



141. Steve McDonald Interviewed by Matt Xian on Xian Archive Podcast

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Matt Humble: All right, we are rolling and I'm here with my good friend, Steve McDonald. How's it going today, brother?

Steve McDonald: Hey, Matt, really well, thanks. Great to be here.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. I'm so glad you were able to come on the show and answer some of my burning questions that I've been thinking about asking you, because you've got a lot of insight when it comes to awakening, as well as the medicines and the psychedelics from what I understand. I've caught a number of your talks on *YouTube* and in person, and listened to a couple of podcasts and probably known you for 5 or 10 years now. I've always been impressed with your work and your ability to relay information to people who are going through this change process, this evolution, this spiritual awakening—there are so many terms we can use to address this growing movement that seems to be spreading across the planet rapidly in this day and age around realising what we really are as spiritual beings; more than just what we basically are thought of as being, which is just something that comes to Earth and procreates and lives and dies and is never heard from again. We are getting this experience through psychedelics and spiritual techniques that we are eternal beings and that there is a lot more to this life, a lot more layers to this life than we previously had thought of.

There's a bunch of topics I want to jump into with you, but just to give the audience a little bit of background, how was it that you came to the medicine path? How did you discover psychedelics? How did you discover your spiritual nature?

Steve McDonald: Well, I guess psychedelics came late in life for me. I would have been 44 years old the first time I tried a psychedelic. I jumped in the deep end and the first one I tried was ayahuasca, but my spiritual path obviously goes way back, as long as I can remember, probably. I grew up in a family that was comfortable talking about beings in other dimensions, I suppose, in a kind of old-fashioned way, so that was always something that was there for me.

I guess one of my most significant memories is an experience I had in 1999, where I just had a sudden increase in awareness. It was very kind of routine, I was sitting at home at the time and reading a book on the couch, and the book I was reading was a channelled book. For people who might not know what that is, it is a book that is written by a medium who is bringing information through from another dimension and recording it in a book. I'd never read a book like that before—that was the first time—and as I was reading that book, I just had this sudden change that was instantaneous, like somebody flicked a light switch and I just suddenly had a realisation that this was a real process that I was reading about and these other dimensions were legitimate. That was life-changing. I guess the biggest change it made for me was that it shifted my work focus away from the more mundane things that I had been doing to wanting to work in alignment with what I thought was my spiritual path. That was in 1999.

It was about seven years later that I got invited to an ayahuasca ceremony, and when I got the invitation, I didn't even know what ayahuasca was—I literally had to get on the internet and look it up—but I did have an interest in human development and human evolution and consciousness. By that time was working in that area as a consultant and had been doing coaching and that kind of thing as well, and so I decided to go and partake, mainly from a consciousness perspective. I was curious to find out whether these medicines were useful tools for awakening.

Matt Humble: Yeah, right, very interesting. That's cool. I actually didn't know about your background with your family being open to those ideas or the channelled book either. Are you comfortable sharing what book that was?

Steve McDonald: I can't even remember the name of it, to be honest, but it was by, I think she was an American medium, and it was about the life of Jesus and the Holy

Family. It was channelled material so it covered information like time spent in Egypt studying in mystery schools and those sorts of things. I wish I could remember more details, but I can't even remember the author's name, I'm sorry.

I might add too, at that time I was married and had been married for quite a while. I met my wife when I was still in high school and we spent 23 years together and she was quite a talented clairvoyant, so that was another aspect to my life where I had this connection to the spirit world.

Matt Humble: Wow, wonderful. What would you say clairvoyance is? It seems to be a type of almost sixth sense that maybe we're born with or maybe we can develop. I'm curious about your angle on what clairvoyance is.

Steve McDonald: Sure. It can come in in various ways. You can be clairaudient and hear things or clairvoyant where you have visions, and clairsentient where you just have sudden knowing, so there's lots of different varieties of that, but it's essentially an awareness of other dimensions that hasn't been common throughout history—only certain people have had that awareness. As humans, we all have various skills and various, what Ken Wilbur calls 'lines of development'—like logical, rational intelligence, emotional intelligence, musical intelligence, those sorts of things—and of course, various people have differing natural abilities in those areas. Some people are naturally born musically talented, and some people are obviously born talented in terms of having contact with other dimensions of reality.

Matt Humble: Totally, totally. Very cool. So it sounded like you were primed because, for example for me, when I had my first psychedelic experience, it was completely mind-shattering in that I had no previous insight into other dimensions. I didn't know that was a thing, period. I didn't know about spirituality at all. If you would have walked up to me the day before my spiritual awakening with psychedelic mushrooms and asked me, 'what is spirituality?', I would have had no idea what to say. I would have been like, 'I have no idea'. Do you believe we have a spirit? OK, like that's the very entry level understanding I had of it. Then after, I had more of like a tangible experience of what a spirit was—it was this eternal aspect of myself that was so much more than just the body than I inhabit—so that's really interesting to me. But when you did do this ayahuasca on this first plant medicine experience you had, what happened? Did it end up being a useful experience for you?

Steve McDonald: It certainly did, and I might add to that by the time I had that ayahuasca experience, the first one, I had been meditating for seven years, so around the time that I had that sudden awareness in 1999 that I spoke about, I also that same year started practising a Taoist moving meditation, which is actually a type of meditative kung fu. I'd been practising that for seven years by the time I took ayahuasca, and I found that meditation experience was really valuable because I had had experiences doing moving meditation and standing qigong and those sorts of things that were very drug-like. It's an open-eyed meditation that I practise and I can remember having experiences where I was doing standing qigong outside and the ground would start to ripple like it was water and things like that. So I had a good preparation really, and I found when the ayahuasca kicked in in that first experience, it felt very much just like another meditation, only a bit different—different visuals and those sorts of things. So I felt that I was really well prepared, and that preparation allowed me to have a very enjoyable and constructive first experience with ayahuasca, which is a relatively powerful psychedelic.

Matt Humble: Absolutely.

Steve McDonald: I went into that session, that first experience, with a question in my mind: 'Is this a tool that I could work with to help people awaken?' and the experience ended up being like a tutorial for me. I had a really interesting thing happened right at the start. I started feeling it coming on, I started seeing some visual patterns and things, so I thought, 'OK, here we go.' I didn't really know what to expect, but I thought, 'OK, let's see if I can work in this space,' so I just quietly, in my head, set the intention that I wanted to change what I could see so it looked like wood, and then straight away I heard a voice speak to me and it said: 'Not power over, be at one with'. Of course, I knew what that meant straight away and I thought, 'Oh, OK, yeah, that makes sense.' So I kind of let go that instruction and just sat with the feeling of wanting to see a wooden pattern, and then suddenly I found myself inside a tree and I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm inside a tree', and then I rose up the trunk of the tree right up to the top of the tree. It was a pine tree, and I travelled right out to where the pine needles were in the sunshine, and I could feel the sunshine on the pine needles like they were my fingers and I thought, 'Oh my god, no wonder plants reach up to the Sun. That feels amazing.'

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Matt Humble: Oh my gosh, no wonder.

Steve McDonald: And so that that blew my mind. Here I was just trying to change what I could see to look like wood, and I found myself becoming a pine tree.

Then that experience went on to become a kind of a tutorial. I had contact with a little being who was kind of like an elf or something who said: 'Hey there, here's what you can do with this medicine', and he took me on this tour, even took me inside somebody's body and said: 'You can even go into people's bodies and heal things.'

Matt Humble: Oh, my gosh.

Steve McDonald: It was pretty interesting.

Matt Humble: That is interesting, wow. It's funny how the psychedelics, plant medicines, they seem to elicit the experience of understanding nature from a perspective that finally clicks and makes sense to us as humans, because previously, before that, I'm sure it was very hard to understand how a plant would feel or the sensations that a plant would experience, and then through ingesting a plant, you got the experience of photosynthesis more-or-less, right?

Steve McDonald: Yeah, exactly.

Matt Humble: That's interesting.

