possible gender differences which may inform future research.

Despite these legitimate concerns, I believe this research adds new understanding of an exploratory process concerning spiritual development.

Contributions to Research

At the end of an article discussing spiritual development models, Friedman et al. (2010, p. 90) posed questions about issues that are still to be addressed or solved, *inter alia*, "[h]ow might spiritual development be significantly influenced by historical and cultural context?" My study contributed to addressing this question. I have shown that the historical and cultural context play a significant role in the development of spirituality – not only in terms of religious upbringing, but such a context can stimulate or hamper spiritual development.

Friedman et al. (2010, p. 90) also raised the following question: "What innovative or new methods might be created or utilized to study spiritual development?" My contribution to this is in the novel and innovative research methodology – an autoethnography. Such a research method helped me to conduct my explorations in a personalised and present manner.

The main contribution of this study lies in the fact that my story demonstrated spirituality and spiritual development in practice. It showed that although spiritual development can be tumultuous, it is not something outside of the human experience, and is part of human development. My story focused on this one particular aspect. The study further showed how spirituality and psychology intersect, and should be able to provide some insight and understanding to psychotherapists who are interested in this type of development or have to deal with clients going through a similar process. To this end, I present a few guidelines to assist psychologists in practice:

- Sensitivity to the client's spiritual questions and experiences is recommended. Some of these experiences may look different from the norm, but they are unique to each individual.

- Care should be taken not to impose the counsellor's own spiritual belief system and worldview on the client. To ensure that it does not happen, a pluralist approach which acknowledges multiple and diverse religious and spiritual realities is encouraged. At the very least, an awareness of the counsellor's own worldview should be developed. Mindfulness is encouraged of possible ethical clashes that may arise when controversial or problematic subjects, *inter alia*, divorce, abortion, homosexuality are dealt with.

- However, it is accepted that the counsellor may not always fully understand others' spiritual beliefs and experiences. In such cases, empathy and an embracing stance are required, and engaging with the client's reality – working with their beliefs, convictions and values – is recommended.

- An awareness should be developed of the distinction between spiritual *emergence* – that is, the slow, gradual development of spiritual experiences and beliefs, and spiritual *emergency* – an abrupt shift in experiences and beliefs which may present themselves as crisis-like phenomena, even psychotic episodes. Care should be taken not to pathologise these experiences straightaway, even more so when medication is considered.

- Familiarity with the different spiritual development models should be developed. It will assist the growth path of the client and it will provide a 'map' forward. Even if a stage-like model is rejected, the client can develop a new spiritual understanding as possible growth scenarios are explored.

- Some clients may have expectations about their own spirituality – what they should believe, how they should act – and may believe themselves to fall short of their own and others' expectations. Reassurances of their own unique spiritual paths and the removal of any judgements of themselves may be helpful.

- However, an awareness of the concept of *spiritual bypassing* should be developed – when the client uses their spirituality as an excuse not to grow psychologically, or to rationalise unproductive behaviour.

In summary, this study should help alleviate suspicion and scepticism in the psychological community when it comes to spirituality and should prevent the possible pathologising of spiritual experiences and concerns. The study may also help in the search and development of spiritual seekers – there are other kindred spirits out there.

Conclusion

In this Conclusion, I presented the key findings of my research based on my specific key objectives. Using an autoethnography I explored a spiritual development process based on my own experiences. I found that spiritual development can be uneven and even destructive. I explore how my cultural context could influence such a spiritual development process and found that the cultural community can foster or hamper it. In my case it was the latter. The culture's own development and worldview makes all the difference. I also contextualised, conceptualised and explained spiritual development in terms of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. Overall, with slight differences, I found that his theoretical path for spiritual development matched my own experiences.

I further discussed the limitations to my study, mostly because it is subjective and possibly biased due to the research methodology which I used. I pointed out possible future research and highlighted the contributions of my research to the world of knowledge. I end this thesis with a final reflection.

