

THE LAYERS OF DEPTH IN
FUNDAMENTAL WELLBEING

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The Layers of Depth in Fundamental Wellbeing
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OVERVIEW

In 2019 we released a ground breaking book called The Finders. It detailed the types of, so-called, higher levels of consciousness, variously referred to publically by terms such as: persistent mystical experience, the peace that passeth understanding, enlightenment, nonduality, unity consciousness, and so on. We refer to these ways of experiencing the world collectively as “Fundamental Wellbeing” in this book. (As you read, please keep in mind that some of the terms in this book may not be familiar to you without having read The Finders or being more generally familiar with our work.)

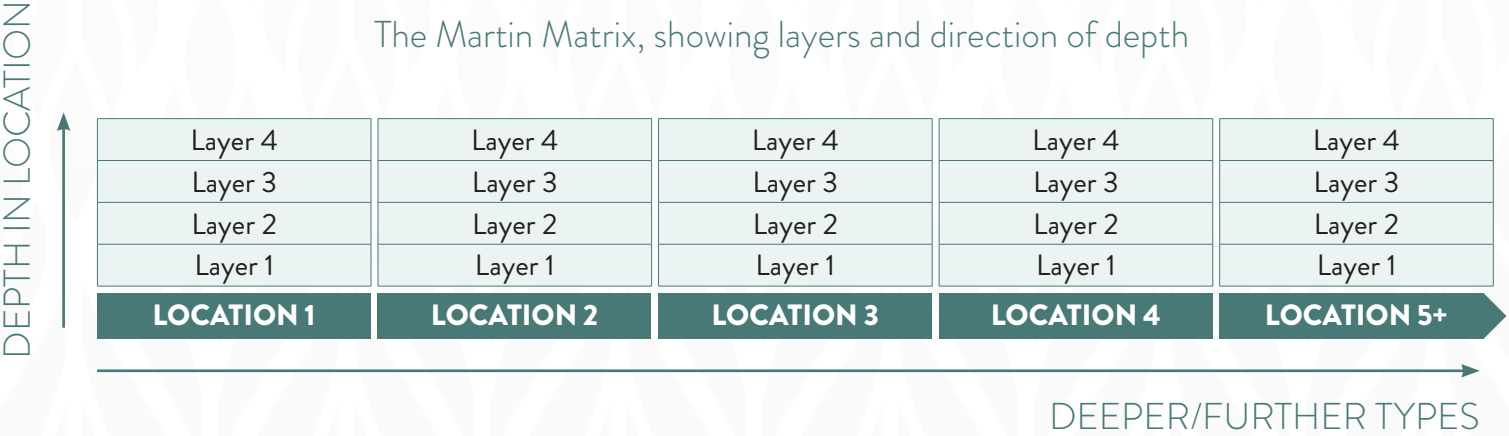
The Finders was the result of the largest global scientific project into Fundamental Wellbeing, one that spanned six continents, over a thousand participants, and more than a decade of dedicated work at the time the book was published. The types of Fundamental Wellbeing it covered, which we refer to as “locations” along a “continuum” of related experiences, were largely unknown prior to that publication. Understanding developmental stages in humans requires very large sample sizes, and teasing these out required a research project on a scale that had never been done before.

LOCATION 1	LOCATION 2	LOCATION 3	LOCATION 4	LOCATION 5+
Expansion of sense of self, connection to divine Much less affected by ‘self’ thoughts Distance from but still have positive and negative emotions Deep peace but can be suppressed by triggered conditioning Effects from perceptual triggers fall off quickly Deep peace and ‘beingness’ feels more real than anything previous Trust in ‘how things are’ Personal history less relevant, memories less	‘Self’ thoughts continue to fade Peace increasingly harder to suppress/conditioning fades Shift towards increasingly positive emotions, until only very positive emotions remain Intermediate levels of perceptual triggers increasingly fade More likely to feel that there is a correct decision or path to take when presented with choices Higher well-being than location one	Only single positive emotion remains Feels like a combination of universal compassion, love, joy, ... Classic end of Christian mystical tradition May be divine or panpsychic Higher well-being than location 2	No sense of agency No emotions No ‘self’ thoughts Perceptual triggers at their bare minimum No sense of divine or panpsychic consciousness Life is simply unfolding and they are watching the process happen Memory deficits/scheduled appointments, etc. Highest well-being reported	

Two years later, we began to share another aspect of our findings that dealt with changes that occur in the depth of people’s experience at each of the continuum’s locations. Unlike the locations, these layers of depth were quite well known. They were easy to spot both in oneself and others, and had been uncovered, widely discussed, and shared by a wide variety of religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions for milenea.

In this book we cover the results of the first major scientific investigation that also uncovered these layers of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing. The information here is secular, and drawn from a global psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience project, making it uniquely useful for gaining a modernized, fundamental understanding of these layers of depth. Those of you who have heard of these through religion, spirituality, or philosophy will find what’s shared here to be a remarkably useful guide to better understanding the information that you’ve previously encountered on this topic.

The layers form a vertical axis of depth for each location on the continuum. As a result, there are many different ways that each location can be experienced. These layers of depth are what the majority of literature on Fundamental Wellbeing focuses on, and are often what is being referred to when traditions and teachers refer to different types of Fundamental Wellbeing.



Unlike the locations, which appear to be related to a rewiring of neural networks and are thus not present before someone transitions to a location, the layers appear to be related to fundamental aspects of the nervous system that are always functioning. All the layers are always present and contributing to the perception of this moment, but the deeper layers are not normally part of someone's subjective experience.

Most people's perception is centered in Layer 1, the most shallow layer, which essentially comprises the conceptual mind. With the transition to Fundamental Wellbeing, it is possible for deeper layers to be experienced. In actuality, Finders are capable of accessing and centering in any layer, as well as fluidly accessing and even integrating two or more layers.

There are four fundamental, subjectively experienced layers in the nervous system. The subjective experiences associated with each layer were uncovered through researching the experiences of thousands of Finders across cultures and continents. They have also been described for millennia in religious and spiritual traditions that are oriented to experiencing forms of Fundamental Wellbeing.



These layers are also reflected in modern understandings of the brain and consciousness. As one deepens through the layers, one seems to effectively be moving subjective experience from being centered in more recently evolved, complex layers of the nervous system, to older, more foundational parts of it. If you are interested in a deeper understanding of the layers from a neuroscience perspective, we recommend the work of Antonio Damasio.

Normally, the deeper layers are obscured by the activity at Layer 1 that, again, primarily involves the mind. Although contributions from the other three layers are also present, they can be difficult to detect. This means that subjective perception is effectively locked into a narrow band of experience that primarily focuses on the most complex layer of evolution in the nervous system. Although this layer is a masterwork of nature, to isolate perception in it is highly limiting in the context of the full potential of human consciousness.

Subjectively, each further deepening of subjective perception into the more foundational layers feels as though it opens up a vaster paradigm of experience. Each successive layer feels as though it contains or enables the content and existence of the more shallow layers beneath it (with the exception of Layer 4, which will be covered in more detail later on). Each deeper layer feels like a greater or more foundational context for the unfolding of experience at preceding layers. Movement deeper into the layers subjectively both transcends and includes the layers that came before. Deeper layers feel more foundational and absolute than the shallower layers.

Deepening through the layers involves getting beneath processes that structure and filter perception at various levels, revealing progressively more foundational and undifferentiated levels of experience. This brings with it progressively deeper qualities of stillness/silence and degrees of peace. The terms “stillness” and “silence” are used interchangeably, with some Finders preferring one term over the other. “Stillness” in this context does not refer to everything being perceptually motionless, and “silence” does not refer to an absence of audible sound. Both “stillness” and “silence” are used to point to an existential quality of experience itself that emerges as the perceptual filters, are progressively removed.

If there is not a sudden, deep shift into a layer, deepening through the layers typically begins with sensing the qualities of a deeper layer and the deeper stillness/silence associated with it from within a preceding layer. This progresses to more direct experience as subjective perception centers in the deeper layer, which can be temporary at first. As the experience becomes more stable and deep, there is an association with the qualities of the layer, and consequently, a shift in the sense of self.

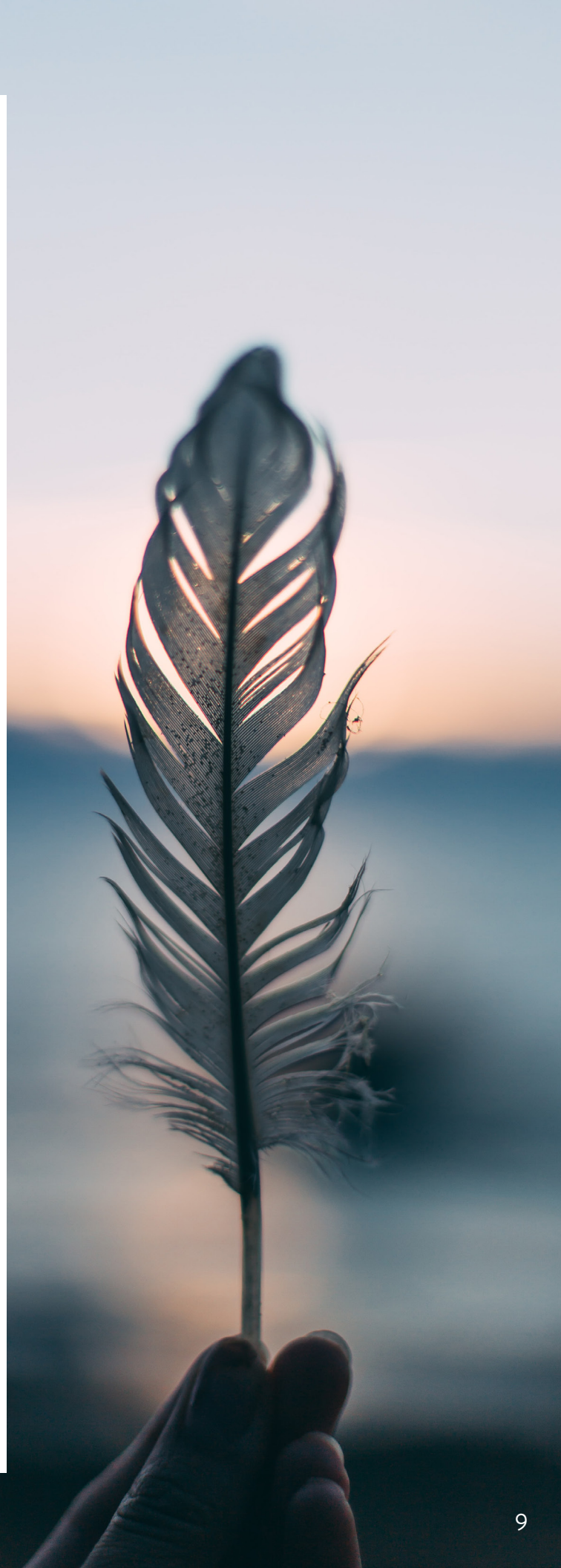


The nature of Layer 1 can produce a sense of personal/individualized self. Moving subjective perception into deeper layers leads to distance from this personal sense of self and to progressively more impersonal and undifferentiated qualities of self, and finally a loss of a sense of self altogether. The nature and degree of this change depends on the location it is experienced from.

The subjective experience of each layer is colored by the location in Fundamental Wellbeing that it is experienced from. Any layer, or combination of layers, can be experienced from any location, though each layer is generally more accessible from specific locations, and some layers can be very difficult to access in a given location.

Each location appears to have intrinsic perceptual gravity towards a particular range of depth, and, consequently, a particular layer or combination of layers in which subjective perception tends to center. It appears to be difficult for subjective perception to reach far beyond the natural perceptual tendencies of a given location, and deepening in a layer that is far out of reach in a given location typically requires moving to a location that is more aligned with that layer.

Most traditional conceptions of Fundamental Wellbeing have been linear and unidimensional in nature and directionality, and each tradition has targeted what it considers to be the “best” or most desirable endpoint of its development. The goal is often to exclusively lock in this “best” combination of layer(s) and location, and leave behind prior states of perception.



However, Fundamental Wellbeing is not linear and unidimensional in nature. Subjective perception rarely isolates in a single layer, and most locations have a range of layers that they have a degree of natural access to. In addition, it is possible for subjective perception to move fluidly between a range of layers within and across locations. This range will depend on the location or locations that a Finder has access to, and the extent to which s/he has developed access to the layers. It is also possible to experience the integration of some or all the layers, making them simultaneously accessible to subjective perception. In the case of all of the layers, this is especially the case for Finders who have gone to later locations and come back to earlier ones.

Fluidity among and/or integration of the layers give the system as a whole greater flexibility and enhance perspective. This, in turn, leads to greater capacity in terms of what can be experienced and expressed. It allows one to meet each moment through whatever quality of perception it calls for, which can significantly enhance the capacity to respond to the situation at hand. It also brings about a more all-encompassing and multidimensional experience of reality.

Both fluidity and integration of the layers diminish single layer fixation in a Finder's perspective. By nature, fixation in a single perspective is dualistic, even if it does not feel that way. It places a limitation on the system as a whole and often leads to imbalance. In contrast, the non-fixation that can result from fluidity and integration allows myriad perspectives to be held simultaneously, all of which represent an aspect of reality and can inform every other aspect. Like a diamond with many facets, the entirety of what is cannot be contained in a single perspective. The same is true of the human system in every moment.





The following sections contain detailed descriptions of the qualities and tendencies associated with each layer of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing. Bear in mind that these are best attempts at descriptions and are not equal to the subjective experience itself. The descriptions are literal, not theoretical or metaphorical, although they may seem abstract or incomprehensible to someone who has not subjectively experienced them.

By nature, the mind is incapable of forming an accurate representation of the subjective experience of deeper layers, and thus these materials should not be regarded as something to understand conceptually. They are a map of the territory that can help people to recognize and contextualize where they are, if they currently experience a particular layer, have in the past, or ultimately end up there. These descriptions are also useful for Finders who already experience two or more layers, as they can have greater clarity regarding their experiences.



LAYER 1: MIND

Layer 1 relates to the mind and the perception of mental activity, and is essentially one's interface with the world. Before Fundamental Wellbeing the mind is intertwined with the Narrative Self (also referred to by some as the egoic self). What remains after transitioning to Fundamental Wellbeing are effectively the same mental structures and capabilities with the influence of the Narrative Self lessened, or in some cases even removed entirely. This typically brings about a reduction in, or in some cases a cessation of, self-referential thoughts, but not necessarily mental activity as a whole. Therefore, many of the mind's same tendencies and qualities remain, which may include:

- Remaining active—describing, analyzing, reasoning, conceptualizing, justifying, imagining, remembering, etc.
- Seeking control
- Being uncomfortable with not knowing or understanding things
- Resisting what it does not like and trying to hold onto what it likes
- Being occupied with and concerned about one's life circumstances—assessing, planning, strategizing, worrying, weighing, comparing, predicting, calculating, etc.
- Being attached to thinking and emotion, and defensive and wanting to be right about these
- Being concerned with meaning and purpose
- Being dogmatic and convinced that what it thinks is right and important, even though it is only one limited perspective
- Lacking confidence and being prone to self-doubt
- Being reactive and prone to highs and lows
- Exerting a strong pull on attention
- Dominating subjective perception—its activity can block perception to other layers and thus other perspectives
- Being highly fallible and having difficulty discerning truth from falsehood
- Being limited by the premises and paradigms it reasons from
- Being by nature dualistic and highly fixated—it cannot function without positionalities, which are fixations in relative points of view and necessarily produce a limited perspective
- Producing a sense of an individualized (personal) self

These tendencies and qualities relate to the nature of Layer 1. It is a fundamental layer of the nervous system that cannot be eliminated; however, the degree of perceptual access to it can vary significantly across types and depths of Fundamental Wellbeing. Contrary to what is sometimes believed, it is not true that all forms of Fundamental Wellbeing involve a largely or completely silent mind—although this can happen, particularly in the case of further out types of Fundamental Wellbeing where Layer 1 is so distant from subjective experience that it is no longer perceived.

Assuming someone wants to be functional in society (i.e., is not “going to the cave” or planning on withdrawing from society), perceptual access to the Layer 1 matters. However, this is often not what feels most natural to Finders and as a result they are generally trying to escape or suppress this layer. This is reinforced by a belief in many spiritual systems and traditions that the mind is something to go beyond. Generally, that is not practical, as Layer 1 is responsible for high quality access to language, thinking, memory, planning, social skills, calculating, describing, analyzing, reasoning, conceptualizing, strategizing, and so on.

One of the reasons being perceptually centered in Layer 1 can feel less natural or “right” to Finders is because most people spend their entire lives before Fundamental Wellbeing operating within Layer 1, and thus this layer contains the most conditioning and capacity to suppress peace. In addition, centering subjective experience in Layer 1 moves it in the opposite direction of deepening through the layers, and thus, deepening into Fundamental Wellbeing. Consequently, many Finders (and many of the traditions that seek Fundamental Wellbeing) tend to see Layer 1 as an obstacle to leave behind. However, there is a price to pay for taking this position in terms of functionality in life. Of course, the more one chooses to withdraw from society, the less this is a concern.

The catch with Layer 1 is essentially that it occludes the deeper layers, where experiences of Fundamental Wellbeing that Finders often consider more desirable, such as a greater and more foreground peace and stillness, can be found. This is especially the case in Location 1, where the Layer 1 is the default. This often results in Location 1 Finders feeling as though they must continuously work at quieting or escaping their minds to remain in the deeper quality of peace. It is true that depth in Fundamental Wellbeing equates to distance from Layer 1, but Fundamental Wellbeing is not linear and unidimensional in nature and directionality. It is possible for Layer 1 to be experienced with other layers in an integrated or fluid way, which does not compromise access to the deeper reaches of Fundamental Wellbeing.