Steve McDonald: At this time in the evolution of humanity, reconnecting with nature is obviously a really strong theme, too, so it makes sense that I would have that kind of experience.

Matt Humble: Yeah, absolutely. It's able to show us what we are, which is a part of nature, which at this point I feel very redundant saying that because I've said it hundreds of times throughout all my podcasts, but it really is the message, and I don't know, it kind of like gives a little bit of a weight off of everything that we're expected of—by society and family and friends and all this and that—to just realise that we are a part of nature and a lot of this struggle is just self-created in the mind. What would you say about struggle and what people go through mentally and how psychedelics are able to heal and help us change our relationship to that?

Steve McDonald: In my view, psychedelics are a way of magnifying what's going on for us and many famous psychedelic characters have said that. I think they also have the potential to speed up our change process, our development process, so it comes down to what the individual is feeling deep down and experiencing, and what the next step is for them. If you think about human development as a spectrum, somebody who is in a different place on the spectrum to you, for example, might not have that connection with nature experience. They might have another quite different theme, which is very relevant to where they're at and what's coming next for them. I think this is a common thing in the psychedelic world, is that people tend to attribute these particular qualities to the plant or the psychedelic drug when in fact it's a quality within themselves that they're experiencing. It's not that this psychedelic is bringing a specific message to connect with nature, but it's that your next step in your growth is to connect with nature, and therefore the psychedelic is greasing the rails for that to happen, if that makes sense.

Matt Humble: It does. It's so strange how it knows where you are in your journey, you know what I mean? What is that? It's almost like there are different levels to the psychedelic experience—there's like a first-grader level and a second-grader and a third-grader, all through high school, right? Some people, when they have a psychedelic experience, they're like at grade 12 and they're having this whole different thing than, like, maybe what a grade 1 person would be having in the sense of like, say it's your first experience. What do you think is that innate wisdom within the plants or within the molecules or within the self or whatever it is that can kind of tell you where you are, or knows where you are and what you need the most right now for your self-development.

Steve McDonald: I guess the ultimate answer to that is that through these experiences, we learn that everything is one thing and unity is the ultimate nature of consciousness, and therefore, ultimately there is no distinction between you and the plant and the tree or whatever it is that comes into your awareness. Given that unitive of nature of consciousness, then it absolutely makes sense that we can have these innate experiences of things feeling like they're perfect and feeling like they're exactly what is required, because they are exactly that. We're just getting in touch with that ultimate perfection and it shows up for us as us discovering exactly what we need to discover in that moment.

Matt Humble: Yeah, totally. That's beautiful. I do want to get to the idea of Clare W. Graves's work, but I think I want to stay on the topic of psychedelics a little more at the beginning here. So after this ayahuasca experience, what was the next plant medicine or psychedelic experience that you found yourself being called to partake in?

Steve McDonald: The next big one for me was MDMA, and I guess after that first ayahuasca experience, I wanted more, of course, and I became very interested in these substances as medicines, because when I went into the ayahuasca experience, I really didn't understand that it was a medicine; I went into it with the idea that this was a consciousness exploration tool. At the time, I was still suffering from depression as a result of my work history in emergency services and the military, and I found that the ayahuasca basically cleared it up very, very quickly. That was a surprise to me, and it was a revelation that, OK, these things are actually medicines and they can heal you. That sent me down the path of psychedelic medicines and eventually, by the end of 2010, I had attended a conference in Melbourne and made contact with Rick Doblin from *MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies)*, (<https://maps.org>) and a bunch of people here in Australia who were interested in starting psychedelic medicine research in Australia. In 2011, I was one of the co-founders of *Psychedelic Research in Science and Medicine (PRISM)*, (<https://www.prism.org.au>), which is a non-profit organisation that I'm still a Director of here and is now doing psychedelic research in Australia. So that became, and still is, a very strong theme in my life. As a result of that journey, I came across the work of *MAPS* in the US with MDMA to treat PTSD. I had, and was still suffering with PTSD at the time that I discovered that and so I then became very interested in trying MDMA to see if it would help my PTSD. That was my next experience, which came actually quite some years later—I think it was probably almost six years later after my ayahuasca experience that I had the opportunity and took that opportunity to try some MDMA.

Matt Humble: Amazing. I've definitely had a firsthand experience with MDMA, and it is extremely healing. How would you describe its effects, and as well, the set and setting that people should probably operate within when using this particular chemical? Because I know that it's famous as a rave culture substance where you're out dancing endlessly throughout the night, but that is not, in my opinion, the best

way to use it for healing. What was the effects of MDMA for you and how would you say that it's best utilised?

Steve McDonald: I agree absolutely with everything you said there. And people who've done it would know that you can go to a party and take MDMA and actually not have a profound healing experience from it at all; in fact, you might even have a bad trip. It's really important to distinguish between recreational use and therapeutic use and understand the things that come with therapeutic use, which is working with an experienced guide or guides—usually a male and female therapist pair is very commonly used in the work of MAPS—and the idea of set and setting.

Set refers to the mindset that you bring to the experience. In other words, if you've had a really bad week and you're not relaxed and you come and take MDMA, or any psychedelic for that matter, these things tend to magnify whatever is going on for you, so all of that chaos and perhaps unhappiness that you might be feeling could be magnified and you could have a very bad experience. So coming in with the right mindset is first and foremost—very important—and usually in a healing situation, that means having a clear understanding of what it is that you want to address from a healing point of view and a commitment to working with that. Then the setting refers to everything around you, including the people who might be helping you or the people that you're with when you have the experience; the physical setting, things like safety, comfort, music, and those sorts of things.

It's really a very complex business and requiring a lot of skill to do that well. Just to emphasise what you said, it's important for people to understand that you can't just go and buy this stuff anywhere and take it anywhere and expect to have the same experience. That's not the case at all and can be quite unsafe because if you're buying drugs on the street, you never actually know what you're getting and so you may end up getting something that's got some poison in it. So I guess that's the 'don't try this at home' warning.

In terms of my situation, by the time that I had my MDMA experience, I had become familiar with the work of *MAPS* because I was already, at that time, involved in *PRISM*, our local research organisation, I had easy access to all of the *MAPS* documentation—their reports from their research and all that sort of stuff—the dosages, how they were taking it, the set and setting and all that kind of thing, so I

went into that experience well prepared. The only thing that I didn't have was that I didn't have formal therapy as part of the experience. I simply had a trusted friend who was a sitter for me and I followed the *MAPS* dosing protocol so I knew how much to take. I laid down and listened to music, and my experience, I think, was not a typical one because I had a history, as I said. I'd spent 15 years in the military, I'd been to a humanitarian deployment in Africa, which was basically, even though it was a humanitarian deployment, there was a civil war going on in Somalia and I was exposed to all of the things that you might expect to see in a war zone. I came home from that damaged and then had become a bit of an adrenaline junkie, and I ended up leaving the army and going into working as a rescue helicopter pilot where I was responding to road accidents and those sorts of things. I was in that job for five years, so I had quite a history of seeing traumatic stuff that needed to be healed.

What didn't happen for me in my first MDMA experience, which is unusual, was I didn't have any of that trauma come up at all. I simply lay down, relaxed, listened to the music, I felt it kick in. The first thing I became aware of was that all my chakras were lighting up—remember at that point I'd been meditating and doing this meditative energy work for many years, so I was very aware of my body and body energy—and then I felt my heart chakra just go *boom*, you know? It was just an extraordinary expansion. I went into a state of ecstasy and thought to myself, 'no wonder they call this ecstasy.'

Matt Humble: Totally.

