

Book Review

One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber Shambhala, Boston, 1999, 386 pp., \$25.

Although the subtitle of Ken Wilber's latest endeavor reads "the journals," this book covers only one year. January 1, 1997-January 1, 1998. In his preface Wilber notes that this book is more a philosophical than a personal journal, "expressing especially ideas regarding the perennial philosophy." There are also, as he notes, many extensive descriptions of his meditation practice and various mystical states he has experienced.

The title of the book, *One Taste*, refers to the nondual state which, after 25 years of (Buddhist) meditation, Wilber is adept at entering. The book begins with a description of how he is often able to retain consciousness during his sleeping hours. Whether he be dreaming, watching images float by or engulfed in blackness, his Witness consciousness remains intact. In a later entry, he describes bobbing up and down in the Atlantic Ocean off South Beach, Miami for three hours, while experiencing One Taste with the sky, sea, sand, palm trees, etc. If you are interested in the further reaches of spirituality, such entries are exciting and stimulating. And, as Wilber continuously reminds us, we are "always already there." We just don't have the awareness yet.

Wilber's contention has always been that there is much more to spiritual reality than most are willing to admit or fathom. Wilber breaks spiritual practices down into two basic categories: translative and transformative. Translative practices help us to adjust or adapt to the world. They are basically enabling and reassure us that there is meaning to our existence and mortal situations, that there is a God out there who cares about us, and that we will find peace in the end. Transformative practices are more concerned with internal realms. They transform our lives, awakening the awareness that there is no distinction between out there and in here, and can eventually lead to One Taste, depending upon what one's objectives are. Both forms of spirituality are necessary, according to Wilber.

But he is content to let people be at whatever level suits them. When asked in an interview what he would say to someone who just wants to meditate, he answered, "Just meditate." Later in the same interview that response was challenged and Wilber replied, "Well, you

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didn't ask if I thought meditation alone was enough. You asked what I would tell somebody who said, 'Leave me alone to meditate.' I'd say, 'Just meditate. I have no desire to interfere with anybody's practice. But if you asked instead, "What other practices do you think meditators could use to facilitate their growth?," then I would answer a judicious blend of Eastern contemplative approaches with Western psychodynamic approaches is an interesting and I think healthy way to proceed."

For Wilber, a truly spiritual lifestyle is inclusive rather than exclusive on all levels of existence. In a wonderful entry he explores what we usually expect from our religious leaders and comments that we like them to be dead from the neck down. As soon as they exhibit any of the physical or material desires the rest of us mortals are prone to, especially sexual drives, we condemn and discard them. Unlike many of the spiritually oriented, Wilber does not deny the body or sexuality. In fact, he says you need to keep your body in good condition to reach your full spiritual potential.

Wilber's approach has always been integrative. Thus, he has mapped out an integrative personal program where "the idea is to simultaneously exercise all the major levels and dimensions of the human body/mind—physical, emotional, mental, social, cultural, spiritual." This includes good nutrition and exercise (Wilber lifts weights), addressing psychological issues through the appropriate therapeutic modality, adopting a conscious philosophy of life, having a spiritual practice, and being committed to your family, involved in your community and possessed of worldcentric awareness.

In Wilber's philosophy, as we progress on our personal journeys we integrate elements from each preceding level into the next level so that we are ever incorporating and transcending. This is why his integrative program addresses all of the levels rather than discarding lower levels as one advances. No matter how far along you may be on your path, you still have a body and a mind, feelings and desires, and an ego. Relinquishing our egos doesn't mean we no longer have an ego, but that the ego doesn't rule our lives. As Wilber points out, the truly great spiritual leaders were not egoless: rather, they had strong egos which they enlisted in service to their missions.

As indicated above, Wilber is a strong proponent of psychological exploration and psychotherapy. He emphatically states that most spiritual leaders need psychotherapy and that, unbeknownst to their students, most Buddhist teachers have been through therapy. Although Wilber thinks body therapies can be effective, he feels most of them

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confuse the integration of body and mind and simply elevate the body to a higher status. This falls into what he refers to as the pre/trans fallacy which, put simply, is mistaking a prepersonal state (infantile fusion) for a transpersonal state (advanced nondual reality) because they can outwardly appear similar. Nevertheless, because "most people are out of touch with their bodies," body awareness is important. He notes that the body is the initial focus of most meditative practices.

Wilber could readily be considered a modern renaissance man. There is hardly a topic he hasn't delved into, including art, literature and fashion. He appears to be current on every trend and proposes that following pop music and surveying the latest television and movie offerings helps him keep track of the pulse of the times.

If you have never read Wilber, this book would be a good introduction since, as stated earlier, he does address in some form (excerpts from book forwards and reviews, letters, interviews) all of his major theories. If you are familiar with Wilber, some sections will be repetitive-although no less interesting-while the more personal ones will be enlightening, moving and often very amusing. Overall, this is a wonderful excursion into Wilberland.

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