In summary, the most fundamental qualities of Layer 1, or the mind, cannot be changed. It will always be as it is by nature, and this has practical use in functioning in the world. Rather than being something which disappears with deepening in Fundamental Wellbeing, it is a layer of the nervous system that is always present and merely becomes increasingly distant from subjective perception as one moves into deeper layers.

This does not mean that it is experienced in the same way that it is prior to becoming a Finder. It is typically less reactive, less compelling, and less dominant overall when experienced in even shallow forms of Fundamental Wellbeing. It is also much easier to reprogram. Prior psychological patterns can more readily be reconditioned in more optimal directions or allowed to fall away.

Although it is often eschewed by religious and spiritual traditions that focus on Fundamental Wellbeing, returning to Layer 1 perceptually for its functional properties may be appropriate and practical for the situation at hand. In a fluid system where a Finder has access to more than one layer, access to Layer 1 does not need to compromise access to the deeper layers. Its perspective can be regarded as a tool for interfacing with the world, rather than as the dominant or only point of view.

DIFFERENCES IN LAYER 1 ACROSS LOCATIONS:

LOCATION 1

In Location 1, Layer 1 is the default layer. This means that mental activity often still dominates subjective experience. The mind has a gravity to it in Location 1, which usually means that subjective experience defaults to mental activity when a Finder is not actively sinking in to deeper layers. This will often lead Location 1 Finders to doubt whether they are experiencing Fundamental Wellbeing persistently. However, usually the fluctuations they experience involve changes in depth within Location 1, and not in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing.

LOCATION 2

Layer 1 is usually highly accessible, although it can be made less accessible if someone works at distancing themselves from Layer 1 by focusing their subjective experience into a deeper layer. It is possible to transition to Location 2 at the Layer 1 level of depth. However, usually this transition occurs at Layer 2, or in a combination of Layer 1 and 2. Layer 1 is often integrated with, or accessed from a deeper layer, making thought feel more impersonal. Location 2 Finders will sometimes comment that, at times, they fall back into their old sense of self. This often relates to aspects of Layer 1, which has a quality of self that feels more individualized and personal than other layers at this location.

LOCATION 3

Layer 1 is not the default layer that people transition to or experience in Location 3, however it can remain quite accessible. It is usually accessed and viewed from the perspective of being centered in a deeper layer. The combination of a continued degree of access to Layer 1 and a very loving, compassionate, joyous disposition, makes Location 3 Finders wonderful to be around.

LOCATION 4

Layer 1 is accessible, to a limited degree, in that there can be a meta-awareness of what is happening at Layer 1. Essentially this is a meta-awareness of what is happening in the mind, but there is no sense of being able to engage with it like there is in previous locations. The most distinctive property of Layer 1 in Location 4 is that it is experienced as functioning autonomously. This can have less than ideal consequences, as it will change how it is programmed to operate over time. Without more conscious direction, this will now take place largely within Layer 1 itself, based on the previous psychological conditioning and tendencies, genetic tendencies, the environment, and so on. Without conscious introspection, many key aspects of the brain are left out of the redevelopment process, including important parts such as those related to moral reasoning. This can lead to outcomes that work out well over time for the Finder's life, or less so. Most systems that target Location 4 tend to hold the belief that the Layer 1 is something to get away from, and as someone deepens it does tend to become less accessible. This moves increasingly in the direction of transcendence and is often not conducive to effectiveness in the world unless actively managed in some way.

LOCATION 5+

In Location 5 and later, Layer 1 increasingly recedes from subjective awareness, especially on the Path of Freedom. Like in Location 4, the mind functions autonomously but is now increasingly outside of even subjective awareness, despite continuing to impact behavior. Instead of action being experienced as the consequence of thought and intentionality, it feels intrinsic to the unfolding itself and is silent and self-revealing. Whatever thought processes precede it are at a level of the system that is out of subjective awareness.



LAYER 2: ALL-CONTAINING SPACIOUSNESS AND EMPTINESS

Layer 2 is the first layer beyond Layer 1 and involves the experience of all-containing spaciousness and emptiness. The experience of it at Location 2 is what the majority of Finders and literature on Fundamental Wellbeing describe as persistent awakening, nonduality, or enlightenment. It is relatively rare for Finders in the general public to persistently go beyond this combination of location and layer.

The most distinguishing qualities of Layer 2 are those of spaciousness, emptiness, vastness, nothingness, expansiveness, formlessness, and so on. There is a sense that this aware emptiness contains and encompasses everything, and that everything seems to be arising from and within. Attention is centered more in the present, in direct experience rather than thoughts about experience. When Layer 1 is no longer front and center in experience, the overlay of labels, concepts, and interpretations on being and/or existence is no longer present. Everything is experienced to just be here, within the limitless spacious clarity of Layer 2, and can feel truly miraculous from this perspective.

Layers have degrees of depth to them, meaning someone can be on the shallow end in Layer 2, in the middle, or deeper. As one deepens into Layer 2, one gains increasing distance from Layer 1 and mental activity feels increasingly impersonal and spontaneous. As this happens, it becomes clear from a subjective experience standpoint that one is not one's thoughts or emotions, nor the agent of them. This results from subjective experience centering deeper in Layer 2 and away from Layer 1. Consequently, the contents of Layer 1 can feel more in the background, or as though they are arising within an overall context of stillness and spaciousness (i.e., Layer 2) that feels deeper and more real than the movement of thought.

As perception moves into deeper layers, there are progressively greater depths and qualities of stillness/silence. (The terms “stillness” and “silence” are used interchangeably, with some Finders preferring one term over the other. “Silence” in this context does not refer to an absence of audible sound, and “stillness” does not refer to everything being perceptually motionless. Both “stillness” and “silence” are used to point to an existential quality of experience itself that emerges as the perceptual filters, most obviously the activity of Layer 1, are progressively removed.)

As mentioned, the stillness/silence relates to stripping away or getting beneath the processes that filter and structure perception, beginning with the Layer 1 (i.e., labels, concepts, interpretations, etc.) in the case of Layer 2. Layer 2 feels like a greater or more foundational context for the unfolding of experience at Layer 1. The deeper layer, in this case Layer 2, feels independent of the content of the preceding layer(s), in this case Layer 1.

This sense of distance from and space around Layer 1 makes its activity seem much less compelling, and one typically becomes less reactive. This makes Layer 2 very effective for releasing and reprogramming previously acquired psychological conditioning at Layer 1. The downside of this is that Layer 2 can be used to disown and escape the parts of the system where challenging conditioning resides. This is usually what is meant when people speak about “spiritual bypassing”. Deepening away from Layer 1 may remove it from one’s subjective awareness, but that does not mean it stops operating. This essentially leaves the conditioned psychological tendencies that reside at Layer 1 to function unsupervised, which may not lead to optimal life outcomes.

This tendency of Layer 2 is mostly relevant from Location 2 on, where one is able to more fully isolate in Layer 2, and where this layer can feel like one has “made it” in terms of Fundamental Wellbeing. A significant amount of religious and spiritual literature describes this experience and assumes it to be the end of the path of deepening further into Fundamental Wellbeing. This can lead people to root into it as deeply as they can, which can prevent the experience of still deeper layers, and also significantly disconnect them from Layer 1. This, as mentioned, can have unfavorable consequences in terms of overall integration and life functionality.



The deeper experiences of Layer 2 typically only occur for Finders from Location 2 on, where the experience of Layer 2 moves more to the foreground of moment-to-moment experience. Location 2 is nondual, meaning that there is no perception of separation between subject (observer) and object (observed). There is only a unified field of experience.

As a result, in Location 2 the experience of Layer 2 is also nondual. It feels as though one is indistinct from the space in which everything arises and, deeper into the layer, from the substance of everything arising as well. Because of the nonduality at Location 2, especially beyond Layer 1 and the shallow end of Layer 2, there is no sense of distinction between the object of experience, the experiencer, and the process of experiencing. It all seems to unfold as one field of experience. There is no longer a sense of within or without, the spaciousness is all encompassing.

In this deeper experience of Layer 2, there is an association with the substance of its spaciousness as one's true nature, which is also experienced as the essential nature of everything. Perception becomes progressively centered on Layer 2's central qualities of spaciousness and emptiness. This increasingly highlights the impermanent and relative nature of other aspects of perceptual experience, like thought, emotion, sensation, and so on, which seem to come and go, all contained within the properties, the spaciousness, of Layer 2. Subjectively, it can feel as though, instead of one's body moving through the world, the perceptual experience of the world is flowing through the motionless, spacious clarity of Layer 2. As one moves progressively deeper into the layer, the experience of Layer 2 often feels more real to Finders than anything else, in this case because everything else seems impermanent by contrast.



Shifting deeply and exclusively into this layer can begin the process of even more comprehensively leaving behind one's former sense of self, particularly the personal self that resides at Layer 1. In its place there is a more formless sense of aware presence, which relates to the association with the qualities of Layer 2 (or 3). Both Layers 2 and 3 have a quality of aware presence/beingness, which is a quality of self that falls away in Layer 4. However, unlike Layer 1, which can have a quality of individuated or personal self, the quality of self in Layers 2 and 3 is impersonal and formless.

An alternative to isolating perception increasingly into Layer 2 is to move fluidly between Layers 1 and 2 (and 3 and 4, if possible) as is appropriate for the moment at hand. This enables greater integration of the system and can allow Finders to experience the depths of Fundamental Wellbeing without compromising effectiveness in the world. The degree to which this is achievable depends on the location one is in and its innate tendencies and access to the layers. Location 2 probably has the greatest range of access across the layers, followed by Location 3.

DIFFERENCES IN LAYER 2 ACROSS LOCATIONS:

LOCATION 1

Layer 2 is accessible to a degree, but experiences are usually partial and temporary. These experiences of Layer 2 are often mixed with Layer 1 and the gravity of Layer 1 in Location 1 tends to make the experience of Layer 2 unstable for most people. Layer 2 is usually the layer that Finders in Location 1 have temporary experiences of, and this experience makes them conclude that they must be going in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing. In reality they are sinking in to deeper experiences of Location 1 (Layer 2) and then being pulled back to a more shallow experience (Layer 1) by the habitual patterns in their attentional systems and their psychological conditioning. The habit patterns can be changed over time with consistent reorientation of attention to Layer 2, although this can take more effort to do from Location 1 than a later location. Over time, the natural unfolding of Fundamental Wellbeing helps with the conditioning and triggers.

LOCATION 2

Layer 2 is one of the default layers for Location 2 (the other is Layer 1) and is most characteristic of the “classic” nondual Location 2 experience described in religious and spiritual literature. Layer 2 is highly accessible and is very often the layer people land in when they transition to Location 2. For some people, this location and layer can feel lonely at first, because it feels like there is only one thing that exists and it has a pervasive sense of emptiness. As the experience of a personal self is left behind, a sense of meaninglessness or starkness can also accompany this layer. These experiences usually do not last, but people can go through periods that are challenging as they become accustomed to this layer.

LOCATION 3

Layer 2 is highly accessible in Location 3 and the experience of it becomes infused with the divine or panpsychist presence that is central to experience in

this location. Usually this is a mix of Layer 2 being infused with Layer 3. The sense of union with divinity or a panpsychist sense makes Layer 2 in Location 3 feel less detached and alone than it can in Locations 2 and 4. It is relatively common for Location 3’s default layer, Layer 3, to be experienced along with Layer 1, bypassing the experience of Layer 2 altogether.

LOCATION 4

Layer 2 is accessible in Location 4, although it is far from the default and is usually experienced from within the perceptual experience of a deeper layer. If a person deepens into Location 4, they can essentially lose sight of this layer. When experienced by itself, Layer 2 of Location 4 can seem like a desert of emptiness. It is profoundly stark and distant and can even lead to one feeling like nothing exists at all. This is typically only passed through on the way to deeper layers because Location 4 does not stabilize in Layer 2. More than any of the other locations, transitioning to Location 4 is associated with difficult psychological experiences that are often referred to by terms such as the “dark night of the soul.” This is especially the case if someone is coming into Location 4 at Layer 2.

LOCATION 5+

Layer 2 is not readily accessible in later locations, which tend to gravitate strongly to Layer 4. When it is touched upon it is typically blended with the deeper layers, and is mostly experienced as greater dimensionality in perception, including spatial perception. From the perspective of Layer 4, every level of experience and state of perception, including the emptiness of Layer 2, shows up as the unfolding of pure existence. Any quality beyond a sense of undifferentiated existence appears secondary and relative and, in contrast to existence itself, unreal.



LAYER 3: ALL-PERVADING FULLNESS

Layer 3 feels like an all-pervading presence and fullness. Initially, as one deepens through Layer 2 into Layer 3, it can feel as though the emptiness of Layer 2 becomes infused with fullness. Fullness and emptiness are both the distinction and intersection of these two layers.

In addition, rather than being a container for and the substance of what is (as Layer 2 feels), the qualities of Layer 3 feel as though they permeate and infuse everything. Some would describe this transition as the container dissolving, or, alternatively, as it expanding infinitely.

It is relatively rare for Finders to reach Layer 3 in a persistent way, however temporary experiences of it are more common. Just as some religious and spiritual traditions regard Layer 2 as the end of the Fundamental Wellbeing path, others view Layer 3 this way. Whereas nondual forms of Layer 3 are sometimes considered the endpoint in various Eastern Traditions, Layer 3 of Location 3 is generally regarded as the goal within Islamic and Christian traditions.

Layer 3 is probably the vastest of all layers to explore subjectively. Deep into Layer 3, it will feel as though it is the substance of everything. On the shallower end, Layer 3 feels more like an essence or presence infusing experience, as though it pervades but is simultaneously transcendent of everything. It feels untouched and untouchable.

There are many ways in which the experience of Layer 3 can show up, particularly in Location 2. It can go in the direction of deep stillness and pure beingness and/or isness, and can have very little affect, thus appearing similar to Location 4. In fact, it is common for Finder who reach this depth in Location 2 to believe that they are in Location 4. Alternatively, the experience can be infused with joy, love, and even a sense of sacredness or divinity, which may appear more similar to Location 3. It can feel highly energized in and of itself and sometimes be referred to as “life” or “aliveness”. It can also be perceived as having a quality of innate intelligence, beyond that of the linear conceptual mind.

Some people will experience Layer 3 as light, using descriptions such as “the clear light of being (or consciousness, or awareness),” or “a light shining through all space and objects”. When this is the case, it can be perceived as an all-pervading, still, luminous field that is both the source of experience and what experiences everything.

Quite deeply into Layer 3, its field-like presence can feel dense, even like a thick liquid, although not everyone experiences this. When it shows up this way, Finders report perceiving what seem like patterns of energy (like ripples) that interact with the environment and other people. In addition, the field-like presence of Layer 3 feels powerful and penetrating, and while being deep in Layer 3 it can feel as though one is having a noticeable influence on others.

There is no sense of emptiness or loneliness deep in Layer 3. The quality of fullness prevails and can feel immeasurably vast and deep. At its deepest reaches, Layer 3 is experienced as a centerless, aware, still, all-pervading field or presence without limits, permeating through and as everything. At this depth, the distinction between inside and outside seems meaningless. It is equally present everywhere.

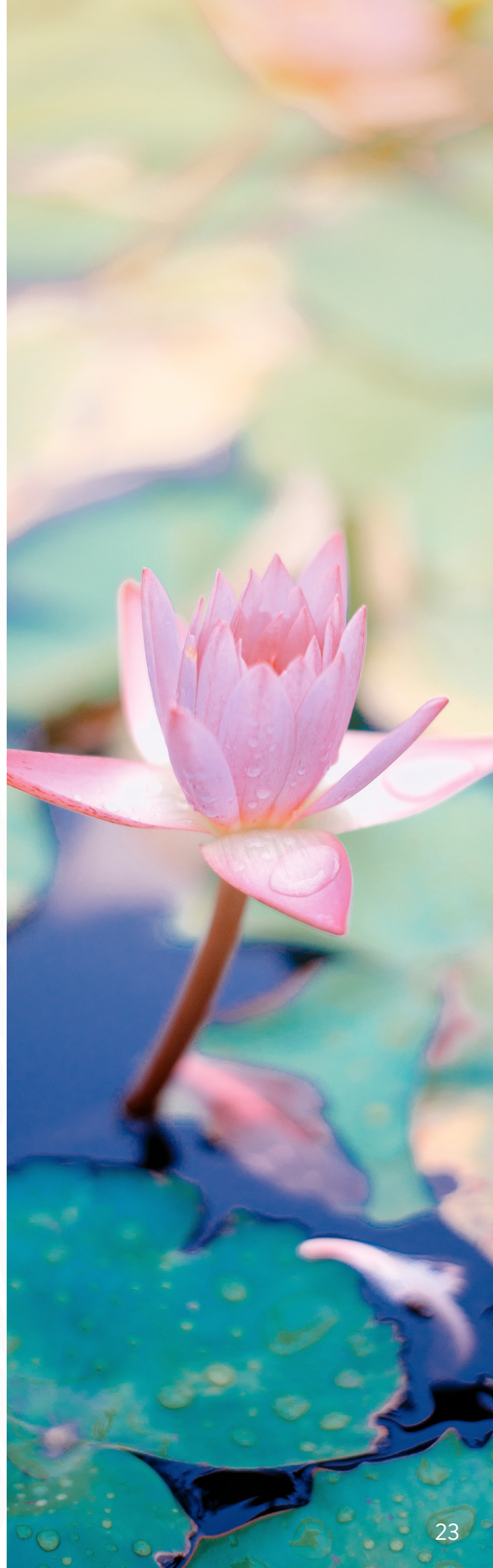
There is very little sense of an individual self left at the deepest centerless reaches of Layer 3, but fragments of self that formerly constituted the complex individual sense of self can still rise into awareness. These are typically viewed as something to release or go beyond, and one can easily spend the rest of one’s life working on this. Doing so leads to an increasingly pure experience of raw beingness and/or isness as these filters are stripped away.