Steve McDonald: And I just lay there for hours soaking it up. It amazed me that I didn't have any trauma come up to be processed or anything like that, which is quite unusual. After five or six hours when I felt ready, I went to bed. I woke up the next morning and I felt a sense of peace unlike anything I could remember, so all my background anxiety had just been dialled down massively. I sat and I thought, 'My God, I can't remember a time in my life when I felt this peaceful', and to a good measure, a good extent, that was sustained so there was something permanently corrected in that MDMA experience which was sustainable for me, even without the formal therapy. That really sold me on the benefits of that as a therapeutic medicine.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. Stories like that are exactly what we need to be hearing to understand these as medicines, because I'm sure there's still the stigma that exists

in the 90% of the world that, 'Oh, it's a drug, you're just going to alter your brain' and whatever. They look at it so base level, but when someone can catch such a sense of relief that they had never known otherwise, that is almost the definition of what a good medicine would provide, and not only that, but the fact that you felt better for days after the medicine was even in your system is a perfect example of what a real medicine should provide. It shouldn't be this thing you have to continuously take three pills a day for the rest of your life, and then take other pills to counteract the side effects of those pills.

My brother was a veteran as well, so I understand that that's how they go about quote unquote 'healing' in the pharmaceutical industry, but it's very clear that this is medicine, and it's just super interesting to me that we've seen leaps and bounds which is amazing, but there's still this stigma that MDMA, there's nothing that could come positive of it in any sense of a permanent way or a spiritual way or these types of things.

What would you say to the spiritual benefits of using MDMA? How did it make you rethink the human experience?

Steve McDonald: In my experience, MDMA usually takes you into the dream state. Just to lay out the landscape here, if you look at the great traditions and the long-term religions, there's a general agreement that these other dimensions that we travel into can be mapped out as the waking state, which is what we're in now where you can see and feel physical things, the dream state, which everybody's familiar with because everybody pretty much dreams when they're sleeping, and then the deep dreaming state, which is also called the causal state, which is beyond that. In a psychedelic trip, you go from having a dreamlike experience where you're just thinking about maybe having interaction with people that you know or characters that are similar to people that you interact with in the world, and then when you cross from the dream state into deep dreaming or the causal state, those characters become archetypal, so they become perhaps god-like, perhaps demon-like and they represent archetypal characteristics with strong themes. Then beyond that causal state, you've got what they generally call the empty witnessing state, so you're going into it closer to a unitive experience there where you find yourself no longer like a character in the world interacting with other characters or other archetypal beings, but you become like a witness looking at it all and you feel quite calm and detached

and everything's just kind of flowing around you. Beyond that empty witness, then you can start to have a unitive experience where you feel like you're just becoming everything and there's no difference between you and other people and you and other things in the world. So we've got the waking, the dreaming, or it's sometimes called the subtle state, the deep dreaming or causal, then the empty witnessing, and then towards unitive, and strictly speaking, the unitive experience, the more it progresses, the less you identify as being you because you become everything, right? So it seems that there's a limit to how much a human can travel into that unitive consciousness state, obviously, or at least a limit to the amount of information we can bring back and remember.

If we're talking about MDMA, typically it'll take you into that subtle energy dreaming realm and perhaps into the archetypal realm, but usually not on its own unless it's mixed with another drug—you generally won't go into that sort of empty witnessing or unitive consciousness experience. So MDMA tends to be, in my view, it's a good introduction to altered state work with psychedelic substances. Some people say it's technically not a psychedelic, it's more an entactogen, but typically, if done with the right set and setting, and done with a good understanding of what to expect, it will be a pleasant experience and give you a great introduction to what it's like to be conscious in the dream state, for example.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. Yes, I agree. A couple of things came up there and one of them was that the reason I consider MDMA a psychedelic is you go on a journey. I consider psychedelics as the medicines that take you on a journey. It's not just a medicine you take and continue about your day. To take MDMA and to go about your day in a normal way, it's not going to happen—you're going to find yourself on the floor petting your dog for 30 minutes and realising you're late to your meeting, you know what I mean? It takes you very much on a journey inward, in my mind. That's how it affects me, and that's why I consider it a psychedelic.

Now, some people would say psychedelic meaning mind-manifesting. They usually link it with hallucinations, visual distortions, inward experiences, kind of dreamlike spaces and geometry spaces that you can visit, but while it differs in its flavour in terms of the visuals, it still very much takes you internal into a reflective state into an ego-softened state. Would you agree with that?

Steve McDonald: That's true. Yes, I would. The definition of psychedelic, I guess it can change depending on who you're talking to, but in the science world, typically they say that the classic psychedelics interact with serotonin receptors, particularly the 2A serotonin receptor and define it more in scientific terms, but you can journey like that on cannabis with the right dosage and the right set and setting—I've certainly done that—and cannabis is not generally regarded as a psychedelic at all. I guess it just depends who you're talking to, whether you're talking to a psychedelic scientist or somebody else. They might have different definitions.

Matt Humble: Totally. Very cool. One of the other things that had come up around all of it is that in this experience, you're able to then reflect backwards on that mental state. For example, during the experience of MDMA for the 4-6 hours that's in your system, almost no negative self-talk enters your consciousness, right? No bickering, no 'you're annoying me', no 'I'm thinking about this thing I don't want to think about'; that seems to dissipate completely, and when you come back and you start to hear that first complaining thought again after your experience, I feel like, in my personal, subjective experience, the next day when that thought entered my head again, I was like, 'What the fuck is that? What about all the glorious unity, beautiful 'it's just amazing to be here'? Where is that coming from? What is that?' Because now I recognise that it's not me, and it's not my experience, and it's not what I have to listen to, and it's not what I have to be, but it's just some weird programme that seems to be running in my subconscious to try and be ungrateful or try to take things for granted or just try to be less patient, you know what I mean? And it really gave me a remembrance that I still work with every day, to reflect back on those states and realise that I can manifest that state internally through that reflective process. What does that concept bring up for you?

Steve McDonald: Something that came up for me is a topic that seems to be quite common at the moment, and that is genetic memory and things that we carry, which actually aren't ours but have been passed on to us genetically by our parents or grandparents, etc. I think at this time on the planet, this is a big issue for a lot of people because we have entered into a deep healing process now, globally, because humanity is going through a shift from one level of development to another, and part of that shift involves us reflecting and healing anything that's necessary to heal from our past. For me and for other people around me right now, a lot of genetic stuff is coming up. It's stuff that's actually not related to something that we've done or

experienced in our lives, but that's been passed on from our parents or our grandparents, or perhaps our great grandparents and further back down the line. For people who come from groups that have experienced persecution historically, perhaps for tens or hundreds of years, there can be quite a load of baggage that gets passed down there that needs to be cleared somehow. So that's a topical thing for me at the moment in discussions with other people working in this space and healers that I know and people who are going through their own healing work. I think it's an interesting thing to consider, particularly if you have been hard on yourself about what you're experiencing and you can't figure out 'Where does this come from? It doesn't make sense.' It's interesting just to sit and think about your lineage and perhaps consider the fact that this might be something that's been passed on to you and it's actually not yours at all but you are carrying it because that's the way it works, and you can also heal it as well.

Matt Humble: Wow, that's profound and it brings to mind this one meme one time that I saw on the internet in the psychedelic internet space. It said something along the lines of 'by healing yourself, you're potentially healing all future generations of your bloodline.' That's a very interesting idea. Would you say that by us healing ourselves and then passing our code, our DNA, on to our children and then they would pass on to their children as well, by stepping up and healing this family trauma once and for all that you would be positively impacting the future generations of your family line?

Steve McDonald: Absolutely. I absolutely agree with that, and you can even think about it in the other way, that you're healing back down your lineage as well—into the past as well as into the future.

Matt Humble: Wow, that's profound. That also brings to mind the idea that I've heard explored recently about how our psyche is almost the perfect hybrid between the psyche of both of our parents. We tend to think that we're our own being and that any negative behaviour or negative mental operations going on are simply how we were raised or the experiences we had growing up. This other idea brings up that there's almost no way to escape being like your parents because your psyche is the perfect hybrid between both of their psyches and their internal worlds. Does that resonate with you at all?