A Last Reflection

When I heeded the call by my teachers, as much as I was in awe of the new process I thought I should put my own verification measures in place. I stopped reading all spiritual related literature – I wanted to see if I was going to be taught something new that I had not come across previously. I

also made a conscious decision, along with my teachers, that all communication between us should take place in English, in order to differentiate it from my everyday stream of consciousness which is mostly in Afrikaans. These measures worked, to the point where I can say that we worked with ideas I did not know about or had not thought about consciously. The knowledge I gained in the process was novel and clearly structured. (I have many notebooks dealing with metaphysical matters, but such were beyond the scope of this project). I mention this because I found Ken Wilber's work and structure invaluable when it came to validating my own process and understanding matters of Spirit. I am also deeply grateful to all the other theorists and writers I encountered during this project, who informed and delighted me and, importantly, helped decrease my self-absorption and self-importance.

At the outset of the thesis the ethics committee recommended that I should arrange for psychological help if the matters I dealt with became too painful to manage myself. I did not have a need for such help. However, the autoethnography literature did not warn about how tired one would become from spending so much time on your own 'data'. Reading the texts of other theorists, writers and academics made all the difference to this self-project, and they deeply enriched my own understanding. Thank you.

A Psalm of Life

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,

   Life is but an empty dream!

For the soul is dead that slumbers,

   And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!

   And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,

    Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

    Is our destined end or way;

But to act, that each to-morrow

    Finds us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,

    And our hearts, though stout and brave,

Still, like muffled drums, are beating

    Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,

    In the bivouac of Life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

    Be a hero in the strife!

Lives of great men all remind us

    We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

    Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,

Sailing o'er life's solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

With a heart for any fate;

Still achieving, still pursuing

Learn to labor and to wait.

(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1838, in Mee, 1925, p.255)

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ANNEXURE A

Research Ethics Committee

3 July 2019

Dear Mrs S van Wyk

Project Title:	An autoethnography of spiritual development in an Afrikaner cultural context: A Wilberian perspective
Researcher:	Mrs S van Wyk
Supervisor:	Dr SL Liccardo
Department:	Psychology
Reference number:	14277264 (HUM029/0419)
Degree:	Doctoral

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 27 June 2019. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Mr A Bizos; Dr L Blokland; Dr K Booyens; Dr A-M de Beer; Ms A dos Santos; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr W Kelleher; Mr A Mohamed; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Dr M Soer; Prof E Taljard; Prof V Thebe; Ms B Tsebe; Ms D Mokalapa

ANNEXURE B

<u>Participant Information Letter</u>

Project Title: An autoethnography of spiritual development in an Afrikaner cultural context: A Wilberian perspective

Affiliation: University of Pretoria

Researcher: Sonja van Wyk   Supervisor: Dr. Sabrina Liccardo

Cell No: 078 801 9321   Tel No: 012 420 4935

Email: sonjavw@webmail.co.za   Email: sabrina.liccardo@up.ac.za

University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee:

Tel No: 012 356 3084 or 012 356 3085

I am a student at the University of Pretoria and I am interested in spiritual development from a psychological perspective in an Afrikaner cultural context. A few years ago, I went on a spiritual journey, and I have story to tell about my experiences during that time. I have decided to change that story into a Phd research project and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. Participation in this study involves taking part in an unstructured interview, which will be conducted by me. Your participation is completely voluntary, thus, the decision to participate is entirely your own. There are no negative consequences should you decline to participate. Should you agree to participate, you do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering and you may withdraw at any point during the interview, also with no negative consequences.

Our conversation will be audio recorded. The recording will be saved on my personal computer and then deleted from the recorder. The recording will be used to transcribe the interview. My personal computer is password protected and therefore only I (and my supervisor) will have

access to the recordings and transcripts. All data will be stored for 15 years and may be used in future research. However, all information that could identify you in any research outputs, including any identifying information in direct quotes used, will be replaced with pseudonyms (false names) if you so wish.

The risks involved in taking part in this study include, possibly feeling uncomfortable exploring issues of culture, religion and spirituality with the researcher. However, should you feel as though you need to speak to a professional regarding any of the topics brought up in the interview, you are invited to call Lifeline (012-804-1853) which have been contracted to provide counselling services free of charge.