As with each deeper layer, there is a greater depth of stillness/silence experienced at Layer 3 than any preceding layer. This relates to stripping away or getting beneath the processes that filter and structure perception, including the sense of self at its more foundational levels. The quality of stillness/silence at Layer 3 is profound and feels as though it pervades and encompasses everything. Simultaneously, it also feels as though it transcends everything, or is somehow more foundational, real, or permanent than anything else.

Layers 1, 2, and 3 are like holons, in that each successive layer feels as though it contains or enables the content and existence of the more shallow layers beneath it. This is not the case with Layer 4, which feels total and complete beyond all distinctions. However, with Layers 2 and 3, each feels like a greater or more foundational context for the unfolding of experience at preceding layers. Movement deeper into the layers subjectively both transcends and includes the layers that came before. The deeper layers feel more foundational and absolute than the more shallow layer(s). Especially at Layer 3, there is a distinct quality of presence and beingness, which feels deeper and more real than anything previously experienced. It can be described as a very raw experience of being, pure beingness or isness, timeless presence pervading everything, the ground of being, the foundational aliveness or life in everything, and so on.

Accordingly, Layer 3 is sometimes described as the foundation or source of manifest existence. It can be experienced as a source that pervades all levels of being, yet simultaneously transcends the specific forms that are manifest. Because it is undifferentiated and formless, the only way the symbolic mind can conceive of it is as unmanifest, pure potentiality.

Subjectively this may be experienced as a field of infinite potentiality because it is formless and unmanifest, yet feels profoundly full and like the source underlying all differentiated existence. It feels like it is everywhere—there is nowhere it is not—yet it is not localized anywhere and it does not have spatial dimensionality. There can still be a subtle duality or separation perceived between form and formless, manifest and unmanifest, which increasingly fades at greater depths of the experience. There are many depths and varieties of nonduality, many of which contain subtle levels of duality that often only become apparent when they are gone beyond. The subtle dualities deep in Layer 3 are an example of this.





Because of the innate tendencies of Layer 3, isolating in this layer can be less optimal in terms of effectiveness in the world. Layer 3 feels profoundly complete and as though one must have arrived at the end of the path in terms of deepening further into Fundamental Wellbeing, while simultaneously seeming to allow for endless deepening within it. Consequently, the tendency is to deeply root into it.

There is a strong pull into the stillness and peace which can preclude thought and action. This layer can increase issues with motivation, and people generally become less concerned about being functional in the world. For those who feel deeply pulled into Layer 3, Layer 1 can be more difficult to access, and one can be more distant and non-reactive in terms of normal human interaction. It can be very helpful for Finders deepening into Layer 3 to have fixed responsibilities, such as a job or family to care for, that force them to integrate, or maintain access to, more of Layer 1.

An alternative to isolating perception increasingly into Layer 3, is to move fluidly between Layers 1, 2, and 3 (and 4, where possible) as is most appropriate for the moment at hand. This enables greater integration of the system and can allow one to experience the depths of Fundamental Wellbeing without compromising effectiveness in the world. The degree to which this is achievable depends on the location one is at and its innate tendencies and access to the layers.

DIFFERENCES IN LAYER 3 ACROSS LOCATIONS:

LOCATION 1

Layer 3 is difficult to access in Location 1, and the experience is typically temporary and more shallow than at other locations. The experience usually involves aspects of Layer 3 mixed with shallower layers. As with Layer 2, the movement in and out of these temporary experiences can give Location 1 Finders a sense of “not being there yet,” which is usually not correct—there are simply more locations and depths within them to explore, and that process is unfolding.

LOCATION 2

Layer 3 is highly accessible in Location 2, but it remains relatively rare for Finders to reach Layer 3 persistently. The experience of Layer 3 is often mixed with the deeper aspects of Layer 2. Finders who reach Layer 3 in Location 2 and do not seek to isolate from society often develop a natural fluidity between Layer 3 and Layer 1, sometimes even minimizing access to Layer 2.

LOCATION 3

Layer 3 is the default layer for Location 3 and is dominant and pervasive in subjective experience. It is experienced as the divine or panpsychist presence permeating everything. There can often be a natural fluidity, and even integration, between Layer 3 and Layer 1, sometimes minimizing access to Layer 2. This can be an exception to deepening in Layer 3 generally resulting in diminished access to Layer 1. Particularly in Location 3, Finders sometimes develop the perception and/or belief that their state of being is somehow of benefit to humanity or life as a whole. They can feel as though the divine or some beneficial type of blessing is radiating out from them.

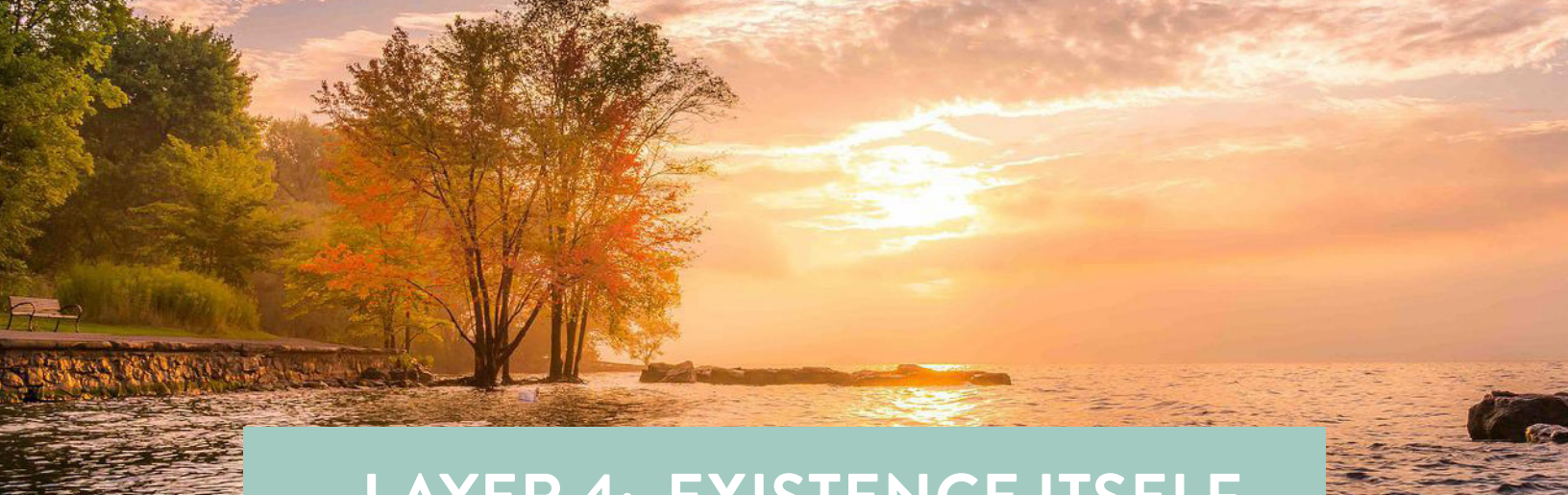
LOCATION 4

Layer 3 can remain accessible in Location 4, though usually only the deepest centerless aspects of it. This will typically be mixed with Layer 4. Finders often experience a mix of Layer 3 and Layer 4, and possibly other layers, after initially transitioning to Location 4. If they remain in Location 4, they will usually go through what they often describe as a “deepening” in that location, which typically involves their system moving more solidly into Layer 4. From this point on, it becomes more difficult access to Layer 3.

LOCATION 5+

Access to Layer 3 depends on whether one is experiencing later locations on the Path of Freedom or the Path of Humanity. On the Path of Freedom, subjective experience roots increasingly deeply into Layer 4, until Layer 3 becomes difficult to access. It can sometimes show up again in later locations in a highly integrated form where it will feel like Layer 3 is a quality of reality/existence.

In contrast, on the Path of Humanity, the deeper aspects of Layer 3 remain accessible. This difference in where subjective experience centers appears to underlie the split in development after Location 4. Layer 3 has a quality of being/beingness that falls away at Layer 4, hence Finders on the Path of Humanity return to experiencing a subtle quality of self. Similarly, the continued perceptual awareness of Layer 3 results in greater dimensionality in perception, which can subjectively feel richer and more alive than Location 4. There is also some return of emotion on the Path of Humanity, usually impersonal forms of love, which also relate to Layer 3.



LAYER 4: EXISTENCE ITSELF

Layer 4 is the deepest layer and relates to the experience of undifferentiated existence/reality (although “experience” would no longer be viewed as a relevant or accurate term by someone at this layer). Layer 4 is the default layer of Location 4 and later, and experiences of it in earlier locations tend to be partial and temporary. When it is accessed in earlier locations, it is usually mixed with other layers, typically the deepest parts of Layer 3. Because one is unable to fully deepen in it in earlier locations, it tends to be experienced as a mystery or unknowable. An exception to this are fluid, late location Finders who find their way back to earlier locations after having more fully deepened into Layer 4 in later locations.

Up to Location 4, Layer 4 tends to be experienced partially and unclearly. Accordingly, the descriptions relating to Layer 4 are based largely on the qualities of this layer in Location 4 and later, where there is typically a deeper and more pure experience of it. Layer 4 is in many ways distinct from the preceding three layers and when the shift is total it is often unforeseeable. Because of its nature, the properties of the layer cannot be adequately communicated to someone who has not experienced it. Therefore, bear in mind throughout this section that descriptions are the best attempt at a literal description of what is actually, subjectively experienced (i.e., not theoretical or mystical).

The primary change at Layer 4 is the loss of any sense of separation—there is no separation or distinction of any kind, and therefore no sense of individual existence or self. There is only “This,” only indivisible reality in spontaneous unfolding. It is without any sense of duality or possibility of duality (e.g. subject/object, self/not self, form/formlessness, dual/nondual, being/non-being, within/without, enlightened/not enlightened). Distinctions begin to fade into undifferentiated reality, becoming progressively flat perceptually, which happens increasingly the further out in locations one goes. This quality of flatness is so noticeable that Finders who experience it often use these terms when referring to it, such as calling it “the flat absolute”.

Everything is experienced as undifferentiated existence/reality unfolding spontaneously. There is no sense of a container. The unfolding does not happen in anything. Rather, it is total and complete in itself. Similarly, there is no longer any sense of an essence pervading everything like in Layer 3. There is nothing arising from or within it. It has no content and no distinctions—there is only reality/existence itself, which is complete and total as this moment.

From this perspective, nothing appears to have independent or essential existence, and there is only undifferentiated reality. Both the concepts of self and no-self cease to have meaning. There is no sense of “I” or “I am,” no process of association or reflection. Deep in Layer 4, the dissolution of sense of self is so complete that even the experience of “no self” falls away. That experience is relative to the experience of self and is a positionality or fixation in perspective (a reference point). As one deepens into Layer 4, this is no longer referenced, and there is only existence itself. This cessation of the reflective movement in consciousness is central to the falling away of the subjective sense of self in Layer 4 in Location 4 and later.

This final dissolution of separation tends to be realized in a partial way until Layer 4 can be stabilized, which typically requires being in Location 4 or later. This is because all preceding layers contain a sense of self or being, and thus, separation (even though it often does not feel like it). Any sense of being (e.g., “beingness”, “isness”, “This is”, “It just is”, “I am That”, “I am”, even just “I”) entails a subtle positionality that relates to the deepest aspects of Layer 3 and produces the perception of duality. Without this reference point, there can be no distinctions and no perception in the ordinary sense. This does not mean that someone deep in Layer 4 cannot see trees, mountains, and rivers; rather, the “reporter” or “interpreter” of experience has fallen away. This “reporter” or self is an artifact of the impersonal perceptual process of reflection on experience. Subjectively, Layer 4 is beyond the duality of being and non-being. Reality is beyond all attributes and conditions, including that of being. To say “This is” or “I am” is redundant and implies that “This” is subject to and distinct from the condition of being or existence. Although that can sound theoretical and abstract, it is subjectively experienced.

Layer 4 feels like absolute, irreducible reality, in which there is no state or condition (including the condition of being), nor any existent thing to which a state or condition could pertain. This way of experiencing Layer 4 is more relevant to Locations 4 and later, where it can stabilize. When experienced temporarily, Layer 4 is often seen from the perspective of one or more shallower layers, which means that the sense of self remains partially intact, and Layer 4 does not feel like it is not a state or condition.

In this case, Layer 4 is experienced in the context of there being a self-existent experienter that enters and leaves the experience. This is the case even when viewed from locations and layers where it may subjectively feel as though all aspects of an individualized sense of self have fallen away. In reality, they have not, they just appear to have. The aspects of self that remain only become apparent upon their cessation, which typically only occurs upon rooting completely into Layer 4.

In Location 4 and later, where the sense of self is dissolved on a very low level, it feels as though that illusion of self just fell away, leaving only existence in spontaneous unfolding. Hence, it does not feel like anything is attained. Who could attain it when nothing but existence could ever be? From this perspective, all perceptual states are illusory and there is only undifferentiated existence.

In earlier locations, it is common for Layer 4 to be experienced as an unknowable or a mystery. This is partly because one is unable to deepen into and stabilize in it, and partly because it cannot be known objectively, or even subjectively in the usual sense. In Layers 1, 2, and 3 there is the subject of experience, and usually the perception of objects as well. Although the subject and objects may appear unified (nondual) depending on the location, they still appear to have inherent existence/beingness of themselves.

In Layer 4 there is only undifferentiated reality. There is only the entirety, no distinct thing appears to have intrinsic existence and there is neither the perception of subject nor objects. Being without subject and objects means that subjectively, it is also beyond experience or knowing in the usual sense. It feels contentless and indivisible. There is only reality unfolding as a revelation. Existence knows itself intrinsically and is self-revealing. It stands forth complete, total, and self-illuminating. It cannot be known objectively because it is beneath the perceptual process of reflection on experience. Because this process remains intact in earlier locations, Layer 4, which is raw non-reflexive subjectivity, can seem unknowable while in them.





If someone has a divine experience of an earlier location Layer 4 can be experienced as the ultimate mystery of the divine, sometimes called the Godhead, especially in Location 3. It is like the absolute unknowable depth of divinity. It feels like one's self disappears into this unknowable depth and there is only That, beyond all distinction and comprehension. Note that like all experiences of Layer 4, this also entails an even more complete loss of the individual self, but in the context of its total dissolution in divinity. This experience is typically not persistent in earlier locations, and usually does not allow someone to be functional while it lasts.

When shifting deeply and exclusively into Layer 4, which essentially only happens from Location 4 on, it can feel like Layer 3 collapses or disappears, and with it the reflexive layer of perception. The shift is of a different nature than those of preceding layers, because up until this point, each successive layer feels as though it contains or enables the content and existence of the preceding layers. Each feels like a greater or more foundational context for the unfolding of experience at preceding layers (i.e. Layer 3 forms/contains Layer 2, Layer 2 forms/contains Layer 1).

Subjectively, this is not the case when shifting deeply into Layer 4, where all preceding layers disappear or collapse into undifferentiated existence. Finders will sometimes say “all containers fell away” when this layer is reached. It “is” what is happening and does not seem to be happening in anything. This produces the often-mentioned sense of a “return to the body” in Location 4, because it is a return to the raw existence of everything. There is no longer the sense of anything within or beyond it, no sense of all-transcending or all-pervading formless presence or beingness (such as in Layer 3). What remains actually and perceptually is the body and everything that is physically present. There is only raw, unfiltered experience and it feels as though it is all just existence unfolding spontaneously. The body itself appears as part of that unfolding and no different from any other aspect of life.

Another effect of this shift is that Layer 4 feels truly timeless. The experiences of time and causality relate to perceptual processes that fall out of subjective awareness deep in Layer 4. With no distinction or separation at all, there is no sense of cause and effect. There is only the spontaneous unfolding of existence/reality. Time then appears to be a conclusion produced by the sequential processing of perception, which is the consequence of positionality and has no objective reality.

Although these descriptions can sound far out, subjectively it feels in no way mystical or extraordinary. Rather, it feels like complete simplicity. All notions of sacredness or holiness lose relevance because they only have meaning in relation to a reference point. The completeness of reality is beyond attributes or conditions, because it is not relative. It is total and self-fulfilling.

There is a sense that nothing can die because nothing exists of itself, and it therefore has no independent existence to lose. Life in its totality has no opposite and cannot die. There is a sense that this is reality itself and can never be gained or lost, but is the condition of everything that is or could be. There is no starting or ending point, there is simply no frame of reference for these.

Presumably because fundamental human fear originates from the fear of death, this perception brings an incomparable sense of freedom and peace. The peace is of a different order than that of any other layer because it is not dependent on any positionality, such as “I am awareness”, or “I am”. The untouchable quality of Layer 3 becomes irrelevant (untouchable in relation to what?), because nothing but reality could ever be.