Steve McDonald: It does, but I think there's a lot more to it than that. It really comes down to what your fundamental spiritual beliefs are, be they religious or from some other teaching. For me, I firmly believe that we exist at a soul level, above this physical human being, above and beyond. I also believe in the process of incarnation whereby that soul inhabits this meaty body that we're wearing at the moment, so in that sense, you've got a history as a soul that you're bringing into the body. There's no doubt that your parents are going to impact some of your thinking and behaviour in your life—I think that's quite true—but I think, much larger than that, you have this soul personality that you bring, and that shows up in situations where you just get a kid in a family who is profoundly wise and is teaching their parents lessons—probably everybody's either heard of that or maybe even experienced it. How else do you explain that, than this is a soul-level phenomenon? I think that there is truth in what you said, but I wouldn't get hung up on that being the ultimate state of things. Through different dimensions of existence, there's much, much more to it than that.

Matt Humble: Got it. Very cool, very interesting. That does bring me to the idea of *Spiral Dynamics*, which was popularised by Clare W. Graves, which I initially heard about through you, as I believe you are very fascinated and with this model and as well have worked a lot to help develop it and push it into the world. It's more or less describing that there are different layers of consciousness going on across the globe at all times and some of us are inhabiting one layer and some of us are inhabiting another. That's a very entry-level explanation, but please give us an overview of *Spiral Dynamics* and what that means.

Steve McDonald: Sure. First up, *Spiral Dynamics* comes from the name of a book that was published in the late 90s by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, two American academics, and not all of the book, but maybe 95% of the book, was based on the work of Clare W. Graves, who you mentioned. Clare was a professor of psychology at *Union College* in Schenectady in upstate New York back in the 1950s and he conducted some developmental psychology research. He was around at the same time as Maslow, and anyone who's studied a little bit of psychology would understand and know about Maslow's *Hierarchy of Human Needs*, the triangle diagram. Graves was around at that time when those kind of things were being talked about—he actually knew Maslow—and he was very, very curious about the different theories of psychology that were being taught at university level at that time.

He said, himself, every year at the end of a course, one of the students would put up their hand and say, 'Dr. Graves, you've taught us these five different theories of human psychology, which one is right?' That motivated him to do his own research.

What he did was he studied 1,065 people for a period of nine years, and during that time he did all sorts of analysis on them, including asking them to analyse themselves by writing essays and those sorts of things. He did behavioural observation, he did timed response testing to see how they would respond to different images and words, and those sorts of things. He gathered a huge amount of data and in that time, he also looked at how an individual's data changed over time, so if somebody showed up this way early in the nine year study, then five years later, what do they look like and how had they changed and what had changed in their personality and behaviour?

He was particularly looking at values and he was a pretty smart guy; he knew that his own worldview and his own values would have an impact on how he analysed the data, so he got seven other people to help him analyse the data, and he really was very general about how they did it. He just said, 'here's a whole bunch of data, take it away, see if you can see any patterns in it and let me know.' Then over time, he gradually put together this model of human development, which was an amazing piece of work, and after the nine years had finished, he continued for many, many years—probably the best part of 20 years or more—to further develop his understanding of this information and to craft this model of human development—psychological development.

Unfortunately, he passed away before he published a book that he was working on. This would have been his final finding and he passed away from a heart attack in 1986 before he published that book and left the notes behind, obviously. Those two guys who published the *Spiral Dynamics* book—Don Beck, who had been a professor in his own right at a university in Texas, teaching history, and Christopher Cowan, who was one of Don's students—they then took what Clare Graves had left behind and they crafted it into this book called *Spiral Dynamics*. They also brought in a little bit of other information from people like Richard Dawkins and Csikszentmihalyi, who's the 'flow state' guy, to put the book together.

The book was released in the late 90s, so that was really how, first of all, the name *Spiral Dynamics* came to be—Graves never made up that name; that was created by Don and Chris—and then the model only really became publicly known when that *Spiral Dynamics* book was published, but of course most of the value that was presented was really from Clare Graves's work.

I heard about this in about 2003. I read the book, it just grabbed me straight away, and everything that I read in the book resonated with my personal experience of interacting with humans and being human, right? So I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing stuff'. At the first opportunity, I went and did a training course with Don Beck, which was just a short one-week course—he happened to be in Australia at the time—and then the next year, 2006, I went over to Texas and I did another more advanced course over there. Eventually, a few years later, I helped put together a train-the-trainer course for that material, together with Christopher Cook who's a friend and colleague of mine from the UK, who was very well versed in *Spiral Dynamics* and Clare Graves's work and was one of my teachers. He and I worked together to create a short course to train somebody to be able to train others in the model. That happened, I think, in about 2008 when I was working in Melbourne. Then, like many of these things, particularly in the human nature/psychology realm, often when two people come together and create an amazing model, they end up splitting up and working independently and you get to schools, and that happened with *Spiral Dynamics*, so then you had the Don Beck school and the Christopher Cowan school.

Matt Humble: Is that why some of them talk about different colours and then others talk about numbers?

Steve McDonald: Yes, it is, and also, Ken Wilbur dabbled in all that kind of stuff as well and Ken made up his own colours and allocated different colours to the different layers in the spiral.

Matt Humble: I was so fascinated after learning about it from you, I went to look it up and I started to say, 'Hey, these are different colours than that model and then there's different numbers over there'. So there's a couple of different competing ideas around what it is, but they all converge on the idea that we're all at certain stages of our development.

Steve McDonald: Yes. What I ended up doing was, after working, I fell into Don Beck's school not even knowing that there was more than one school. After being around the scene for a couple of years, I realised there was a lot of politics going on; there were even legal battles going on over trademarks and all sorts of stuff. What I did was I decided to just kind of step out of that and go back to Clare Graves's original work. Thankfully, Christopher Cowan, one of the authors of *Spiral Dynamics*, and his partner Natasha Todorovic, in 2005 published Graves's research notes in quite a thick book called *The Never Ending Quest*, and that became the bible for me, to go back to his original research, his original writing, and see what Graves said about these things and how he found them, how he described them.

There were three really key things that came out of his work. The first one was this realisation that human consciousness is amazingly adaptive and it responds to the complexity of life conditions. What that means is that whatever our life conditions demand of us in terms of problem-solving and creativity, our consciousness will rise to the occasion, quite literally. Clare Graves described that as like a double helix relationship, just like a DNA strand where one strand was the life conditions, the other strand was the consciousness—human consciousness—and as one became more complex then human consciousness would rise to match it, and it works both ways so if our life conditions deteriorate and become less complex, then our consciousness will also dip down. That doesn't mean to say that we lose any capacity, it's just that it's a dynamic relationship, so somebody who is highly developed and highly capable and can cope in a very, very complex set of life conditions might suddenly find themselves in immediately changed life conditions, particularly if there was an emergency of some sort, and they might have to start operating in a very simplistic way, simply to save their life or something like that. That doesn't mean to say that they still can't do the complex stuff, but it just shows that this is a dynamic model and people can go up and down according to what life demands of them.

That was the first key finding that he found, and the second thing was that when we go through change, it's a very predictable path, and this is not something unique to Graves's work. Many people have studied the idea of human change and found the same pattern which takes us from being stable at one particular level or layer, and that stability is starting to come apart, we start feeling uncomfortable, go through some turbulence and then eventually we progress into a deep change process which

results in all of our preconceived values kind of falling apart. Nothing seems to work for us anymore, we have a time when we feel lost and don't know what's coming next, don't know what to do, and then through a kind of pressure-cooker process where we're put under pressure, our neural networks change, our body chemistry changes, we have a breakthrough and all of a sudden we become more capable and we rise to a more complex layer on that developmental spiral. Then there's a period of integration before we become stable again.

Joseph Campbell's work—Joseph Campbell was a philosopher who described the *Hero's Journey* and wrote books about that—it's really the same thing. It's about being comfortable, something calling you out of that comfortable space, going through an ordeal and then coming back again, but being changed once you come back. Often that is represented in other people's work as a circle, but in Graves's work, because he understood this spiral progression—vertical progression—he realised it was actually a spiral that was in action there, not just a circle, so when you finish that circle, you're not in the same place anymore, you're in a higher place, higher being more complex if that makes sense.

Matt Humble: It does.