If you have any questions regarding the research, you may contact me or my supervisor (details above). If you have any complaints you may contact the research ethics committee of the University of Pretoria (details above). Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss this research.

I look forward to working with you.

…………………………   ………………….

Sonja van Wyk   Date

…………………………   ………………….

Dr Sabrina Liccardo   Date

ANNEXURE C

<u>Informed Consent Form</u>

Project Title: An autoethnography of spiritual development in an Afrikaner cultural context

Affiliation: University of Pretoria

Researcher: Sonja van Wyk   Supervisor: Dr. Sabrina Liccardo

Cell No: 078 801 9321   Tel No: 012 420 4935

Email: sonjavw@webmail.co.za   Email: sabrina.liccardo@up.ac.za

University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee:

Tel No: 012 356 3084 or 012 356 3085

The study explores spiritual development from a psychological perspective in an Afrikaner cultural context. I will use my own story of spiritual development in an autoethnographic study. However, to add richness to my story I require additional input from chosen research participants. Participation in this study involves taking part in an unstructured interview.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign this consent form granting me (the researcher) permission to interview you, audio record the interview and your responses, and store the data.

I understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary.

- I may refuse to answer any question I do not wish to answer.

- I may withdraw from the interview at any time, with no negative consequences.

- I will do my best to answer the questions fully and candidly; there are no right or wrong answers and I will not be judged for the opinions I hold.

- Any information that I provide will be kept confidential.

- The interview will be audio recorded.

- The audio recordings will be stored on the researcher's computer and then be deleted from the recorder.

- The recordings will be used to transcribe the interview.

- All data will be stored for 15 years in a secure location at the Psychology Department at the University of Pretoria and may be used for future research.

- The researcher's computer is password protected and only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to the recordings and transcripts.

- Risks include possibly feeling uncomfortable exploring certain issues with the researcher.

- *Lifeline* has offered to provide psychological support and counselling services free of charge, upon request.

- Benefits include contributing to knowledge regarding the topic and learning more about the topic and myself.

- I may contact the researcher at any point to discuss the research. I have the right to access my data.

I _____ (name and surname) consent to being interviewed by Sonja van Wyk (the researcher) and approve the use of the audiotape recorder during the interview discussion. I also consent to the use of my responses.

In respect of anonymity, please tick one or more of the following boxes to indicate your choice/s.

☐ Disguise my identity as much as it is possible, by using pseudonyms and not providing identifiable characteristics or traits.

☐ I consent to be identified in the research.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Researcher: S van Wyk

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Supervisor: Dr S Liccardo

ANNEXURE D

Ken Wilber's tiers of structures of consciousness

(Wilber, 2000, 2000b, 2006, 2017).

Number, colour	Wilber's original structures/ waves	Cognitive line Piaget, Wilber	Worldviews	Fowler Stages of Faith	Meditative State-stages
First tier					
0. Infrared	Sensorimotor mind	Sensorimotor	Archaic	0.Undifferentiated	___
1. Magenta		Preoperational			___
2. Red	Phantasmic-emotional	Preoperational	Magical	1. Magical	___
3. Amber	Concrete /Representational mind	Concrete operational	Mythic	2. Mythic-literal 3. Conventional	___
4. Orange	Concrete rule/role mind	Formal operational	Rational	4. Individuative-reflective	___
5.Green	Formal/rational mind	Formal operational /late	Pluralistic	5. Conjunctive	___
Second tier					
6. Teal	Low Vison-logic	Vison-logic	Centaur	6. Universalising	
Turquoise	High Vision-logic		Kosmocentric		Psychic
					Subtle
					Causal
					Non-dual
Third tier					
7. Indigo	Para-mind -previous Psychic	Para-mind	Transglobal	___	___
8. Violet	Meta-mind -previous Subtle	Meta mind	Visionary	___	___
9. Ultraviolet	Overmind -previous Causal	Overmind	Transcendent	___	___
10. Clear light	Supermind -previous Non-dual	Supermind	Unitary wholeness non-dual	___	___