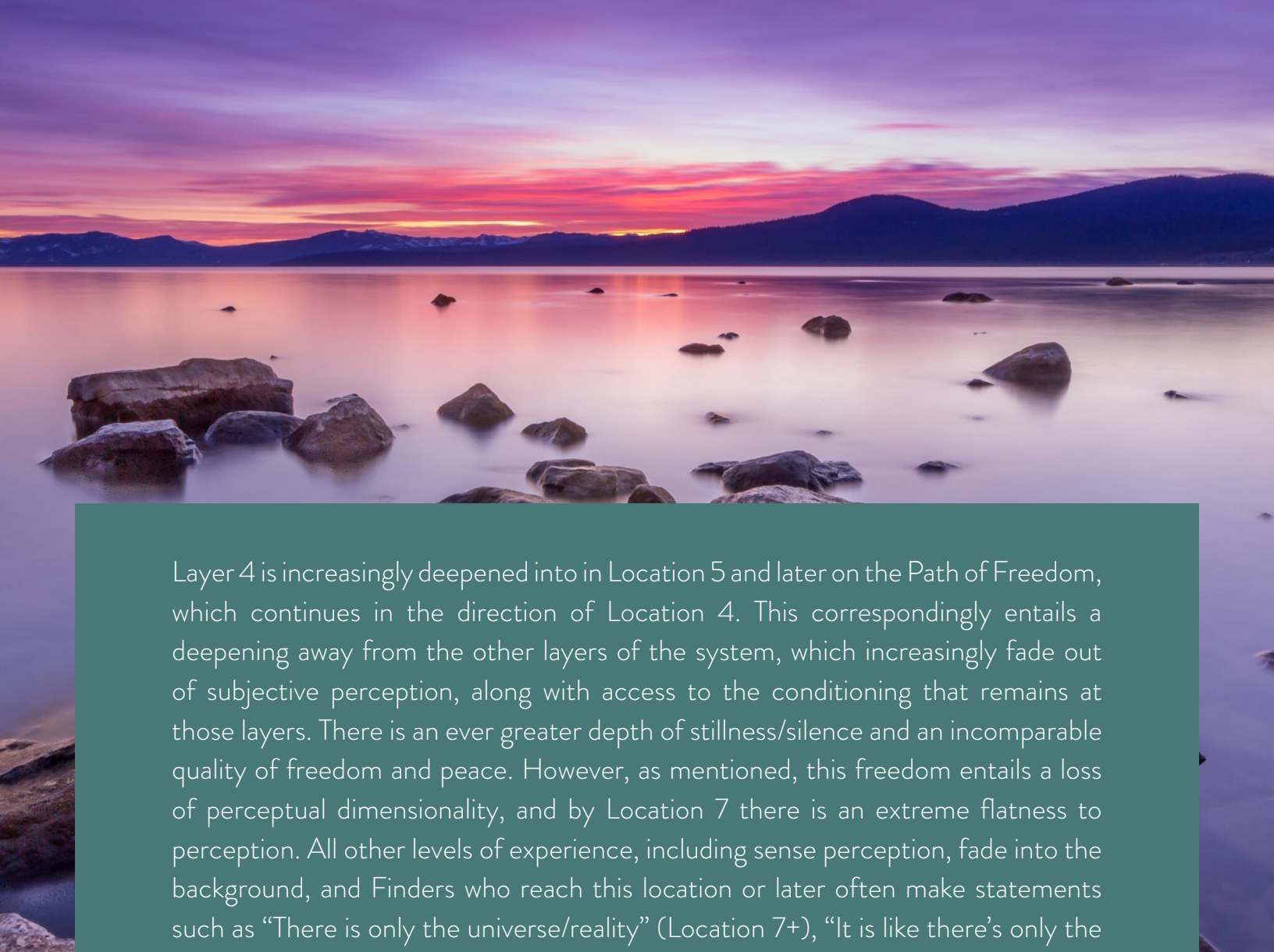
The peace feels absolute and of a different dimension than emotional or psychological peace. It is the classical “freedom from suffering” pursued by spiritual traditions for millennia. However, as noted previously, this freedom entails a loss of perceptual dimensionality—deepening into Layer 4 involves stripping away or getting beneath the processes that filter perception, until all that remains is increasingly raw experience. This diminishes the dimensionality of perception, which becomes progressively flat in later locations (although someone is not likely to notice unless they come back to an earlier location).

Presumably owing to the profound peace and freedom, there is a powerful directionality and gravity to Layer 4 in Location 4 and later, which can be difficult to escape. Location 4 Finders often experience what they describe as a “deepening” after initially transitioning. This can occur quite rapidly, or take months to unfold, and typically involves their perception being drawn more deeply and exclusively into Layer 4.

From this point on, it becomes more difficult to access Layer 3 and return to previous locations. This is even more the case for Locations 5 and later, making it difficult and rare to get back to earlier locations from these later locations. When it does happen, the experience of earlier layers and locations is permanently changed as a result of the Finder’s system having deepened so far into Layer 4.

Deeper into Layer 4 in later locations, the sense of unfolding diminishes, until everything feels instantaneous and total. It feels as though everything collapses into stillness/silence. The stillness/silence is total and intrinsic to existence itself. It no longer feels experiential. There is no sense of distance or space. Even the field of awareness disappears, leaving no sense of any dimension, only the all-present reality. With Layers 2 and 3, everything is inside. This notion loses all meaning. there is no inside and no outside, no locality or reference point at all. Everything appears as an intrinsic quality of reality, and does not feel experiential, nor does anything appear to independently or essentially exist of itself. There is only raw undifferentiated reality. This comes increasingly to the foreground of perception the further one goes beyond Location 4, resulting in an extreme flatness to perception.





Layer 4 is increasingly deepened into in Location 5 and later on the Path of Freedom, which continues in the direction of Location 4. This correspondingly entails a deepening away from the other layers of the system, which increasingly fade out of subjective perception, along with access to the conditioning that remains at those layers. There is an ever greater depth of stillness/silence and an incomparable quality of freedom and peace. However, as mentioned, this freedom entails a loss of perceptual dimensionality, and by Location 7 there is an extreme flatness to perception. All other levels of experience, including sense perception, fade into the background, and Finders who reach this location or later often make statements such as “There is only the universe/reality” (Location 7+), “It is like there’s only the universe looking out of these eyes” (Locations 8 and 9).

It is relevant to note that subjective experience does not reflect the totality of what is happening in the human system. Subjective experience may be primarily rooted in Layer 1, for example. Yet, in reality, all of the layers are operating within everyone, all of the time. This means that, in this case, Layers 2, 3, and 4 are operating outside of subjective experience, but they are still operating.

For late locations (Location 4 and on), subjective experience is typically rooted increasingly deeply in Layer 4. Despite this, Location 4 people function just fine in the world. This is because the other layers are still there, operating. They simply remain out of the Finder’s perception. In some instances, it is possible for late location Finders to regain perceptual access to Layers 1, 2, and/or 3 in a highly integrated form. In these cases, every layer is visible and perceived as a quality of reality/existence—although this is a highly altered way of experiencing the earlier layers.

DIFFERENCES IN LAYER 4 ACROSS LOCATIONS:

LOCATION 1

Layer 4 is extremely difficult to access from Location 1 and generally experienced as a glimpse from other layers. Those who can experience it more fully are typically Finders who have deepened into Layer 4 in later locations and are pulled back down to Location 1 for some reason.

LOCATION 2

Layer 4 is rare and difficult to access from Location 2, and it is nearly impossible to stabilize. When it is accessed, the experience is typically partial and temporary. It is usually mixed with other layers. Because one is unable to fully deepen in it, it tends to be experienced as divine, a mystery, or unknowable.

LOCATION 3

Layer 4 is not easily accessible in Location 3, and experiences tend to be partial and temporary. When it is accessed, it is usually mixed with other layers, typically the deepest aspects of Layer 3. Because one is unable to fully deepen in it, it tends to be experienced as a mystery or unknowable. Those who experience the divine version of Location 3, sometimes refer to it as the Godhead.

LOCATION 4

Layer 4 is the default in Location 4. It is often mixed with the deepest aspects of Layer 3 when a Finder first transitions to Location 4, and over a short period of time deepens into a more complete and pure experience of Layer 4. At this point it can become harder to access other layers and get out of Location 4. Layer 4 can be experienced at progressively greater depths as one deepens into Location 4, and significantly deepening into Layer 4 seems to be important to transitioning to Location 5 and later on the Path of Freedom.

LOCATION 5+

Layer 4 is the default for Location 5 and later, however, the depth of experience depends on whether someone is on the Path of Freedom or Path of Humanity. Layer 4 is increasingly deepened into on the Path of Freedom, which continues in the direction of Location 4. In contrast, the reintegration of Layer 3 on the Path of Humanity allows Finders to return to feeling more “human”. However, the anchoring of subjective experience in Layer 3 precludes significant deepening into Layer 4, and as a result the Path of Humanity does not go past Location 6. By Location 7 there is a very deep and complete isolation of perception in Layer 4, which cannot be achieved on the Path of Humanity.

MORE ABOUT
HOW THE
LAYERS SHOW
UP IN EACH
LOCATION

How the layers show up in Location 1

In Location 1, Layer 1 is the default layer. This means that mental activity still dominates subjective experience. The mind has a gravity to it in Location 1, which usually means that subjective experience defaults to mental activity when a Finder is not actively sinking in to deeper layers. This will often lead Location 1 Finders to doubt whether they are experiencing Fundamental Wellbeing persistently; however, usually the fluctuations they experience involve changes in depth within Location 1, and not in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing.

LAYER 1

Contrary to what is sometimes believed, it is not true that all forms of Fundamental Wellbeing involve a largely or completely silent mind. When subjective experience is centered in Layer 1, as is the case for the majority of Location 1 Finders, the activity of the mind will predominate in moment-to-moment experience. The mind can still be quite active and reactive at this point. However, typically there is still a significant decline in self-referential thoughts, which continue to drop off as locations get later.

Fundamental Wellbeing also does not typically show up as persistent equanimity or bliss in Location 1, as some also believe will be the case. There is still psychological conditioning that can activate positive and

negative emotion and push peace to the background. However, unlike before the transition to Fundamental Wellbeing, all of these experiences arise within the context of everything seeming fundamentally okay, even if that sense feels far in the background at times.

The remaining psychological conditioning at Layer 1 keeps the peace of Fundamental Wellbeing pushed to the background most of the time, especially when someone has recently transitioned. Over time, the deconditioning cycles that unfold in a Finder's system after transitioning deal with a lot of this conditioning and the peace moves increasingly to the foreground of experience.

LAYER 2

The dominant quality of Layer 2 is the sense of all-containing spaciousness (i.e., emptiness, expansiveness, space, nothingness, openness, and so on).

Attention is centered more in the present, in direct experience, rather than thoughts about experience—when Layer 1 is no longer front and center in experience, the overlay of labels, concepts, and interpretations on the being/existence of everything falls away.

Layer 2's sense of all-containing spaciousness is accessible to a degree in Location 1. It is not the default for this location, which is Layer 1, and the gravity of Layer 1 tends to make the experience of Layer 2 unstable for most people. Layer 2 is usually the layer that Finders in Location 1 have temporary experiences of, and this experience makes them conclude that they must be going in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing. In reality they are sinking in to deeper experiences of Location 1 (Layer 2) and then being pulled back to a more shallow experience (Layer 1) by the habitual patterns in their attentional systems. These habit patterns can be changed over time with consistent interruption and reorientation of attention, although this can take more effort to do from Location 1 than a later location.

In Location 1, this layer will typically be experienced as everything just arising, with a general sense of things arising as one, but maintaining the perceptual duality of an observer (subject) here and everything arising there (object). People will often describe this experience as being like looking at a painting or a movie screen. Therefore, the notion that Fundamental Wellbeing necessarily entails experiencing a unified or oneness-based type of perception (nonduality), is not accurate. Both Location 1 and 3 are dual locations, in that there is a sense of distinction between subject (observer) and object (observed). However, Location 3 is subtly dual, just like the experience of Location 1 becomes more subtly dual in Layer 2 than it is in Layer 1.

As one begins to sense into the shallower end of Layer 2, there is a quality of stillness that feels deeper than or more real than the mind and its contents. There is a sense of detachment and space around what is happening at Layer 1, resulting in a more impersonal observation or witnessing of its activity. This experience is usually Layer 2 mixed with Layer 1 because it is hard to achieve an isolated experience of Layer 2 without a more unified or oneness-based (nondual) perception, which only shows up in Location 2. Often deepening into Layer 2 pulls a Finder's system over to Location 2.

LAYER 3

Layer 3 has a quality of all-pervading fullness and beingness. It tends to be difficult to access within Location 1, and the experience typically remains temporary and shallower than at other locations. As with Layer 2, the movement in and out of these temporary experiences can give Location 1 Finders a sense of “not being there yet,” which is usually not correct—there are simply more locations and depths within them to explore, and they are at the beginning of that process unfolding.

In contrast to Layer 2, which has the qualities of spaciousness and emptiness, Layer 3 feels like a profound fullness. Rather than feeling as though it contains everything like Layer 2, this feels as though it pervades and infuses

everything. At the early end of Layer 3, it feels like an essence or presence infusing, but different from, experience. This is typically initially perceived as beginning to infuse the spaciousness of Layer 2.

As mentioned, in Location 1, there is usually a more partial experience of this layer, mixed with previous layers. It will often initially be sensed as a deeper or mysterious stillness or beingness within everything, which is intrinsic to its being as an expression of life itself. The qualities and tendencies of Location 1 typically prevent Layer 3 from being experienced clearly and completely, and so Layer 3 is felt more as a mysterious essence within everything rather than its qualities being dominant and pervasive in experience.

LAYER 4

Layer 4 is extremely difficult to access from Location 1 and generally experienced as a glimpse from other layers. Those who can get a sense of it are mostly Finders who have deepened into Layer 4 in further locations and are pulled back down to Location 1 for some reason. It would typically be experienced as the quality of flatness and

loss of dimensionality that comes with Layer 4, in addition to greater peace, stillness, and silence. This is as far as you can get away perceptually from the experience of the mind, and also from the experience of and association with the body in Location 1, both of which will feel distant from Layer 4.

How the layers show up in Location 2

In Location 2, Layer 1 can be the default layer, although it is more typically Layer 2. Location 2 probably has the greatest range of access across the layers of any location. Allowing one to access deeper layers without compromising access to shallower layers makes Location 2 something of a sweet spot on the continuum that allows Finders to experience a great degree of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing while remaining effective in the world.

LAYER 1

When subjective experience is centered in Layer 1, the activity of the mind will predominate moment-to-moment experience. In some cases, a Finder can work on distancing themselves from Layer 1 by focusing their subjective experience into a deeper layer and thereby experience a largely or completely silent mind. However, in most cases, Layer 1 is readily accessible in Location 2, as is the case with other earlier locations. Therefore, typically Finders in Layer 1 of Location 2 will experience some self-referential thoughts, along with a mix of positive and negative emotions. At Location 2 these are much less likely to be identified as personal versus as “just arising” in a more impersonal way. They also are more likely to dissolve spontaneously and rapidly.

In Location 2, this is often the result of the experience of Layer 1 being integrated with, or experienced from, deeper layers. This, in turn, involves a degree of distance from

Layer 1, which also produces a sense of distance between mind and self (e.g., “I am not my thoughts”, “I am not the thinker”). In other words, subjective experience is centered in a deeper layer and is watching the processes at Layer 1 happen rather than being embedded within them, resulting in mental activity feeling more impersonal and spontaneous. This means that it typically feels more equanimous and spacious than in Location 1.

Fewer negative emotions tend to arise the further one deepens into Location 2, until the internal experience is largely or entirely positive. Memories also tend to arise less because there is an increased focus of attention on the present, and because the past is no longer valued as defining the sense of self.

By the time someone reaches Location 2, a change in sense of self is very noticeable, typically involving a dramatic reduction in or elimination of the conceptual, narrative-based sense of self. This change relates in part to association with the qualities of Layer 2 or deeper, rather than with the personal sense of self that is produced at Layer 1. The personal self has a smoothing function that normally makes distinct processes/parts of the mind appear unified, or as part of a single coherent self. When the association with this sense of self falls away, the smoothing function also falls away, and the distinct parts appear less integrated and related. This can be very apparent by the time someone reaches Layer 3.

Location 2 Finders will often comment that at times, they fall back into their old sense of self, and this often relates to aspects of Layer 1, which has a quality of self that feels more individualized and personal than other layers at this location. Finders often assume this is something to go beyond, but it is just the nature of Layer 1, and if subjective experience is centered there, this quality of a more individualized or personal self naturally arises. Returning to Layer 1 perceptually for its functional properties can be appropriate and practical at times. And, in a fluid system where a Finder has access to more than one layer, access to Layer 1 does not need to compromise access to the deeper layers.

LAYER 2

Layer 2 is highly accessible in Location 2 and is very often the layer people land in when they transition to Location 2. Layer 2 is one of the classic Location 2 experiences that is described in spiritual literature and is regarded by many as the end of the path. Consequently, most Finders in Location 2 really root in here and never go beyond it.

The dominant quality of Layer 2 is the sense of all-containing spaciousness (emptiness, expansiveness, space, nothingness,

openness, and so on). In Location 2, this is a nondual experience of Layer 2—that is, the perception of separation between subject (observer) and object (observed) is dissolved—and so it feels as though one is indistinct from the space in which everything arises and, deeper into the layer, that one is indistinct from the substance of everything arising as well.