Steve McDonald: That was the second big thing from his work, was that map of the change process, and then the third thing was he mapped the developmental landscape. If you think of this double-helix spiral, when we go through the change, circle around the spiral and end up higher up, then there are landmarks on the spiral that we can look at and say, OK, this one represents the Scientific-Industrial mindset and that era of humanity, and the one below it represents the Agricultural era and that way of thinking, etc. He mapped out eight of these milestones on the spiral, which we call 'value systems' in the *Spiral Dynamics* book, because each one of them has its own set of values, its own motivations, its own way of making sense of reality and orienting oneself in the world.

Those milestones, in terms of looking at those and how they manifest in our consciousness, the best way to think about them is like a nested set of systems—if that's the first system, the second system is nested over the top of it and the next one is nested over the top of that, so it becomes like one of these Russian dolls where you pull it apart and there's six smaller dolls inside it or something like that,

right? The old ones don't go away, they're still there, and wherever our development takes us, we can always spiral back down to make use of those older systems when they're appropriate in life, and we do. That can happen minute-to-minute, it can happen from being at home in the morning, interacting according to one value system with your family, then going to work and interacting with your work colleagues in a completely different value system, and that's where the 'dynamic' part of *Spiral Dynamics* came from.

Matt Humble: Ok, so that's a little bit of new information for me because part of me was kind of thinking that once you get to one of the stages, you're kind of there, and not that you couldn't recede down, but that it was kind of more like, let's say days or weeks that you're there and not that you're fluctuating within the day. You're saying that we might be operating within different layers even each day, is that right?

Steve McDonald: Absolutely. If you think of it from a problem-solving perspective and think about different environments you find yourself in during the day—and I guess the most obvious one for most people is work at home—the kind of problems that you might have to solve dealing with small children and a family structure require a certain way of thinking and behaving, and if you work as a buyer on the stock exchange, it's completely different, right? If you go home from the stock exchange job and you start behaving towards your young kids the same way you do when you're going 'Buy! Sell!', there's trouble. That's a bit of a ridiculous example, but I think it makes it obvious that different values and different behaviours are appropriate in different settings in life. So it is a very dynamic, elastic kind of attribute that we have as humans, but generally speaking, everyone has a dominant value system and that is usually the most complex system that they're stable in. When we're working with the model, we usually say that people are spread across about three value systems in general because usually they're stable in one system, they've still got a little bit of the previous, less complex system that's active, and they're starting to edge into the next most complex system as well, so most of their behaviour will be centred around those three systems.

Matt Humble: Right, so is it to be looked at like a hierarchy or not so much? Because it did seem like when I was studying it, that there were let's say the lowest level was almost kind of brutal and primal, right? It's kind of like force and violence—this kind of entry-level, base level of the human development experience is kind of

like, 'I protect my home and you and myself and I will use physical means, more-or-less, to be able to do that.' That's kind of, as most of us say, brutish to be violent, right? Those are kind of synonymous in a sense, unless you're maybe a martial artist—in a sense, that could be a form of art—but I guess I'm just trying to say that to be able to solve your problems with violence isn't really the highest hierarchy of it, so is it to be looked at like a hierarchy, and as you ascend it, you become better at problem-solving in better ways? Or what would you say?

Steve McDonald: If you think about each one of these values systems or milestones on that spiral of complexity as a window through which you view the world, then it depends which one of those windows you're looking through as to how you interpret Clare Graves's model.

Matt Humble: That's true.

Steve McDonald: Does that makes sense? This is where it can start to do your head in a bit. You can't actually say 'the model is this and that'; it really depends which window of consciousness you're looking through because that's going to shape how you interpret the model, and you see that even in how people teach the model. Some people will teach the model as a hierarchical model because that's the window that they're looking through; other people will teach it as a circular model with all of these different things being like options on a flat table, and that's because of the window that they're looking through. So I guess the best thing you could do is to try and figure out which window Clare Graves was looking through when he wrote the model.

Matt Humble: I would assume one of the higher numbers. We haven't talked about the number system. It's easier for our minds to comprehend numbers 1 through 8—8 is a higher number, 1 is a lower number. The model seems to have these brackets—numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8—and if you're at a 7, you're pretty revolutionary and visionary and on kind of a next level and looked at as, you know, a guru or a leader or someone who really knows their shit versus like someone lower, so I would assume he was coming from one of these higher levels. What would you say?

Steve McDonald: It does look that way, just because of his way of comprehending and writing about these different value systems.

For those who aren't familiar with the model, let's just run through really quickly what those numbers represent. We're going from the least complex to the most complex here. The least complex was what was labelled in the *Spiral Dynamics* book as the first value system and given the colour Beige in the book, and that represents early life as a human where you're basically just in survival mode. If you think of a young baby not long after it's been born, where it's not thinking about going on a picnic, it's just thinking about 'Where's my next food coming from? I need a cuddle from mum', and those sorts of things. At a species level, that's usually equated with our first step into being *Homo sapiens* from what we were—whatever our predecessor was—and life as a hunter-gatherer where basically all your time and intelligence during the day is centred around shelter, safety, food and interaction with your immediate family clan.

The second label represents, for an individual, family life as a child where you've got a family structure and you understand what different people represent, what their roles are in that family, and how you fit in with them. At a species level that represents tribal existence where we've gone from clans of hunter-gatherers to settling in a stationary village, so instead of roaming about, we're settling a village and we have a structure within the tribe of a chief, elders, and we understand where we sit in that structure. Around that time in history was when we saw this explosion of culture, roughly about 50,000 years ago, when we transitioned from Hunter-Gatherer to this second layer of values—the Tribal.

The third one then comes when, as individuals, we start to feel like we want to bust out of that family structure. It just doesn't work for us anymore, we know we need to get out and do our own thing, which usually comes post-puberty in the teens. It's all about discovering our own personal power and making our own personal mark in the world. At a species level that came when people started to bust out of the village and bounded sacred land that they belonged to and go invade someone else's land, steal someone else's chickens or whatever. I guess the ultimate example of that was Genghis Khan, who conquered most of Asia and Europe. That's the third; that was given the colour Red in the book. The second one was given the colour Purple.

Those three—Hunter-Gatherer, Tribal, and Egocentric (that's what Graves called it; you could call it Martial also)—were in what you might call a pre-rational zone where the rational mind hadn't become dominant so behaviour was driven by basic wants,

needs, urges: 'I'm hungry, I'm going to get food', those sorts of things. That's not to say that people weren't intelligent. If you look back at some of the wisdom of indigenous tribal people, they had wisdom way beyond Scientific-Industrial wisdom, and we can see them now at this time teaching lessons to the Scientific-Industrial world based on 30,000 years of oral history and those sort of things, so this is not about intelligence. Graves said in his notes, there's no absolute relationship to intelligence here, it's just different ways of being human.

The fourth takes us into dominance of the rational mind. This is where the rational mind really kicked in and started to dominate our emotions and our urges and instincts. We see that when people grow out of that wild teenage phase and they start to settle down and they look for some higher authority to provide very specific information on how to live life. Sometimes that can come from the structure of a religion or the structure of maybe a police force or some particular job where there are rigid rules and only one right way to do things. Graves called this Authoritarian, this fourth one. It was given the colour Blue in the *Spiral Dynamics* book and it represents how life at a species level changed when the Agricultural Revolution happened. Instead of you having to work in armed bands to gather and capture resources and those sorts of things, or live in villages in a tribal way, or live as hunter-gatherers, we discovered how we could produce crops in bulk, and because that meant we didn't have to spend most of our day searching for food or tending to crops and things—some people still did that, obviously—but a lot of other people were freed up and they could go build big towns and cities, and that was another explosion of culture, of course, when that happened.

Then came the shift into the Modern era, which Graves called Multiplistic, and that really represents Scientific-Industrial thinking. At an individual level, after a while when you settle down and start working in a job, start thinking long-term, those sorts of things, and then sooner or later, you're going to feel like you don't want to stick with the programme anymore; you don't want to stick with that routine, you want to bust out and do something a little diverse and maybe create some innovation and those sorts of things. That would represent a shift to Layer 5, which was given the colour Orange in the book, and it represents the time, at a species level, when we saw the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions happen and society shifted that way and superseded the Agricultural way of living. Where we're at right now in the world

is we're seeing that fifth layer of human existence collapse and we have entered into this change process, which is taking us to the sixth layer.