For some people, this location and layer can feel lonely at first, because it feels like there is only this one thing. As the experience of a personal self is left behind, a sense of meaninglessness or starkness can also accompany this layer, and it can bring with it changes in or loss of motivation. These experiences usually do not last, but people can go through periods that are challenging as they become accustomed to this state.

Unlike Layer 1, which can have a quality of personal and individuated self (even in Location 2, somewhat paradoxically), the quality of self in Layer 2 and later is impersonal. The sense of a localized, distinct observer/subject is no longer present. Instead, everything is just arising as one field of experience—because of this nonduality at Location 2, especially beyond Layer 1 and the shallow end of Layer 2, there is no sense of distinction between the objects of experience, the experiencer, and the process of experiencing. It all seems to unfold as one.

Deeper into Layer 2, there is an association with the substance of its spaciousness as one's true nature, which is also experienced as the essential nature of everything. Subjective experience becomes progressively centered on Layer 2's central

qualities like spaciousness and emptiness, increasingly highlighting the impermanent and relative nature of other aspects of perceptual experience, like thought, emotion, sensation, and so on, which seem to come and go, all contained within the properties of Layer 2.

Things are seen with more distance and objectivity, and one typically becomes less reactive. The downside of this is that it can be a great place to escape the mind and disassociate from psychological conditioning. This is usually what's meant when people speak about "spiritual bypassing." Deepening away from Layer 1 may remove it from one's subjective awareness, but that does not mean it stops operating. This essentially leaves the conditioned psychological tendencies that reside at Layer 1 to function unsupervised, which may not lead to optimal life outcomes.

It is possible to move fluidly between Layers 1 and 2 (and 3 and 4) as is most appropriate for the moment at hand. And, there is often a degree of natural integration that happens with Layers 1 and 2 in Location 2, allowing Finders to experience deeper peace than is normally experienced at Layer 1 while remaining optimally functional in the world.

LAYER 3

In contrast to Layer 2, which has the qualities of spaciousness and emptiness, Layer 3 feels like a profound fullness. Rather than feeling as though it contains everything like Layer 2, this feels as though it pervades and infuses everything—all objects and experience. Initially, as one deepens through Layer 2 into Layer 3, it can feel as though the emptiness becomes infused with fullness.

Layer 3 is highly accessible in Location 2. However, it remains relatively rare for Finders to reach Layer 3 persistently. When they do, it is often taken to be end of the path in terms of deepening further into Fundamental Wellbeing.

Finders who reach Layer 3 in Location 2 often develop a natural fluidity between Layer 3 and Layer 1, sometimes even minimizing access to Layer 2. This allows them to maintain a high degree of functionality within the mind while simultaneously being able to sink in to deeper peace and stillness.

There are many ways Layer 3 can show up, especially in Location 2. The experience of it can go in the direction of deep stillness and peace, which can have very little affect and appear similar to Location 4, or the experience can be infused with joy, love, or even a sense of sacredness or divinity, which might appear more similar to Location 3.

Layer 3 is probably the vastest of all layers to explore subjectively. Deep into Layer 3, it will feel as though it is the substance of everything. On the more shallow end, Layer 3 feels more like an essence or presence infusing experience, as though it pervades but is simultaneously independent of everything. It feels untouched and untouchable. It can also be perceived as have a quality of innate intelligence, beyond that of the linear conceptual mind.

Quite deeply into Layer 3, its field-like presence can feel dense, even like a thick liquid—although not everyone experiences this. When it shows up this way, Finders report perceiving what seem like patterns of energy that interact with the environment and other people, like ripples that then influence or determine their responses.

At the deepest reaches of Layer 3, it feels like a centerless, all-pervading field or presence without limits, flowing through and as everything. Inside is the same as outside—it is equally present everywhere. There is very little sense of an individual self left at the deepest centerless reaches of Layer 3, but fragments of the self that formally constituted the complex individual sense of self can still rise into awareness. These are typically viewed as something to release or go beyond.

There is a deeper quality of stillness at Layer 3 than at any preceding layer, and the stillness/silence feels as though it pervades and encompasses everything. Simultaneously, it also feels as though it transcends everything, or is somehow more foundational, real, or permanent than anything else.

There is another type of presence/being at Layer 3, which feels deeper or more real than anything previously experienced. It can be described in ways such as “an experience of raw being”, “pure beingness or isness”, “timeless presence pervading everything”, “the ground of being”, “the foundational aliveness or life in everything”, and so on.

Layer 3 is sometimes described as the foundation or source of manifest existence, like the ground of being. Because it is undifferentiated and formless, the only way

the symbolic mind can conceive of it is as unmanifest, pure potentiality. Subjectively this may be experienced as a field of infinite potentiality because it is formless and unmanifest, yet feels profoundly full and like the source underlying all differentiated existence. It feels like it is everywhere—there is nowhere it is not—yet it is not localized anywhere and it does not have spatial dimensionality, so also feels like it is nowhere.

Some people will experience Layer 3 as light, using descriptions such as “the clear light of being (or consciousness, or awareness).” When this is the case, one way it can be perceived is as an all-pervading, unmoving, luminous field that is both the source of experience and which experiences everything.

LAYER 4

Layer 4, the raw experience of existence itself, is rare and difficult to access from Location 2, and it is nearly impossible to stabilize. It is essentially the home layer of Locations 4 and later, and experiences of it in earlier locations tend to be partial and temporary. When it is accessed, it is usually mixed with other layers, typically the

deepest portion of Layer 3. Because one is generally unable to fully deepen into it in earlier locations, it tends to be experienced as a mystery or unknowable. An exception to this appears to be fluid, late location Finders who find their way back to Location 2 after previously more fully deepening into Layer 4 in later locations.

Layer 4 will initially be sensed as an even deeper stillness or silence than that of Layer 3. This deepest stillness brings with it a loss of dimensionality and seems flat or stark when compared to the richness of Layer 3. This quality is so noticeable that Finders who experience it often use these terms when referring to it, such as calling it “the Flat Absolute”.

In contrast to Layer 2, there is no sense of a container. The experience of it does not seem like it happens in anything. It is total and complete in itself. Similarly, there is no longer any sense of an essence pervading everything like in Layer 3. There is nothing arising from or within it. It has no content and no distinctions—there is only existence itself, which is complete and total as this moment.

The full shift into Layer 4 is the complete and final dissolution of any sense of separation, and therefore of individual existence or self. Nothing appears to have individual existence of itself. Distinctions begin to fade into the flatness, which happens increasingly the further out in locations one goes. The experience of everything is reduced to raw sense data and it feels as though it is all just

existence unfolding spontaneously. This final dissolution of separation tends to be realized in a partial way until Layer 4 can be stabilized, which typically requires being in Location 4 or later.

In earlier locations, it is common for Layer 4 to be experienced as an unknowable or a mystery. This is partly because one is unable to deepen into it and stabilize in it, and partly because it cannot be known objectively—or even subjectively in the usual sense. While in Layers 2 and 3 there is the subject of experience (and usually objects as well), in Layer 4 there is neither the perception of subject nor objects.

Deeper forms of Layer 4 are typically only experienced temporarily in Location 2 and often do not allow someone to be functional while they last. When it is only touched upon temporarily, it does not necessarily feel as though it is not a state because the sense of individual self remains partially intact in earlier locations. Layer 4 is then experienced in the context of there being a self-existent experiencer that entered and left the experience.

How the layers show up in Location 3

In Location 3 subjective experience tends to default to Layer 3, although Layers 1 and 2 are usually quite accessible as well, often blended with Layer 3 or experienced from Layer 3. Like Location 2, Location 3 has a broad range of access to the layers, allowing Finders to experience a great degree of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing while remaining relatively effective in the world.

LAYER 1

Layer 1 can usually be easily accessed in Location 3 but is by no means the default anymore. It will often be experienced from perception being centered in deeper layers. Therefore, mental activity feels more distant, impersonal, and spontaneous. By this point self-referential thoughts have declined significantly, and thoughts that remain are largely present moment oriented. Memories also tend to arise less because there is an increased focus of attention on the present, and because the past is no longer valued as defining the sense of self.

Because of the profound experience of love, joy, and compassion in Location 3, the mind tends to be biased by the very positive affective state. The universal or divine love/joy/compassion tends to increasingly drown out personal emotion, including personal forms of love, until only one positive meta-emotion of love, joy, and compassion remains. Strong psychological triggers such as the death of a loved one can still cause a reaction in the system, but for the most part, there is persistent equanimity and joy.

LAYER 2

In Location 3, Layer 2 shows up as the presence of divinity, or as the panpsychist presence. This is almost always mixed with Layer 3 in Location 3, which gives it the all-pervading and revealing qualities. The quality of spaciousness (emptiness, expansiveness, openness, and so on) feels as though it pervades everything as the presence of divinity, or as the panpsychist presence,

depending on how Location 3 is showing up for that person. There is still a sense of self, but it feels formless, impersonal, and in union with the all-pervading presence. The sense of union with divinity or the panpsychist sense makes Layer 2 in Location 3 feel less detached and alone than it can in Locations 2 and 4.

LAYER 3

Layer 3 is the default layer of Location 3 and is experienced as the divine or panpsychist presence, or as divine love itself, in and as everything.

Deep into Layer 3, it will feel as though the divine or panpsychist presence is the substance of everything, but initially it feels more like an essence or presence infusing everything. It feels as though it pervades everything but is simultaneously independent of everything. It feels untouched and untouchable. This quality of presence or being feels more fundamental and real than anything else. There is a sense of being in union with this all-pervading field or presence that is without limits, flowing through and as everything. This sense of union underpins the subtle duality

of Location 3, and deepening into Location 3 feels like deepening into an increasingly complete union with the divine/panpsychist presence, in which any sense of individual self progressively dissolves.

As is the case in other locations, there is a deep quality of stillness at Layer 3. It is more still than any preceding layer, and the stillness or silence feels like it pervades and encompasses everything—all objects and all experience. Simultaneously, it feels as though it transcends everything, or is somehow more foundational, real, or permanent than everything else.

The stillness is simultaneously infused with a profound quality of fullness, especially in Location 3. The all-encompassing feeling of love, joy, and compassion pervades all experience, and there is a deep sense of perfection, beauty, and even sacredness to everything.

Layer 3 is sometimes experienced as the foundation or source of manifest existence, which is typically integrated with conceptions of divinity in the case of people who experience the divine version of Location 3. Because it is undifferentiated and formless, the only way the symbolic mind can conceive of it is as unmanifest, pure potentiality. Subjectively this may feel like a field of infinite potentiality because it is formless and unmanifest, yet it feels profoundly full and like the source underlying all differentiated existence. It feels like it is everywhere—there is nowhere it is not—yet it is not localized anywhere and it does not have spatial dimensionality.

LAYER 4

Layer 4 is not easily accessible in Location 3. It is essentially the home layer of Location 4 and later, and experiences of it in earlier locations tend to be partial and temporary. When it is accessed, it is usually mixed with other layers, most typically the deepest portions of Layer 3. Because one

There is still a subtle duality or separation perceived between form and formless, manifest and unmanifest, which increasingly fades at greater depths of the experience.

Some people will experience Layer 3 as light, using descriptions such as “the clear light of being (or consciousness, or awareness, or divinity).” When this is the case, one way it is perceived is as an all-pervading, unmoving, luminous field that is both the source of experience and which experiences everything.

The field-like presence of Layer 3 feels powerful and penetrating, and being deep in Layer 3 can seem to have a noticeable influence on other people. Especially in Location 3, Finders sometimes develop the perception/belief that their state of being is somehow of benefit to humanity or life as a whole. They can feel as though the divine or some beneficial type of blessing is radiating out from them.

is generally unable to fully deepen into it, it tends to be experienced as a mystery or unknowable. An exception to this appears to be fluid, late location Finders who find their way back to Location 3 after having more fully deepened into Layer 4 in later locations.

Layer 4 will initially be sensed as an even deeper stillness or silence than that of Layer 3. This deepest stillness brings with it a loss of dimensionality and seems flat or stark when compared to the richness of Layer 3. The silence or stillness feels absolute and infinite.

In contrast to Layer 2, there is no sense of a container. The unfolding does not happen in anything; rather, it is total and complete in itself. Similarly, there is no longer any sense of an essence pervading everything like in Layer 3. There is nothing arising from or within it. It has no content and no distinctions—there is only divinity/existence itself, which is complete and total as this moment.

In earlier locations, it is common for Layer 4 to be experienced as an unknowable or a mystery. This is partly because one is unable to deepen into it and stabilize in it, and partly because it cannot be known objectively—or even subjectively in the usual sense. This experience is typically not persistent in Location 3 and usually does not allow someone to be functional while it lasts.

When it is only touched upon temporarily, it does not necessarily feel as though it is not a state, as it does when it is experienced deeply and persistently, because the sense of individual self remains partially intact in earlier locations. Layer 4 is then experienced in the context of there being a self-existent experiencer that entered and left the experience.

If someone has the divine version of experience in Location 3, Layer 4 is experienced as the ultimate mystery of the divine, often called the Godhead. It is like the absolute unknowable depth of divinity. It feels like one's self disappears into this unknowable depth and there is only That, beyond all distinction and comprehension. Note that like the experiences of Layer 4 in other locations, this also entails the loss of individual self, but in the context of its total dissolution in divinity. This state is difficult to stabilize and will usually either fall back into Layer 3, or pull someone's system into Location 4, where subjective experience naturally centers in Layer 4.

How the layers show up in Location 4

In Location 4, subjective experience is typically rooted in Layer 4, sometimes mixed with the deepest centerless aspects of Layer 3. Earlier layers are accessible to a degree but are usually experienced from the deeper layers. Perception increasingly roots deeper into Layer 4 in Location 5 and later, although these are very rarely reached by people. Location 4 and later essentially move in the direction of more extreme forms of transcendence, and often lead to increased isolation and disengagement from the world.

It is relevant to note that subjective experience does not reflect the totality of what is happening in the human system. Subjective experience may be primarily rooted in Layer 1, for example. Yet, in reality, all of the layers are operating within everyone, all of the time. This means that, in this case, Layers 2, 3, and 4 are operating outside of subjective experience, but they are still operating.

For late locations (Location 4 and on), subjective experience is typically rooted increasingly deeply in Layer 4. Despite this, Location 4 people function just fine in the world. This is because the other layers are still there, operating. They simply remain out of the Finder's perception.

LAYER 1

Layer 1 is accessible, to a limited degree, in Location 4 in that there can be a meta-awareness of what is happening at Layer 1. Essentially this is a meta-awareness of what is happening in the mind, but there is no sense of being able to engage with it like there is in previous locations.

The most distinctive quality of Layer 1 in Location 4 and later is that the mind is experienced as functioning autonomously. Someone is just watching the process

unfold without feeling as though they are doing any of it. This can lead to a wide range of outcomes, from extraordinary life results to some of the amoral behavior observed in late location teachers. The extensive compassion and ethical training in some spiritual systems may be designed less for seekers, and more to condition Finders' systems to express these more positive qualities once they are subjectively no longer able to act volitionally.

Self-referential thought and any existential concern with meaning or purpose disappear by Location 4. After deepening in Location 4, many Finders experience a largely or completely silent mind. Attention is so absorbed in the present moment and far away from the level of the mind, that memory is usually quite affected by this point, especially in relation to non-routine events. Finders in Location 4 and later usually develop strategies to deal with these memory deficits, like writing everything down and setting reminders.

Most systems that target Location 4 and later tend to hold a belief that the mind/Layer 1 is something to get away from, and as someone deepens it does tend to become less accessible. This is typically not

conducive to effectiveness in the world and moves increasingly in the direction of its transcendence. This can be fine if a person's life circumstances allow for that.

In Location 5 and later, Layer 1 increasingly recedes from subjective awareness, especially on the Path of Freedom. Like in Location 4, it functions autonomously but is now increasingly outside of even subjective awareness, despite continuing to impact behavior. Instead of action being experienced as the consequence of thought and intentionality, it feels intrinsic to the unfolding itself and is silent and self-revealing. Whatever thought processes precede it are at a level of the system that is out of subjective awareness.

LAYER 2

Layer 2's primary qualities are the sense of all-containing spaciousness and emptiness. Layer 2 is accessible in Location 4, although it is far from the default and is usually experienced from a deeper layer. If a person really deepens into Location 4, they can essentially lose sight of this layer, and from Location 5 on it becomes increasingly difficult to access. The loss of perceptual access to Layer 2 can affect things like

dimensionality of perception, which becomes progressively flat in later locations.

Perceptually, Layer 2 of Location 4 seems like a desert of emptiness—it is profoundly stark and distant and can even feel like nothing exists at all. This is typically only passed through on the way to deeper layers because Location 4 does not stabilize in Layer 2.

Layer 2 is essentially out of phase with Location 4 and can bring on difficult experiences for people. More than any of the other locations, transitioning to Location 4 is associated with difficult psychological experiences that are often referred to by terms such as the “dark night of the soul.” This is especially the case if someone is coming into Location 4 at Layer 2. In these cases, it can be beneficial to speak with someone who understands what is happening, because despite being in Location 4, the dissonance at the level of the mind/Layer 1, which is also often experienced in these cases, can still affect the overall system and make the adjustment more challenging.

LAYER 3

Layer 3 can remain accessible in Location 4, though usually only the deepest centerless aspects of it. This will typically be mixed with Layer 4. Finders often experience a mix of Layer 3 and Layer 4, and possibly other layers, after initially transitioning to Location 4. If they remain in Location 4, they will usually go through what they often describe as a “deepening” in that location, which typically involves their system moving more solidly into Layer 4. From this point on, it becomes more difficult access to Layer 3 and to return to previous locations.

Layer 2 is not readily accessible in later locations, which tend to gravitate strongly to Layer 4. When it is touched upon it is typically blended with the deeper layers, and is mostly experienced as greater dimensionality in perception, including spatial perception. From the perspective of Layer 4, every level of experience and state of perception, including the emptiness of Layer 2, shows up as the unfolding of pure existence. Any quality beyond a sense of undifferentiated existence appears secondary and relative and, in contrast to existence itself, unreal.

This deepening process involves the falling away of remaining subtle layers of self at Layer 3. These relate to being/beingness itself, the most foundational layer of association. When these fall away, it subjectively feels as though the centerless field of beingness/awareness (i.e., Layer 3) disappears, or somehow collapses into raw, indivisible existence. Then, all that remains is existence in spontaneous unfolding.

It is common for Location 2 or 3 Finders to experience Layer 3 as foundational to all existence, like the source or ground of being. It feels as though it is always there and untouched by all experience. As a consequence, the subjective experience is emmeshed with deep beliefs about what is ultimately real, and transitioning to and deepening into Location 4 can be disconcerting. This is especially the case for Finders who had a divine experience of Layer 3 before transitioning to Location 4, because divinity disappears.

On the Path of Freedom subjective experience roots increasingly deeply into Layer 4, until Layer 3 becomes difficult to access. It can sometimes show up again in later locations in a highly integrated form where it will feel like every layer is a quality of reality/existence. If a Finder does work at restoring some perception of Layer 3, it can often appear extremely intense energetically at first.

In contrast, on the Path of Humanity, the deeper aspects of Layer 3 remain accessible. This difference in where subjective experience centers appears to

underlie the split in development after Location 4. Layer 3 has a quality of being/beingness that falls away at Layer 4, hence Finders on the Path of Humanity return to experiencing a subtle quality of self. Similarly, the continued perceptual awareness of Layer 3 results in greater dimensionality in perception, which can subjectively feel richer and more alive than Location 4. There is also some return of emotion on the Path of Humanity, usually impersonal forms of love, which also relate to Layer 3.

The reintegration of Layer 3 on the Path of Humanity allows these Finders to return to feeling more human, while those on the Path of Freedom continue in the direction of Location 4, which feels profoundly alien and out of phase with the world. Nonetheless, the anchoring of subjective experience in Layer 3 precludes significant deepening into Layer 4, and as a result the Path of Humanity does not go past Location 6. By Location 7 there is a very deep and complete isolation of perception in Layer 4, which cannot be achieved on the Path of Humanity.

LAYER 4

Layer 4 is the home layer of Location 4 and later. Up until this location it tends to be experienced partially and temporarily. The descriptions relating to Layer 4 in general are largely based on the qualities of Layer 4 in Location 4 and later, where there is typically a deep and pure experience of Layer 4 (apart from the Path of Humanity where there is a mix with Layer 3).

From the perspective of Layer 4, there is no separation or distinction of any kind. There is only This—only indivisible reality in spontaneous unfolding. It is without any sense of duality or possibility of duality. Nothing appears to have independent or essential existence, and there is only undifferentiated reality. The concepts of self and no-self cease to have meaning. There is no sense of “I” or “I am” —no process of association or reflection. This dissolution of sense of self is so complete in later locations that even the experience of “no self” falls away. That experience is relative to the experience of self and is a positionality or fixation in a perspective or reference point. As one deepens into late locations, this is no longer referenced, and there is only existence itself. This cessation of the

reflective movement in consciousness is central to the falling away of the subjective sense of self in Location 4 and later.

Layer 4 feels like absolute, irreducible reality, in which there is no state or condition, nor any existent thing to which a state or condition could pertain. This way of experiencing Layer 4 is more relevant to Locations 4 and later, where it can stabilize. When it is only touched upon temporarily, it does not necessarily feel as though it is not a state because the sense of individual self remains partially intact in earlier locations. Layer 4 is then experienced in the context of there being a self-existent experiencer that entered and left the experience. In Location 4 and later, where the sense of self is dissolved on a very low level, it feels as though that illusion of self just fell away, leaving only existence in spontaneous unfolding. Hence it does not feel like anything is attained—who could attain it when nothing but existence could ever be? From this perspective, all perceptual states are illusory and there is only undifferentiated existence.

When shifting deeply and exclusively into Layer 4, which essentially only happens from Location 4 on, it can feel like Layer 3 collapses or disappears. This produces the sense of a “return to the body” in Location 4, because it is a return to the raw existence of everything. There is no longer the sense of anything within or beyond it—no sense of all-transcending or all-pervading formless presence or beingness. What remains actually and perceptually is the body and everything that is physically present. The experience of everything is reduced to raw sense data, and it feels as though it is all just existence unfolding spontaneously. The body itself appears as part of that unfolding and no different from any other aspect of life.

There is a sense that nothing can die because nothing exists of itself, and it therefore has no independent existence to lose. Life in its totality has no opposite and cannot die. There is a sense that this is reality itself and can never be gained or lost, but is the condition of everything that is or could be. Presumably because all fundamental human fear originates from the fear of death, this perception brings an incomparable sense of freedom and peace. The peace is of a different order than that of any other layer because it is not dependent on any positionality, such as “I am awareness”, or “I am”. The untouchable quality of Layer 3 becomes irrelevant

(untouchable in relation to what?), because nothing but reality could ever be. The peace feels absolute and of a different dimension than emotional or psychological peace.

There is a powerful directionality and gravity to Layer 4, which can be difficult to escape. Location 4 Finders often experience what they describe as a “deepening” after initially transitioning, which can last from a few weeks to a few months, and typically involves their perception being drawn more deeply and exclusively into Layer 4. From this point on, it becomes more difficult to access Layer 3 and to return to previous locations. This is even more so the case for Location 5 and later Finders.

Layer 4 is increasingly deepened into on the Path of Freedom, which continues in the direction of Location 4. This correspondingly entails a deepening away from the other layers of the system, which increasingly fade out of subjective perception, along with access to the conditioning that remains at those layers. There is an ever greater depth of stillness/silence and an incomparable quality of freedom and peace, which is the classical “freedom from suffering” pursued by spiritual traditions for millennia. However, this freedom entails a loss of perceptual dimensionality—deepening into Layer 4 involves stripping away or getting beneath the processes that filter perception, until

all that remains is increasingly raw sense data. This diminishes the dimensionality of perception, which becomes progressively flat in later locations (although someone is not likely to notice unless they come back to an earlier location).

Deeper into Layer 4 in later locations, the sense of unfolding diminishes, until everything feels instantaneous and total. It feels as though everything collapses into silence. The silence is total and intrinsic to existence itself. It no longer feels experiential. There is no sense of distance or space. Even the field of awareness disappears, leaving no sense of any dimension—only the all-present

reality. With Layers 2 and 3, everything is inside. This notion loses all meaning—there is no inside and no outside, no locality or reference point at all. Everything appears as an intrinsic quality of reality, and does not feel experiential, nor does anything appear to independently or essentially exist of itself. There is only raw undifferentiated reality. This comes increasingly to the foreground of perception as locations get later, resulting in an extreme flatness to perception. There is a powerful gravity to these late locations, making it difficult and rare to get back from them. When it does happen, the experience of earlier locations is changed as a result of the system having deepened in late locations.

DESCRIPTIONS OF LAYER 1 -with commentary-

It can be helpful to hear people's direct experience of the layers, in their own words. We've collected many of these accounts during the research, and have selected some to share. For each, we include commentary to provide additional insight and clarification.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 5+

PARTICIPANT 1: LOCATION 1

“ Normal functioning and activity of mind, but reasonably calm and present most of the time. Curious and open rather than fearful, allowing for greater neutrality and observation of what is. It can be more balanced in relating to others, since it isn't invested in protecting the narrative sense of self. Social functioning is fine, memory is fine, planning is fine. ”

In Location 1, Layer 1 is the default layer. This means that mental activity is still dominant in subjective perception. The mind can still be quite active and reactive at this point, and contrary to what is sometimes believed, it is not true that all forms of Fundamental Wellbeing involve a largely or completely silent mind. The decrease in self-referential thoughts in Location 1 means that it can feel as though one is more present to observe what is, rather than one's narrative about what is.

PARTICIPANT 1: LOCATION 2

“ Normal/enhanced functioning of mind, mind feels clearer, sharper, and is capable of great focus and efficiency. There is no distinct sense of an I that is thinking, it is more like an impersonal process that one can engage with. With less identification with thoughts there is a diminished need to be right, which allows for greater objectivity and receptivity. The mind can still actively engage with its own workings. Memories are less prevalent but not inaccessible. Planning and its implementation seem perfectly fine. ”

Mental functioning often feels clearer and more focused to people in Location 2 because self-referential thought has diminished significantly by this point and is no longer disrupting and clouding the space of the mind. Thought can often feel impersonal, or as though it is “just happening”, which relates to subjective perception being centered in one of the deeper layers, as is common in Location 2. However, in contrast to Location 4 and beyond (where there is no sense of agency), one can still engage with the process of thinking, make decisions, and so on. Memories tend to arise less because there is an increased focus of attention on the present, and because the past is no longer valued as defining the sense of self.

PARTICIPANT 1: LOCATION 3

“Mind is much more quiet. It can be biased by the love and joy, so one ends up doing things that don't always seem wise in the eyes of others. Its functions are essentially intact, but one is less inclined to use them. The ever-present experience of love, beauty, devotion bring about awe and complete trust in the unfolding of life. The compassion, unity, and love make connection with others natural and enjoyable, so social functioning is fine.”

Layer 1 can usually be easily accessed in Location 3 but is by no means the default anymore. It will often be experienced from perception being centered in deeper layers. On top of this, self-referential thought continues to decline in Location 3. These all combine to make the mind seem more quiet and in the background in Location 3. The good access to Layer 1 together with the pervasive feelings of love and joy make Location 3 people wonderful to be around, and a bit of an exception to the issues with social functioning that (especially deeper) Fundamental Wellbeing often entails. Because of the profound experience of joy, love, and compassion in Location 3, the mind tends to be biased by the very positive affective state, which tends to increasingly drown out personal emotion until only this one positive “meta-emotion” remains. In this sense, Location 3 is more like Location 4 than it seems.

PARTICIPANT 1: LOCATION 4

“It functions autonomously, there is no way to influence it. No self-referential thoughts and zero interest in meaning or purpose. Very little thought of past or future, takes effort to go there when it is necessary. Memory is definitely worse at this point, relying on lists and notes seems unavoidable. Planning and taking action mostly rely on external stimulus to initiate them, as there is no internal drive or energy to do so. Thought can solve problems, analyze, reason, interpret, deal with practical things when called for. The social side isn't ideal, stemming largely from disinterest and lack of affinity with others. The mind is very quiet, and thoughts are often very brief or half formed. It is not compelling, no thought feels true or important. The gravity of the silence tends to preclude thinking.”

The most distinctive quality of Layer 1, Location 4 is that the mind is experienced as functioning autonomously. Someone is just watching the process unfold, most typically without feeling as though they are doing or able to influence any of it. This can have less than ideal consequences, for example, in how deconditioning occurs. Attention is so absorbed in the present moment and far away from the level of the mind, that memory is usually quite affected by this point, especially in relation to non-routine events. Finders in Location 4 and later usually develop strategies to deal with these memory deficits, like writing everything down and setting reminders. Self-referential thought and any existential concern with meaning or purpose disappear by Location 4, and after deepening in Location 4, many Finders experience a largely or completely silent mind. Most systems that target Location 4 and later tend to hold a belief that the Layer 1 is something to get away from, and as someone deepens it does tend to become less accessible. This is typically not conducive to effectiveness in the world and moves increasingly in the direction of its transcendence and isolation. This is perfectly fine as long as a person's life circumstances allow for that.

PARTICIPANT 1: LOCATION 5+

“ It functions autonomously, there is no way to influence it. The mind is mostly silent, but its practical and intellectual functions are intact for the most part. The social side is less optimal - it is hard to follow what people are saying when they aren't direct or to the point or tell long stories, it is hard to see their perspective or to know what they want or feel if they don't state it directly. Things that were once thought seem to happen of themselves, as if thinking is happening but without taking any form, no image, no sound, no movement. It is like thought is replaced by knowingness, which is silent and self-evident, innate to the unfolding itself. In watching it the past days it looks almost like there is thought but no awareness of it, because the body will react as if there was a thought – like suddenly change direction, get up, say something, which would normally be intentional and the consequence of a thought, but now feels intrinsic to the unfolding. The subjective experience is that nothing causes anything, though if reasoning from the perspective of brain processes, one could say that perhaps thought is occurring outside of conscious awareness.

In Location 5+, Layer 1 increasingly recedes from subjective awareness, especially on the Path of Freedom. Like in Location 4, it functions autonomously, and is now increasingly outside of even subjective awareness, despite continuing to impact behavior. This relates to subjective perception being increasingly isolated in Layer 4 and into Locations 5 and later, although these are very rarely reached. Locations 4 and later essentially move in the direction of transcendence, and generally lead to increased isolation and disengagement with the world.

PARTICIPANT 2: LOCATION 1

“ I would say that it’s a friendlier much less critical version of the regular mind. Very useful for planning and organizing and strategizing.

Layer 1 of Location 1 is comparable to the mind prior to Fundamental Wellbeing, but without the underlying sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. The reduction in self-referential thought, combined with the sense of completeness and okayness that comes with Fundamental Wellbeing, make it much more benign, although old conditioning can still be triggered and suppress the peace.

PARTICIPANT 2: LOCATION 2

“ Similar to Location 1 in terms of being able to use it for planning and organizing. The difference I experienced was it was much less self-referential. Much less subject and object. And noticeably more in the background than location one.

Self-referential thought declines as locations get later. At the same time, there is also an increasing tendency for subjective perception to center in deeper layers, resulting in Layer 1 appearing to be more in the background. Location 2 is nondual, so the sense of fundamental distinction between subject and object, including thinker/thought, has disappeared.

PARTICIPANT 2: LOCATION 3

“ Absolutely no inner critic, super positive and loving and joyful. Not as good at planning and organizing as Location 1 and 2. Less accessible than in Location 2 but a pleasure to interact with and live from.

Due to the profound experience of joy, love, and compassion in Location 3, the mind tends to be strongly influenced by the very positive affective state. Layer 1 does not draw attention as much as it can in the earlier locations, so Location 3 is usually somewhat less ideal for organizational tasks, especially running a business.

PARTICIPANT 2: LOCATION 4

“ Super, super far in the background. Very matter of fact. Not much personal stuff going on. More in the realm of “need to get groceries,” “should do some laundry,” etc. etc. Definitely not great for planning and organizing. Actually, pretty bad for planning and organizing!

”

Self-referential thought is gone by Location 4 because there is no sense of self, and so thought tends to relate to practical matters. It feels very far in the background because subjective perception is centered in deep layers, usually Layer 4, possibly with a narrow band of Layer 3.

PARTICIPANT 2: LOCATION 5+

“ Again, super far in the background and not much personal content or stories. More about every day tasks and getting from A to B. Maybe hearing a song in my mind or an imprint of a movie or something like that. Kind of hard to describe. Almost a trippy surreal calmness

”

This is similar to Location 4 (this person was in one of the earlier locations beyond 4). The sparkly quality described here probably related to a persistent change in the visual system, which accompanies a transition to Location 5.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 4

PARTICIPANT 3: LOCATION 1

“ I believe this is where I first landed. In the beginning there was a distinct silence from the default mode network but mind was active in the sense that planning, problem solving, analyzing still operated of course. I remember wanting to escape from mind and it felt a bit like ‘the enemy’. The peace was kind of dependent on few distractions. I did not view mind as helpful at all. ”

Layer 1 has a kind of gravity to it in Location 1, which usually means that perception defaults to mental activity when a Finder is not actively sinking in to deeper layers. This often results in Location 1 Finders feeling as though they must continuously work at quieting or escaping their minds to remain in the deeper quality of peace.

PARTICIPANT 3: LOCATION 2

“ I think I have stabilized in Location 2. It’s easy now to zoom out as soon as I get the chance but I have come to appreciate mind more with the exemplar program. I don’t have to fear it at all. I’m not afraid of slipping back in to it. I have had huge stressors and challenges and stayed here for over two-three years I believe. I’ve really come to appreciate that the mind does not have to change in itself. It is what it is and has its properties. I feel that fundamental wellbeing is best used in the world rather than the cave. At least for me. For me there has been a deeper acceptance of Layer 1 and it’s easy to understand how conditioning forms it and how it is acting out of past experience predicting and wanting to be of service. ”

The qualities of Layer 1, or the mind, cannot be changed. It will always be that way by nature, and it has a practical use in functioning in the world. Rather than being something which disappears with deepening in Fundamental Wellbeing, it is a layer of the nervous system that is always present and merely becomes increasingly distant from subjective perception as one moves into deeper layers. This means that returning to Layer 1 perceptually for its functional properties can be practical, and in a fluid system, access to Layer 1 does not need to compromise access to the deeper layers.

PARTICIPANT 3: LOCATION 3

“ I believe I have had episodes in this location, and I agree that you feel a bit more as a separate yet super loving entity. As I remember it is a bit harder to be efficient and goal oriented compared to location 2. I felt more zoomed out from Layer 1 here. Cared less about goals, etc.