The six layer in Graves's study, for an individual, it represents a change that would take you from working in a job where you're driven by wanting to be successful—work hard, put in enough time, then you'll eventually get the rewards, that kind of thinking—to a shift that would cause you to want to reject that lifestyle completely, reconnect with nature, be motivated by human connection rather than success, and often at this time in their career, you'll see people do sea change or a tree change where they'll want to get out of the city and go and live somewhere where they can be connected with nature, they can find community, they can rediscover growing their own food. It doesn't always come that way, but that's a classic example. Layer 6 is typified by a very humanistic mindset and network-thinking, so rather than striving to be the best and finding the best way to do things in Layer 5, the Scientific-Industrial Modern way, Layer 6 looks to create a strong network and then draw from the network of minds—the knowledge within the network—and work together with people in a communal way.

I might add there that as we're going through these different layers of value systems, they alternate their focus between individual and collective. Hunter-Gatherer was individual, Tribal was collective, Egocentric was individual, Agricultural-Authoritarian was collective, Scientific-Industrial was individualistic, and now we're going back to collective behaviour again. This equates to the changing, shifting dominance of the left and right brain.

Layer 6 was given the colour Green in the book, Layer 5 was Orange, and that takes us to the end of what Graves called the First Tier of consciousness. Graves never wrote this but to me, it's looking more and more like the shift beyond Layer 6 is actually, perhaps, a shift beyond Homo sapiens—a species change for humanity—because the difference that Graves found between Layer 6 and Layer 7 was just off the charts, literally. The coping capacity of somebody at Layer 6 versus the coping capacity of Layer 7 was like a quantum leap in complexity.

How are we going so far?

Matt Humble: Oh, love it. I'm following you, very much so.

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It feels to me like the psychedelic renaissance is very much almost the driving factor in shifting us from 5 to 6, just in that it seems to instil those values through the experience itself, that we should be close to nature, we should be in community, we should be in a role that we feel passionate about and that feels in line with our soul, because we could have these soul crushing jobs—let's just call it being a Wall Street broker or something—and yes, it makes you a lot of money, and yes, you can afford to live in an expensive city and support your family, but if you have a psychedelic trip and then you realise, 'Oh my god, I actually don't love stockbroking at all, actually, I really just love music, and why am I spending this one life that I have endlessly doing this job that I don't feel aligned with, spiritually, and I've got enough money to support my family and myself by working at my job this far, so now I'm just going to quit that job' and we could just say become a psychedelic musician or whatever you want to say. That's something that seems common with people where they get out of jobs that aren't fulfilling their soul and instead opt, even for less money, to do something that does fulfil them. How does that resonate with you?

Steve McDonald: Yes, absolutely. I think that's a good example. If we think of psychedelics as a way of greasing the rails, a way of amplifying and accelerating human awareness and human change—and remember that they've been used as long as written history and longer in fact, as far as we know so it's not like they just popped up for this change—but throughout history, they have most likely been playing a role in human development all the way along. At this time, because of where we're at, then they're showing up as being useful for doing things like reconnecting people to nature because that's exactly what's needed for people to transition from Layer 5 to Layer 6 and beyond.

Matt Humble: Right. So to be in Layer 6 and to have that be the primary window you're looking through at the world, your identity is seemingly very tied in with your mission and they almost merge and you almost feel this sense of 'why I'm here is to do what I'm good at and brings me joy and brings me fulfilment and helps others in the process.' Do you think that that's accurate?

Steve McDonald: I do. I do think you could also apply that to other shifts as well. For example, Layer 4 and that Agricultural Revolution seem to coincide with the development of the major religions that we know, and so somebody who was

transitioning from Layer 3 to Layer 4 could also have that realisation that, 'I think I'm here to be a spiritual person and be of service and go join one of the major religions.' It would be not the same but a similar a kind of a transition, but I agree with what you said, and it certainly does apply to that Layer 6 transition.

Matt Humble: Right, well then maybe if it's not in the sense of religion, it's in the sense of experiential knowledge, because with religion, you're very much relying on a pre-existing matrix or thought system and subscribing to that. I feel like when you become a psychedelic explorer, you start to articulate your own understanding of the universe, and it could actually be pulling from several systems. Me, for example, I'm very drawn to the Eastern yogic practices, and I'm very drawn to Taoism as well, and those are completely different traditions, but I found a home in this hybrid of them and drawing from things from both that resonate with me.

Steve McDonald: Yes, that's exactly right, and that really shows up this network-centric sort of way of thinking. Rather than latching onto one belief system like you might do in Layer 4, in Layer 6, typically people look across a whole network and they will create their own network of whatever it is to suit them, just as you've done, and it's quite classic to see people pulling from different traditions and using what's useful for them; what appeals to make their own networked version, for sure. Absolutely.

Some of the other things that go on in Layer 6 are that typically people are highly motivated to heal themselves. If you think of Layer 1 and Layer 6 as like the bookends of the existence of the species Homo sapiens, it makes sense that when you get to Layer 6, you want to kind of clean it up and have a clean ending to that stack of books, and if you're here on Earth to transition into what Graves called the Second Tier of consciousness which will take you to Layer 7, then you need that clean finish to provide a strong foundation for you to jump off into the Second Tier of consciousness. If you think about a trampoline, if the trampoline has got a whole bunch of holes in it, it's not going to work, so you need to make sure you get a nice solid surface that you can bounce on and when you've got that good foundation, then you can make that move into Second Tier consciousness. Again, I haven't got the science to back this up at the moment, but it's looking to me very much like it is the emergence of a new species of humans, and so what that implies is that we can, while we're alive, go through a species transition, which is a very interesting concept.

Matt Humble: Yeah, that is. I almost don't know what that means, but what comes to mind is that we're becoming more like where we came from, possibly God or the concept of a creator that doesn't have limitation and can be in multiple places at multiple times, and these types of almost, you said earlier Quantum Leap identity. How does that resonate?

Steve McDonald: It does, and it's very, very clear that this shift from Layer 6 into Layer 7 involves the emergence of greater multidimensional awareness, so we become much more aware that, OK, we're not just here in this dimension. That's not to say that some people haven't already got some of that awareness—we spoke at the start of the call about psychics, clairvoyants, who might be able to see or hear into other dimensions—but this is talking about everybody having that capacity once we move into Second Tier, and everybody constantly having an awareness of not just this dimension, but other dimensions as well.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. That makes a lot of sense.

Going into these more complex areas of 7 and 8, I know that human language is not quite the best way to transmit the information that resides in those tiers, and I do believe people exist within those tiers, but how can we try to say what our best speculation is towards what happens in tiers [Layers] 7 and 8?

Steve McDonald: Probably a good place to start is to talk about what doesn't happen. If we look at First Tier, 1 through 6, in all of those layers of consciousness or layers of values, people are driven by fear in some way, and when we move from 6 to 7, into the Second Tier, that motivation by fear no longer happens. That's not to say that people don't feel fear—they do—but it's no longer their main motivation; they can be afraid and do it anyway, in other words. So that's a big thing, and as I go through these, just remember that you can use these as markers. If you come across somebody who you think might be in this Second Tier zone, just think about these things and they're very, very useful for checking that.

The first one is they never do anything out of fear, and the second one is that the tendency to reject people who have different values than you no longer exists. So again, in the First Tier, if you're Layer 5, then you tend not to like people who are

Layer 4 or Layer 6, right? There's an absolute rejection, particularly when you transition into a new layer, like you go from 5 to 6, all of a sudden, Layer 5 looks really bad. You see that in the world right now when people talk about how the modern world treated the environment, treated animals and all these sorts of things, you can see that strong rejection factor in play. Once we go to Layer 7, you don't have that built-in rejection; you see that, OK, that's going on, but that's going on because that person's at Layer 5, so it just makes sense and it doesn't have the emotional charge anymore.

Matt Humble: Right, so it feels almost like a level of acceptance with what is, which is also in line with Taoism, which is what is perfect, you know what I mean? I know that things are not always seemingly perfect, but it's kind of about your vantage point and maybe even the weird, bad things that seem to go on in the news and stuff might actually be necessary for some higher order thing to manifest. I'm not sure, you know, I'm just speculating.

Steve McDonald: Absolutely, you're spot on.

We've spoken about fear dropping away as a motivator, the acceptance of people with different values—so the rejection factor falls away—and another aspect is that people become very comfortable working with paradox. Another way of saying that is that people see the opportunity to do things that work which might not be logical and in that way, of course, it opens up a deeper understanding. You're talking, from a Taoist point of view, of the *taijitu*, the *tai chi* symbol, which shows the yin and the yang in that swirling pattern, and understanding that each one has the seed of the other in it which is characterised by those little dots, right? And so if something is an extremely yang situation, then you know that if it changes, it's going to change to be yin, and so somebody from First Tier might see an extremely yang, an extremely active situation, a violent situation perhaps, and straight away think, 'ah, it's going to get worse', but somebody who was able to understand paradox might see it and say, 'ah, this is peaking now, we should see that change.' Is that making sense?

Matt Humble: Sure. That really brings up in my mind in psychedelic ceremony where someone's going through a hard moment and the shaman isn't worried at all. He's literally like, 'this is exactly what they need to go through. They need to purge, they need to cry, they need to slap the ground, they need to get it out, and this is a

good thing', where a person on a different level would be like 'She's having a terrible time. Why would you let her do this? You need to stop her. You need to stop her from ...'. It's like, 'No, she's going through the process she needs to go through to release this trauma' or whatever it is, and that shaman in that higher Layer 7 perspective perhaps, is able to see the silver lining and even a thing that appears on the surface level like a bad thing.

Steve McDonald: Yes, that's a great example, absolutely.

Another thing is that people in Second Tier, from Layer 7 onwards, will start to think about these different layers of consciousness as operating frequencies, so it's a very different way to think about them. You look at somebody operating on a particular frequency and emitting a particular frequency, and in Second Tier, once you transition to Layer 7, you can actually feel these frequencies so you can read someone's frequency. So sometimes you can look at someone, read their frequency and know straight away which of those value systems that is their dominant value system just by reading their frequency. I find that a really useful way of talking about the value systems and understanding them as operating frequencies and the human capacity to shift frequencies very, very quickly if there's some change in their life conditions. It's interesting just to observe it that way and think about it that way. Another aspect of Second Tier existence, Layer 7, is the capacity to essentially shapeshift and meet somebody at their own frequency, so with that capacity to read a frequency comes the capacity also to adjust yourself to that frequency and interact with them at that frequency. What that does is it takes away their rejection factor because they'll feel like you're on the same page.

Matt Humble: Right, and interestingly, how a Layer 5 looks at Layer 4 and says, 'Oh, that's terrible, what a nightmare', in a way, as we're looking up, even, it can look almost inauthentic that a person can meet you where you're at instead of just staying in that high vibration. They can just be like, 'Oh, you're people pleasing', quote unquote, but in fact, I feel like it's a highly spiritual act of compassion that takes a sense of internal strength and identity to be able to hold space for yourself and know where you're at and still meet people where they are. What would you say about that?

Steve McDonald: Yes, I think you've just got to understand that whatever people are saying to you about anything, really, is a reflection of which window they're looking through on the spiral. In that way, it is useful to think of each layer on the spiral as like a window that you look through that colours how you see things, so somebody who says something like you just said, what they're really doing is they're giving you clues as to which value system they're operating from at that time.

Matt Humble: That's true.

Steve McDonald: One of my teachers, a fellow called John Cook who has passed away now, he really understood how to analyse language and look at the themes in language and then tie that to the particular value systems that Graves wrote about. He taught me how to do that and that's a really interesting skill. What that means is you can pick up a book and you can read the book and looking at the themes and the way life is described in the book, you can actually read the value system of the person who wrote the book. Very interesting.

Matt Humble: Totally. This is all super helpful for sure, and understanding that we have heights that we can ascend to in our consciousness within ourself, even in a baseline consciousness state, you don't simply have to be on psychedelics 24/7 to be operating at 6 and 7; it's something you can integrate into your daily life and way of being.

I meant to say this earlier, but it's funny how we talked about how within one day we might cycle through the layers, and it gave me the idea that you had said, dealing with the children you're at one layer, at work you're at one layer, and then that night, if you had had an MDMA ceremony planned, you're at that layer and that might be a 7 or an 8. Human language can't really encapsulate and deliver the message because you have to have that experience yourself to understand what they're talking about. But this is a step we have to take in discussing it to get people interested, although they might not fully understand it or comprehend it until they have that experience or knowledge themselves.

Steve McDonald: Exactly. When people talk about having a peak experience on psychedelics, what's actually happening is that you having the opportunity to go to a more complex level of consciousness, and in one sense, it is like taking a trip further

up the spiral and having a taste of what it is to experience reality there and then coming back down again. The beauty of it is that when you do that, usually you never quite come back to the same place where you were; you always just get that little bit of expansion. Many people who've worked with psychedelics for a long time say that the more you do this meditative developmental work with psychedelics, the less you actually need to take psychedelics. All of that awareness seeps into everyday life.

Matt Humble: I 1,000% agree. In my personal experience, there was this experience-seeking thing that happened where I tried an experience at a level and I said, 'I want to take more'. I tried that experience and I said, 'Hmm, very interesting, I want to take more'. Eventually, though, I got to almost like the height of an experience into the point that I actually just kind of noticed that as I would take smaller amounts, almost microdose amounts, I was getting to the same places that previously it took three times the amount to reach. It was almost like I just could enter that space easier and therefore needed less assistance from the medicine itself.

Steve McDonald: Yes, they're certainly showing up to be very, very useful tools for that kind of developmental work when they're used in the right way and with respect.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. I know we only have a few more minutes here, but I did want to touch briefly on Layer 8 now. In my mind, it's almost like the space that you hear about 5-MeO-DMT taking people, which is a unitive consciousness experience in which they merge with the Source and become all of space and time all at once and they've been here all along, and they almost recognise themselves in the dinosaurs and the fossils and the sea, let alone being a human named Matt who's age 30, you know what I mean? They kind of go into this massive, huge experience that you can't even tell anyone about almost, but that, to me, is the closest thing I can think of as to what Layer 8 is. I wanted to see how does that resonate with you? And if not this, what would you say Layer 8 is?

Steve McDonald: Well, let's start with what Clare Graves wrote. He found, out of 1,065 people in his study, 6 of them who had originally identified, or he had identified, as being able to operate at Layer 7. Those 6 shifted during the 9 years and started operating in a new way, which after a lot of focused work, he finally

figured out was a new layer, because at that time, in any of the psychological models that were common at the time, there were no more than 7 levels or layers so initially he thought he must have made a mistake. Then, eventually, with the help of other people, he figured out, no, actually, this is an eighth layer. Because he only had 6 people, he didn't get a lot of data, but what he did write was that the left-brain/right-brain bias that he saw in the First Tier—Scientific-Industrial Layer 5 being left-brain, individually-oriented, and then Layer 6 Communal being right-brain oriented—that absolutely settled down a lot in Second Tier and you began to get this resonant two hemisphere integration happening. There was still a little bit of bias towards individuality in Layer 7 and a little bit of bias towards community and Layer 8, but it was probably this resonant integration of left and right hemisphere that brought the massive problem-solving capacity and consciousness expansion that we see in the Second Tier.