”

Location 3 has a subtle quality of duality, as opposed to Location 2 which is purely nondual. The very positive affective state and perception of perfection in Location 3 tend to undermine intrinsic motivation, and this, paired with being rooted deeper in the layers away from Layer 1 (zoomed out), can make goal-oriented action less forthcoming.

PARTICIPANT 3: LOCATION 4

“ I have experienced episodes in location 4 I believe since I lost the ability to love in the old sense and reality felt more alien and strange. There could be a touch of surrealism to this whole existence thing and things at Layer 1 mattered very little. It felt very non-functional and Layer 1 operations were distant. As a householder it kind of freaked me out because of all my responsibilities but I could definitively feel the pull to just deepen. If I did not have a family and the knowledge from this course I think I would slide in to a cave and later locations easily and end up in a rewarding but non-functional echo-chamber of my own non-mind.

”

The experience of all emotions, including love, disappears in Location 4. Subjective perception tends to be centered far from Layer 1; thus, mental activity seems distant and less optimally functional. There is definitely a subjective pull to deepen in Location 4 and later, but as in this example, familial and other responsibilities can prevent people from going in this direction.

PARTICIPANT 4: LOCATION 1

“ Sliding in and out of feeling like a person again. Spontaneous thought, somewhat direct-able. Can deliberately concentrate. Plenty of time-based thinking, forward and back. Lots of triggers into thought based on previous experience. Useful for same things as pre-location 1 thinking. Plus, useful for noticing (and sometimes commenting ad nauseum) on changes from moving into Location 1. ”

Subjective perception in Location 1 defaults to Layer 1, and so attention is very easily drawn into mental activity. Self-referential thought is diminished, but generally not gone at this point. As this participant commented, this can be useful for self-reflexivity, which reduces the deeper one goes in Fundamental Wellbeing.

PARTICIPANT 4: LOCATION 2

“ At the low end of Location 2 it feels very similar to Location 1. Further in, thought has an immediacy similar to the immediacy of sight and sound, it just appears in awareness. Takes effort to do theory of mind activities. Harder to keep track of physical symptoms of illnesses to report of them in doctor appointments, because if they are not currently present the story isn't there to tell. And, generally, harder to gauge seriousness of body sensations, other people have to tell me when to go home sick from work. Focusing on a task seems to require clenching my stomach in order to happen. Similar for interacting with others, there is a physical tightening in order to do social interactions. Responding to emotions of others using cognitively learned and practiced patterns. ”

This participant is describing being at Layer 1 of Location 2 “at the low end”. Deeper in Location 2, subjective perception becomes centered away from the processes at Layer 1, resulting in the experience of thoughts appearing spontaneously. The descriptions of a lack of body awareness also relate to the deeper layers and disassociation from Layer 1. The association with the body exists at Layer 1, and the deeper one goes into the layers, the less accurate one's perception of physical sensations becomes. Nevertheless, most Finders won't realize this. Although Layer 1 is usually readily accessible in Location 2, this layer can be made less accessible if a Finder works at isolating at a deeper layer, like this person seems to have done.

PARTICIPANT 4: LOCATION 3

“Something shows up to be done, and you do it. Mind seems to be floating along for the ride, sometimes twittering to itself in the background as experience happens. Notices other people looking shiny and admires them. Notices how accessible, or not, their interiors seem to be. Are they present, or wrapped up and away? Tends to invite play when catching the attention of another.”

Layer 1 can usually be easily accessed in Location 3, but it is by no means the default anymore. It will often be experienced from perception being centered in deeper layers. Therefore, mental activity feels more impersonal and spontaneous than in earlier locations.

PARTICIPANT 4: LOCATION 4

“Going through the day having the thought “I should be caring about this.” Mind seems very clear and focused. Decisions just show up.”

So much of Layer 1 and its prior conditioning has fallen out of subjective perception by Location 4 that it can feel like not caring at all about what happens. There is no sense of agency in Location 4, so it feels as though decisions and actions occur without volition.

PARTICIPANT 5: LOCATION 1

“ The mind is less addictive and sticky than when not experiencing Fundamental Wellbeing. All its functioning is the same as before, it’s simply not the central and only point of view. It’s seen as a place to stand. Memories, planning, reasoning, language, fantasizing, dreaming, etc. function normally. ”

Again, the mind operates in a similar way to before Fundamental Wellbeing. It no longer being seen as the central or only point of view, but rather as a place to stand, relates to access and fluidity to deeper layers. Layer 1 is one perspective or way of experiencing reality, and one is able to move in and out of it, rather than being fixated in it as one is prior to Fundamental Wellbeing.

PARTICIPANT 5: LOCATION 2

“ The mind is quieter than at Location 1 and its chatter is less frequent. All mind abilities are accessible. ”

Layer 1 is no longer the default, but still highly accessible.

PARTICIPANT 5: LOCATION 3

“ Same as in Location 2, but “negative” or less useful thoughts diminish. Thinking seems to change in flavor to more loving, grateful and caring messages for all. ”

The mind is strongly influenced by the loving and positive affective state in Location 3.

PARTICIPANT 5: LOCATION 4

“ The mind is seen as something in the horizon as an independent show or movie without any meaning or significance. Thinking simply happens and it does what it does. It does not require control nor can it be controlled.

”

This example illustrates the disassociation from Layer 1 that is typical of Location 4. Its level of perception no longer seems real or meaningful from Layer 4, to which Location 4 tends to default. Layer 1 essentially operates autonomously and does not feel volitional.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 3

PARTICIPANT 6: LOCATION 1

“ There is a lot of conditioning left, and one never knows which aspect will show up. It could be frustration or anger for not advancing faster or fear of not getting “there.” There are also streams of repetitive thoughts that still come up, even though self-referential thoughts have decreased. Finally, I feel the ego is trying to fight for survival. There is this idea that the mind is the enemy and needs to be shut down, so the mind really is not cooperating with the movement that the person has started. Once the person and the mind understand that every single “mechanism” has its function, and the mind is an important interface with the world, things get less “violent.” ”

Fundamental Wellbeing does not show up as persistent equanimity or bliss in Location 1. There is still psychological conditioning that can activate positive and negative emotion in the system and push the peace to the background. However, unlike before the transition to Fundamental Wellbeing, all of these experiences arise within the context of everything being fundamentally okay, even if that sense appears far in the background at times.

The remaining psychological conditioning at Layer 1 keeps the peace of Fundamental Wellbeing pushed to the background most of the time, especially when a Finder has recently transitioned. Over time, the deconditioning cycles that unfold in a Finder’s system after transitioning deal with a lot of that conditioning, and the peace moves increasingly to the foreground of experience.

PARTICIPANT 6: LOCATION 2

“ When I am in Location 2 I feel there is a greater buffer between the real me and the mind. I can see the mind is still functioning, but its effects are softer. Repetitive thoughts, worries about the future are really in the background. It seems that in Location 1 Fundamental Wellbeing is in the background and the mind is still in the foreground. In Location 2 it is the opposite. So even though past, future, and repetitive thoughts may occur, their volume is lower. Also, conditioning is less compelling.

”

This describes observing Layer 1 from being centered in a deeper layer, providing distance from the mind, which now feels as though it is more in the background. There is less of a pull to Layer 1 in Location 2, and reactions at this layer tend to have less of a pull on attention and fall off faster.

PARTICIPANT 6: LOCATION 3

“ I seem to be more connected to other people in Location 3, with more empathy and compassion. It is possible to find beauty in everything, independently whether it is something people usually label as bad or undesirable.

”

This person is mostly describing Location 3, but not so much Layer 1 in particular. The central meta-emotion of joy, love, and compassion in Location 3 dominates and infuses every experience. This results in impersonal love for everything that arises in experience, including other people. Location 3 often brings with it a sense of perfection and beauty, which can equally pervade all experience as one deepens in this location.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 2

PARTICIPANT 7: LOCATION 1

“ I remember when I began to enter into Location 1 and the “stickiness” or attachment to self-referential thoughts began to decrease. With this came a relief from all the stories I had been telling myself for so many years because I started to realize that whatever “I am” is not those stories. Although there was a relief from these types of things I would still get triggered from stress at my job and I noticed that I would have to sacrifice the peace that came from loosening attachment from self-referential thought for an immersion in the mind/problem solving/rationalizing of personal action, belief and thoughts in order to excel in my work.

”

In Fundamental Wellbeing, particularly beyond Layer 1, the sense of self is no longer derived from narrative and concept. To some extent, a quality of personal self continues to exist at Layer 1, which this participant describes needing to return to in order to function optimally in their work. The peace they feel they need to sacrifice is the peace of the deeper layers. Accordingly, they are describing a degree of fluidity between Layer 1 and, most likely, Layer 2.

PARTICIPANT 7: LOCATION 2

“ So, as I think I am in Location 2, the mind seems to be more practically accessible as a tool. I have noticed that I can move from the practicality of the mind up one layer (or two layers?) to Layers 2 and 3. The reason I think this is because as I write this I can see the mind engaged in identification with the “I” thought, peace and contentment are slightly moved more into the background and this causes a slight decrease in contentment. However, as I pull away from the mind and surrender the need to be attached to the things aforementioned such as identification with the “I” thought, the need to be right, firm belief in “I think I know”, logical or rationalizing of thoughts/belief etc. I become very peaceful, lose motivation for certain things and a sense of contentment all bubble up and I feel so very pleasant just enjoying my sitting. The mind overall, generally speaking, has less control over emotional states and triggers fade fairly quickly. ”

Location 2 Finders will often comment that at times, they fall back into their old sense of self, and this often relates to aspects of Layer 1, which has a quality of self that feels more individualized and personal than any other layer. Finders often assume this is something to go beyond, but it is just the nature of Layer 1. If perception is centered there, this quality of more individualized or personal self naturally arises. This participant is again describing a fluidity between Layer 1 and deeper layers, where Layer 1 is needed for cognitive functioning, but entails a reduction in the experience of peace. This kind of trade-off can be appropriate or even necessary in the context of a person's life, which makes fluidity across the layer immensely valuable, allowing a Finder to experience a greater degree of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing while remaining effective in the world.

The description of triggers fading quickly relates to Location 2 in general, and also to perception being centered in a deeper layer, which tends to naturally decondition and release conditioning arising at Layer 1.

PARTICIPANT 8: LOCATION 1

“ Very similar to mind before transition, just steadier, quieter, more peaceful. ”

This participant is describing Layer 1 without the Narrative Self (Ego's) fundamental sense of threat and incompleteness.

PARTICIPANT 8: LOCATION 2

“ Quite similar to mind prior to transition, all skills & abilities accessible. Much happier, less notice of stress, less reactive. A definite change in identity, turning loose of ego, great sense of freedom. Less self-reflexivity. Mind is useful for relationships, interacting with the world, solving problems, understanding what’s happening here. Tend to watch it working, some distance between mind and self.

”

By the time someone reaches Location 2, the change in sense of self is very noticeable, typically involving a dramatic reduction in or elimination of the sense of a Narrative Self. The change relates in part to association with the qualities of Layer 2 or deeper, rather than with the personal sense of self that is produced at Layer 1. This, in turn, involves a disassociation from Layer 1, which produces the sense of distance between mind and self (e.g., “I am not my thoughts”, “I am not the thinker”). In other words, subjective perception is centered in a deeper layer and is watching the processes at Layer 1 happen rather than being embedded within them, resulting in mental activity feeling more impersonal and spontaneous.

PARTICIPANT 9: LOCATION 1

“ Thoughts have no echo. Memories of pre-FW are of thoughts triggering thoughts triggering thoughts. I would see an event and land twenty steps away with a surety of disaster. In Location 1 a thought arose and there was no follow on thoughts. Thought arose, then passed away.

”

A reduction in the quantity of thoughts, especially self-referential thoughts, is common with transitioning to Fundamental Wellbeing. Attention is more focused on the present moment, and thoughts of past and future arise less and/or seem less relevant when they do.

PARTICIPANT 9: LOCATION 2

“ Mind arises in response to different events and has a distinct context/flavor/personality based on what is happening. There is no unifying theme. There is leader response. Planner response. Anger response. etc. Each of these are distinct and “unwound” from each other. Very different than the continuity of self in pre-FW or Location 1 Layer 1 state.

”

The change away from having a personal sense of self in Location 2 allows for all of the mental processes that are unfolding at Layer 1 to be witnessed impersonally. A smoothing function that normally makes these distinct processes/parts appear unified, or part of a single coherent self falls away.

PARTICIPANT 10: LOCATION 1

“ More ‘sticky’ in Location 1. Useful for conceptualization, language, verbalizing, planning, analyzing/categorizing/assessing/discerning/comparing/differentiating, doing targeted tasks, staying focused on something, keeping a schedule, checking off boxes, making lists, imagining/daydreaming/fantasizing. It’s great for setting an intention. It names things, arranges into hierarchy, identifies boundaries, establishing a context. It makes decisions - or at least thinks it does and claims ownership of them. Also responsible for ‘selfing’ - creating a separate ‘self’ with an identity / history / goals / attributes / characteristics - although it is/was looser and less ‘bound’ in Location 1 than non-Finder. Also, responsible for perception of linear time, causal relationships and assigning meaning to experience. It is good for working with beliefs, deconditioning, identifying triggers and reframing them. It’s definitely good - although not particularly accurate sometimes - at judging, in both a positive and negative direction. It seeks to understand! Always looking for answers and trying to figure things out. I find this to be one of its more addictive qualities. It creates ‘other’ and pigeon-holes, throws into large buckets, plays ‘what’s wrong with this?’ and ‘how could this be better?’ and similar games.

It's great for playing games! In Location 1 it still has access to memories and perhaps those are involuntary for some in the early part of the location. My memory of my personal history has faded over the last few years, with a sharp decline during 45 Days. And I LOVE that! Less useful are the areas where there is/was still looping of thoughts that are difficult to control. I think in early Location 1 it's possible the narrative self still narrates most experiences - I seem to remember in the somewhat distant past being unable to simply experience something without ongoing mental commentary - even when trying desperately to 'be present' I would be narrating it like 'Okay, I'm feeling my bottom on the chair and the air on my skin', etc. Now, I naturally spend a lot of time experiencing without any narration at all - but I'm unsure if I'm in Location 1 or Location 2 or a hybrid. Or if that is simply Layer 2 of Location 1 or 2.

”

There is an extensive description of the qualities and tendencies of Layer 1 here...

The sense of self feels “looser” as a Finder because of some degree of fluidity in the layers beginning to be accessed. This means that perception is no longer rigidly fixed in the most shallow part of Layer 1.

Being at Layer 1 means that a lot of perception is filtered through the mind, rather than being experienced directly. Deepening through the layers can be like stripping the filters off of raw perception.

PARTICIPANT 10: LOCATION 2

“ I think mind in Location 2 is pretty similar to Location 1 but it's much less busy with unnecessary distractions and is easier to ignore. The non-stop narration and dissection of everything into 'about me' and 'not about me' is gone or at least significantly waning. Weaving of stories is significantly less. The need to find meaning is less or perhaps gone, but it can be done intentionally when useful. It is useful [and perhaps not useful too] for interpreting experiences. It is still very useful for creating a vision, setting goals and maintaining a course towards them. I'm not sure if the mind is much less interested in story, boundaries, answers, etc. OR if whoever is directing attention just doesn't choose Layer 1 as much/often.

”

The fundamental distinction between subject and object disappears in Location 2, so concepts such as “me” and “not me” become less relevant. In the previous comment, both are probably true to some extent, and they likely compound each other. There is simply less interest in meaning, story, and so on, because there is already a deep intrinsic sense of peace and completeness. This means that Layer 1 and its tendencies are less compelling; they are not valued, so attention is not drawn to them. On top of this, the natural gravity of Location 2 tends towards deeper layers than Layer 1.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Location 1

PARTICIPANT 11: LOCATION 1

“ Since childhood I have always had a sense of being happy regardless of what was happening around me. That it would all be ok when I relaxed and checking in with myself. Started to experiment in college with making it more present when I started practicing yoga. I continue to have self-narrative. Have never feared death that I remember and have always felt a connectedness between myself and my surroundings. I have always struggled with formal religions but have a strong spiritual draw that I cannot doubt.

”

This is a nice description of Location 1 from someone who has been in Fundamental Wellbeing since childhood.

PARTICIPANT 12: LOCATION 1

“ Layer 1 of location one has most of the qualities of a normal mind. Worries about life, judgement, intentions, fear, stories, etc. Perhaps the nature of self-thought is a bit different. Aside from triggers such a phobia like public speaking etc., there's generally less concern about one's image. It's useful because at this layer, there is still an abundant amount of experience in the mind that can help relate with people and empathize. It's very “normal” in a lot of sense.

”

This is describing Layer 1 in Location 1, which is mostly unchanged from prior to Fundamental Wellbeing, except that the core sense of incompleteness and discontentment has fallen away. Self-referential thought declines, so there is less preoccupation with concepts such as image. Unlike in later locations, there is still a good level of Theory of Mind in Location 1, allowing for more effective relating to non-Finders and society.

PARTICIPANT 13: LOCATION 1

“My sense of Layer 1 at Location 1, is that this is my main space of interfacing with the world, although I can access other layers through meditation. Being in the world feels “normal” as in not that different, yet also impersonal and expansive and light. The essence to me of Layer 1 is access to the vast utility of mind in being able to create and make decisions and plan and vision and parent my son and be a wife and a friend and do work in the world. It also feels like it is a thick layer of “stuff” - conditioning I guess - that gets more and more subtle and even tricky as I work with it consciously and it works itself unconsciously... it is very present and feels like a barrier to freedom. So there is a kind of paradoxical relationship to mind - enjoying and at times in awe of the “multi-tool” like quality of it, its very real and pragmatic utility in interfacing with the material realm, and also experiencing a kind of dogged dragging down energy of mind at the same time.