Layer 8 showed up as being communally-oriented. He said it was very spiritual and he really didn't write much more than that. Actually, when you go to his notes, he hasn't got a chapter on it. He's just got like a paragraph and said, 'really didn't have much data here. These people showed up as being very mystical or spiritual, had a communal orientation'. From the *Spiral Dynamics* community—those people like me who've been working with Graves's work for a number of years—I can talk from what the general feeling is. This is beyond Graves's research now, so it's not research-based, it's just an opinion, and at the same time again, I'm going to situate it in the current time. We're at the end, the collapse of the Scientific-Industrial era. We can look around and see all of our social systems, like our economic system, our political systems, our medical systems, they don't work like they used to anymore—they're not coping, they're falling apart. At the same time, we're seeing Layer 6 rise and new systems devised from Layer 6 thinking, which are highly networked, more capable than the Layer 5 systems, and many people, including where I live at the moment, are starting to turn to those what are still informal Layer 6 systems instead of going to the Layer 5 ones because they just work better.

Matt Humble: Yeah, like cryptocurrency, right?

Steve McDonald: Yeah, exactly. We're seeing this dynamic of Layer 6 as playing some sort of a stabilising and healing role at the end of the First Tier and we know that it's going to be the shortest era of the lot, because if you look at the eras from

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Hunter-Gatherer through Tribal through Warlike or Egocentric, Agricultural, et cetera, each era has got shorter and shorter in time span. The Agricultural era was maybe 10,000-12,000 years long and most, the Scientific-Industrial has been a few hundred years, Layer 6 is looking like it's going to be 10, maybe 15 or 20 at the most, so it's going to be a very short space of time. It's going to be a time for great change and healing, and we're starting to see that play out right now which is very interesting. Layer 6 is like a safety net that catches everybody as Layer 5 falls apart and all the systems don't work anymore and collapse. Layer 6 is there as a safety net to catch people and to heal them, basically, and to provide that solid foundation for those people who are here on Earth to transition into Second Tier consciousness, most likely as a new species.

Layer 7, the emergence of this new species, I often think of them as kind of like the first responders on an accident scene. It's like you turn up and see the disaster that happened from this period of Homo sapiens' time on Earth and all of the damage that's been done to the natural world and all the poisons that have been spread around the world and all that kind of stuff, and you look at the world now and you see the chaos starting to grow, then Layer 7 are kind of the folks that are here to carry out first aid and triage on human society and the planet, I guess. They have massive problem-solving capacity and the capacity to operate in very complex environments, obviously, beyond all of the structures that we've relied on to look after us. There will be a Layer 7 structure that's really yet to emerge in any noticeable way around the world. That's going to be the first building block of Second Tier existence for humans on planet Earth. So that's the Layer 7.

Then Layer 8 will be the first step in a community in Second Tier, and it's likely to be absolutely globally-oriented, so the first emergence of a true global society, with no racism, no differentiation; you're a human on planet Earth, therefore you're part of society, and that's what it comes to. We expect Layer 8 to start to provide the cultural and social structures in a formal way on the planet that Layer 7 didn't have time to do because they were too busy cleaning up the mess, if that makes sense.

Then, if you take this one step further, there's mounting evidence from very smart people that the Second Tier is probably only three layers: 7, 8 and 9. At 9, we can probably expect we'll go back to being individually-oriented even more, and my understanding is that the energetic body will create a triangulation between the

seventh, eighth and ninth chakras—the seventh being on the top of the head, eighth and ninth being above the head—which will result in the full activation of a light body. If you go back to some of the oldest written stories on the planet, many religious stories about light beings who could do godlike things and would manifest as a ball of light and those sorts of things, I believe that's where we're headed, and I believe that once we bed down Layer 9, then we will have that full capacity.

So the first step to Layer 7 is the beginning of the development of that capacity and the beginning of the activation of the light body. That continues and expands with Layer 8, and then Layer 9 will complete that process. If you look back to the First Tier at how Layer 3 involved breaking out of the sacred tribal lands, going beyond that boundary, then we should expect that Layer 9 will involve leaving the planet and interacting on a galactic level with other intelligences.

So 7 and 8 are the stepping stones to getting to that, and each one will bring some of that capacity in some way, if that makes sense.

Matt Humble: It does. It actually gave me a funny psychedelic thought that being Layer 9 with the lightbody being capable of being in multiple dimensions at once or multiple dimensions at will, that they are the light beings that people think of today coming back from the future—our Layer 9 selves are already here helping us get there.

Steve McDonald: I think that's fair to say. We've got a very linear idea of history, which is related to Layer 4 and Layer 5 thinking on the spiral, and I think as we go further into Layer 6 and beyond, we're going to rewrite our understanding of history and we'll discard this idea that we were really dumb and we got smarter and smarter and smarter and smarter, and we'll look back on those early stages of human existence and just understand that, 'wow, they had capacities that we didn't have', and we can already do that—we can look back to the indigenous folks. Here in Australia, I often mention when I'm interviewed like this that there's 30,000 year-old story in Aboriginal culture here in Australia about a supernova that science only just discovered in the last decade or two. They would talk to some Aboriginal people and they'd say, 'Oh yeah, we have a story about that, yeah, that happened', so there are capacities there to be in tune with other dimensions of nature and the planet, and interact with the weather, maybe even control the weather according to some stories,

do things that we certainly can't do. Our sort of common story, in the Modern era at least, has been that 'Oh no, they're primitive people, we're much smarter than them', but it's not necessarily that way at all.

Matt Humble: Right? Totally. I love looking at reality as this multifaceted gemstone where, depending on which angle you look through it, what you see. This is such a beautiful existence to get to explore these ideas and I definitely have so many more questions for you, but I know we've come to the end today. We'll have to book another show because I want to ask about mystery schools, I want to ask about cryptocurrency, there's so many other things that I know you're well versed on that I'd love to discuss with you, but I just want to leave the audience with one final thought, and it's if they're interested in developing themselves to, let's say ascend the spiral, what do you think is some easy advice to give them to begin that process?

Steve McDonald: If you think about the body as having different aspects that include our instinctive and emotional selves, our rational-minded self and, beyond that, what you might call that transpersonal self—our emergent light body—what we need to do is go through a process of integrating all those aspects of ourselves. In a developmental sense, that involves being in touch with our emotions, being in touch with our urges and instincts, and understanding and being comfortable with those; having a structure in our rational mind, which helps us make sense of who we are rationally and how we are in the world—and that rational structure can come from things like the work of Clare Graves, and there are so many other models out there about human development, which are all talking about the same thing, just using different language; then the transpersonal part really is that beginning of our exploration of other dimensions, and I think that's where, at this time, psychedelics are a really useful tool, but not absolutely necessary. I'm not saying that if you don't have access to psychedelics, you're not going to grow into this transpersonal self—that's absolutely not true. We can operate and explore those other dimensions in many different ways, including through meditation.

I think just thinking about those three different aspects, it's useful: the pre-rational emotional, instinctive self; the rational self; and then the transrational venturing into that multi-dimensionality, and pay attention to all of those. Of course, the physical body is absolutely an integral part of all of that, and the condition of the physical body influences all of those three aspects that I just spoke about, so it's about an

integrated whole approach to development and not just getting stuck on one aspect, I guess.

Matt Humble: Absolutely. Words from the wise. Thank you so much, Steve McDonald. It's been an amazing chat today. I really appreciate you and everything you bring to the world. I'm so glad that we met and I just want to say thank you.

Where can people learn more about you and what's your website and all that?

Steve McDonald: Well, thank you, Matt Humble, it's been a pleasure. This is the first podcast we've ever done together. I've really enjoyed it, I'd love to do another one, so let's do that.

Matt Humble: Let's do it.

Steve McDonald: If people want to learn about my work, I have a podcast called *Future Sense* and you'll find it on most of the big podcast platforms. It has a website, <https://www.future sense.it>, and I run a charity called *Aadii Mesh Foundation*. We have a website which is <https://www.aadii.org> and there's a bit more information there, but the *Future Sense* site has a brief outline of Clare Graves's model on the *Resources* page (<https://www.future sense.it/resources/>) and links to other resources, so that's a good place to start.

Matt Humble: Amazing. Alright, thanks once again, and thank you to all of our listeners for being here.

Steve McDonald: Thanks mate. Cheers.

Matt Humble: Cheers.

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