”

The mind has a kind of pull to it in Location 1, which usually means that perception defaults to mental activity when a Finder is not actively sinking in to deeper layers. Transitioning to Layer 1 of Location 1 is one of the times that you often hear people say something like, “Nothing is different, but everything has changed”. When perception is centered in Layer 1, which is the case for the majority of Location 1 Finders, the activity of the mind will still predominate the moment-to-moment experience, just as it did prior to the transition. Yet, at a deeper level, something has fundamentally changed—there is an underlying sense of okayness beneath all experience

PARTICIPANT 14: LOCATION 1

“It has all the qualities of the mind with a far reduced element of the narrative self. There is still separateness, sense of ego, thought streams and stickiness (but bothers me less or not at all), discerning ability, sense of agency, reaction to triggers (conditioning), compulsions, and life planning. But what is far less is the self-referencing tendencies, obsession with the self, and protection of one’s own story.

”

The essential qualities of Layer 1 remain, but the prevalence of the Narrative Self and the self-referential thoughts of which it is composed, are greatly reduced.

DESCRIPTIONS
OF LAYER 2
-with commentary-

Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 5+

PARTICIPANT 15: LOCATION 1

“ It has a quality of witnessing. There is still a central self separate to what is witnessed, but the field of perception appears more unified. ”

In Location 1, this layer will typically be experienced as everything just arising with a general sense of things being one, but still with the perceptual duality of an observer here and everything arising there. People will sometimes describe this experience as being like looking at a painting or a movie screen. Thus, the notion that being in Fundamental Wellbeing means you necessarily experience nonduality, is mistaken. Both Location 1 and 3 are dual locations, although Location 3 is subtly dual, and the experience of Location 1 becomes more subtly dual in Layer 2 than it is in Layer 1.

PARTICIPANT 15: LOCATION 2

“ The experience is that of being conscious emptiness, which simultaneously is everything and contains everything. This still has the quality of being, which is a form of self, however it is impersonal and empty of content, and identification with content (thoughts, emotions, actions etc.) ceases. Everything is experienced as equal and essentially no different from oneself. Peace is the prevailing context of all experience, eventually making it possible to allow the polarities of experience to arise and disappear without attachment or resistance. Experiencing itself predominates, without distinct experiencer or experience. ”

This experience is deeper in Layer 2, where the quality of emptiness/spaciousness feels not only like it contains everything, but is also the substance of everything. Both Layers 2 and 3 have a quality of being or beingness, which from the perspective of a Location 4+ person, is a quality of self that can fall away in late locations. However, unlike Layer 1, which has a quality of personal and individuated self, the quality of self in Layer 2 and 3 is impersonal and formless. Deeper into Layer 2, there is an association with this formless quality as one's true nature, which is simultaneously experienced to be the essential nature of everything (in Location 2, which is nondual). Perception becomes increasingly centered in Layer 2, and its unchanging qualities pervade all experience, increasingly highlighting the impermanent and relative nature of all other levels of experience, such as thought, emotion, sensation, and so on. Because of the nonduality at Location 2, especially beyond Layer 1 and the shallow end of Layer 2, there is no sense of distinction between the object of experience, the experiencer, and the process of experiencing. It all appears to unfold as one.

PARTICIPANT 15: LOCATION 3

“ There is less sense of detachment than in the nondual locations. The emptiness feels like it pervades and encompasses everything as the presence of divinity, revealing itself in and as everything. There is a sense of self, but is empty of content. ”

The sense of union with everything through union with divinity makes Layer 2 in Location 3 feel less detached from everything than in Locations 2 and 4. In Location 3, Layer 2 shows up as the presence of divinity, or as the panpsychist presence. This is almost always mixed with Layer 3 in Location 3, which gives it the all-pervading and revealing qualities. There is a sense of self in Location 3, but it is impersonal and formless, and in union with the all-pervading presence.

PARTICIPANT 15: LOCATION 4

“ Everything feels radically empty. It can feel disturbing, or at least hollow, like a desert of emptiness, or as though nothing exists. This was a transitional experience. With its passing there is only the experience of complete emptiness, with no distinctions, no boundaries at all. The emptiness unfolds as everything. All states of consciousness are only the flow of existence, they have no inherent truth, reality, meaning, self-nature. ”

Layer 2 is essentially out of phase with Location 4 and can bring on difficult experiences for people. More than any of the other locations, transitioning to Location 4 is associated with a dark night, especially if someone is coming into it at Layer 2. Layer 2 is always experienced temporarily in Location 4, which defaults to Layer 4, and usually mixed with or viewed from deeper layers. The distinctionlessness is a quality of Layer 4, and from that perspective, every level of experience and state of perception, including the emptiness of Layer 2, shows up as the unfolding of pure existence. Any quality beyond that of raw undifferentiated existence appears secondary and relative, and in contrast to existence itself, unreal. Their being “empty of self-nature” refers to the perception at Layer 4 that nothing has inherent existence or reality of itself, but exists solely as “This”, as existence itself.

PARTICIPANT 15: LOCATION 5+

“ This layer is out of subjective perception, resulting in a significant loss of dimensionality in perception. As though it’s impossible to experience space subjectively. Eventually it was possible to regain limited access to the layer, which then appeared as a quality of existence itself. ”

The deeper a person roots into and isolates in Layer 4, the flatter perception becomes. This is particularly so on the Path of Freedom, especially from Location 7 on. Losing Layer 2 from subjective perception further contributes to this loss of dimensionality. If the layer can be accessed, it is seen from the perspective of Layer 4 and appears as “This”, as a quality of reality/existence.

PARTICIPANT 16: LOCATION 1

“ I would call it a feeling of being zoomed out or the experience of metacognition, the ability to be more in the sensory experience than the mental experience. It had the feeling of relief, of “Oh, this is what some of the spiritual books were talking about.” Useful for witnessing and holding space and really enjoying nature and my senses and not buying into stories and bullshit. Just kind of seeing them as objects. ”

In Layer 2, attention is centered in the present, in direct experience, rather than thoughts about experience, as it is in Layer 1. There is a quality of detachment and distance from what is happening at Layer 1, resulting in a sense of witnessing.

PARTICIPANT 16: LOCATION 2

“ This for me was pretty profound at the time. It was a sense of, “Holy shit. I get it now. This is what they’ve been talking about all along. I may be awake now.” One of the most profound experiences/periods of my life in terms of the massive relief and change of fortune experienced with it. Deep okayness and not much of a sense of self. No-mind. After a while I also noticed that it could be an unhealthy place to be in terms of not engaging with life or avoiding things. After a while I got good at coming back down into the mind to get things done and figure things out and then I could zoom back out when necessary. It was really the end of “suffering” and getting overly tangled up in human bullshit for me.

”

Layer 2 is the classic Location 2 experience that is typically described in spiritual literature, and so is widely regarded as the end of the road in terms of deepening into Fundamental Wellbeing. Consequently, most Finders in Location 2 really root in here and never go beyond it. The sense of a personal self is produced at Layer 1 and is left behind when a person really deepens into Layer 2 (only really possible from Location 2 on). There is a profound sense of peace and okayness at this layer, which feels changeless and untouched by all experience. Things are seen with more distance and objectivity, and one typically becomes less reactive. The downside of this is that it can be used to escape and disown the psychological conditioning that remains at Layer 1. This is usually what is meant when people speak about “spiritual bypassing”. Deepening away from Layer 1 may remove it from one’s subjective awareness, but that does not mean it stops operating. This essentially leaves conditioned patterns that reside at Layer 1 to function unsupervised, which may not lead to optimal outcomes. Instead, it is possible to move fluidly between Layers 1 and 2 (and 3 and 4) as is most appropriate for the moment at hand. Location 2 probably has the greatest range of access across the Layers of Depth, making it a sweet spot on the continuum that allows a Finder to experience a great degree of depth in Fundamental Wellbeing while remaining effective in the world.

PARTICIPANT 16: LOCATION 3

“ Very powerful but different than Location 2. It was like God came back after being on vacation. Things took on a kind of magical/mystical quality. Like everything was God or magical. Became more difficult to come back down into the mind to get things done. Could do it but had to be very intentional and sometimes ask for help from my super organized friends. ”

One of the central components of Location 3 is the experience of union with an all-pervading consciousness, which feels divine in nature to some people. The state feels powerful and good, and it can make one less inclined to engage with the mind or take necessary action. Everything already appears to be perfect.

PARTICIPANT 16: LOCATION 4

“ Much different than Location 3, in that it was like “God“ died or left. It was like being in a very peaceful nothingness that was also a bit disconcerting and concerning at times. It was like entire parts of me were deleted and they were not coming back. But it also seemed to be something beyond consciousness. Definitely having an experience of no-self. This is when things got difficult for me in terms of completely going off social media which I had a pretty big following on, not returning client calls, not getting things done, just forgetting all kinds of shit. It was like I had a new operating system that I had to learn so I could go back out into the world again. I basically didn’t work for a year and a half and just hiked and spent time in nature and with other friends who were experiencing some version of deep and abiding okayness. Massive disinterest in people’s dramas and stories. Lost a few friends because of it. I remember uttering a few times to people who wanted to be where I was at in terms of my well-being and stillness and spaciousness, to be careful what they wished for! And again, I think this was something beyond Layer 2 if I would compare it to the previous three locations. ”

There is no experience of divinity in Location 4. There is a very deep loss of the sense of individual self, which can feel irreversible, especially if someone deepens into Location 4. Terms like nothingness or emptiness are sometimes used by Location 4 Finders to try to express the internal experience of no self, no emotion, no feeling, no movement, no thought, and so on. A profound stillness/silence dominates subjective experience. In Location 4, perception is typically rooted in Layer 4, sometimes mixed with the deepest, centerless aspects of Layer 3. As this participant described, earlier layers are accessible to a degree, but usually experienced from the perspective of the deeper layers. Locations 4 and later essentially move in the direction of transcendence and generally lead to increased isolation and disengagement with the world.

PARTICIPANT 16: LOCATION 5+

“ Similar to location 4 but with a little sparkle and shine on everything. A little harder to engage with “the world“ and just having to trust that I previously upgraded my personality enough and it was healthy enough to trust it to be on auto pilot. Very, very VERY lucky to have had a savings account and an established flow in my life with clients and things like that before this happened. Could’ve gotten really ugly!

”

Perception increasingly roots deeper into Layer 4 into Location 5 and later, although these are very rarely reached. The “shine on everything” relates to the persistent visual change that occurs at Location 5. The functioning of the shallower layers of the system is autonomous at this point, so is essentially running on prior conditioning. This can lead to a wide range of outcomes, including to some of the amoral behavior observed in late location teachers. The extensive compassion and ethical training in some spiritual systems is actually designed to condition Finders’ systems (“upgrade their personality”) to express these more positive qualities once they are subjectively no longer able to act volitionally.

Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 4

PARTICIPANT 17: LOCATION 1

“ I believe I have experienced Layer 2 of Location 1 as having a quieter, calmer more peaceful mind. I felt stillness and the ability to observe my thoughts as a “witness” having distance from them. I was present in my body/location and was less reactive to people’s drama and had less story and drama of my own. This layer is good for escaping the always busy chattering mind, getting distance from it and feeling the space around it. I felt like I could move between Layer 1 and Layer 2 in location 1 very easily or even be in a little of each at the same time like there was an overlapping of Layers 1 and 2.

As one begins to sense into the shallower end of Layer 2, there is a quality of stillness that feels deeper than or more real than the movement of thought. There is a sense of distance from and space around the thoughts, which are witnessed as arising in a more impersonal way. In Location 1, Layer 2 is usually mixed with Layer 1, because it is hard to achieve an isolated experience of Layer 2 without nondual perception, which only shows up in Location 2. Often deepening into Layer 2 actually pulls a Finder’s system into Location 2. This participant is describing a degree of natural integration between Layers 1 and 2, as well as a degree of fluidity between them.

PARTICIPANT 17: LOCATION 2

“ In Location 2 Layer 2 I was very aware that I was not my thoughts and emotions. There was a me at Layer 1 I could leave behind and see in the distance, there was separation. I felt stillness and space, openness. I had an extreme drop in motivation and a sense that everything was meaningless and that was okay. I did not feel lonely but I could feel very alone. Like everything is just here and occurring or arising and I am here with it and all is very still and quiet. I am with it but I can be it as well and I am alone in all of this. This sounds dual but I don’t really feel dual. I can look at people and talk to them and I need to play a role and say what I am supposed to say to them but they are not here in this container with me, I am alone. Sometimes I hear things I am saying and I think who said that, or why did you say that, but most of the time it seems to work out in the situation. I think I am in location 2 Layer 2 most of the time. I have shifted into being more motivated but can easily sink in and become less motivated. If I meditate, I have an increased sense of stillness and space, usually this is a very calming feeling but lately sometimes I feel like I can lose my body in that space and that is not so comfortable.

As one deepens into Layer 2, one gets more distance from Layer 1, and it takes on an increasingly impersonal quality, until it is very clear from a subjective experience standpoint that one is not one's thoughts or emotions. This layer leaves behind the more personal sense of self that exists at Layer 1. The sense of a localized, distinct observer is no longer present. Instead, everything is just arising as one field of experience. As one deepens into Layer 2, one's experience becomes increasingly one with its qualities (all-containing spaciousness, etc.), and there is a sense that it simultaneously is everything and contains everything. For some people, it can feel alone, because there is just this one thing. As the experience of a personal self is left behind, a sense of meaninglessness can also accompany this layer, and it can bring with it changes in or loss of motivation. These experiences usually do not last, but people can go through periods that are challenging.

PARTICIPANT 17: LOCATION 3

“ I think I have experienced Layer 2 in Location 3. It is hard to say because I usually feel nondual but there have been times that I was so awe struck at the all-pervasive presence of source, consciousness, indescribable beauty, love, joy, majestic presence, of all that there is, ultimate peace and I was observing it. So, I am guessing that would be it, I think Layer 2 at location 3 would be good for spreading love and joy, compassion and goodwill. Like when you speak to a monk or monastic person or “guru” whose eyes are almost translucent like they are not there but they are aware of source and divine presence and just need to share that with everyone. You feel calm in their presence and you feel the love and peace emanating from them.

”

Location 3 is subtly dual – there is a sense of union with an all-pervading consciousness or with divinity in everything, and in order for there to be union, there must be a subtle sense of duality. This description relates more to Layer 3, which is the default of Location 3, and is the experience of the all-pervading presence.

PARTICIPANT 17: LOCATION 4

“ I think I have experienced Layer 2 at Location 4 or at least had glimpses of it. All there was was what there was at the time, all was still, I was in it, as it and of it and it was lonely, more than just an alone feeling but without emotion, very hard to describe. At the same time there was more and something that went in and out of Layer 2 that made me less concerned with being there. The container of consciousness would expand and grow like there was no end to space, it became fluid calmness versus stark silent stillness. It was very hard to communicate with people and know what to say or what role to play. I could observe myself saying things but with no connection to why or where I came up with saying what I said. I am not sure what this level would be good for other than just “being”.

”

Layer 2 can have a quality of aloneness in the nondual locations (i.e., Locations 2 and 4). It is difficult to say from such a short description, but this person may have been describing a movement from Layer 2 of Location 4 to Layer 3 of Location 4. Some would describe moving into Layer 3 from Layer 2 as the container expanding infinitely (or alternatively, as it dissolving). The emptiness of Layer 2 can feel particularly stark and desolate in Location 4, and it no longer feels that way at Layer 3. There is a strong disassociation from Layer 1 and from the levels of the system where the sense of agency is produced, thus it is common for people to say that they have no idea what is going to come out of their mouths next. They are just watching the process unfold.

PARTICIPANT 18: LOCATION 1

“ The sense of consciousness in Location 1 comes from the distinct experience of not being “in” the body. I am the space that contains the body, and, this is an irreversible shift in identity. When there is a pause, space comes to the forefront, and everything is happening in this space.

”

This is deep in Layer 2 for a Location 1 experience, where the Finder’s sense of self has shifted out of identification with the content of the space (i.e., thoughts/thinker, feelings/feeler, actions/doer, etc.), to the space in which these arise. Having glimpses rather than persistent experiences of the space/peace being in the foreground is characteristic of Location 1.

PARTICIPANT 18: LOCATION 2

“ The sense that I am in essence space strengthens. The world is made out of space, which is what I am. Emotions, thoughts, and feelings take place in the spaciousness, and leaning into space empties out the mind, leaving very little capacity to think analytically or conceptually. The soundless sound of silence deepens too, leaving a slight hum that is continuous. ”

By Location 2, the sense of space/peace is in the foreground most of the time. In Location 2 this is a nondual experience of Layer 2, and so it feels as though one is the space in which everything arises, and, deeper into the layer, is the substance of everything arising as well (which is not described yet by this participant).

PARTICIPANT 18: LOCATION 3

“ A blissed-out, happy, giddy, sublime place. When I come here, these thoughts float into the mind--”am I on drugs?” But I don’t take drugs, so the answer is always no. There is a gratitude and a perplexed feeling about how there could be so much joy for no reason. ”

This is primarily describing the intensely positive affective state that accompanies Location 3. There is a profound and uncaused experience of love and joy no matter what is happening externally.

PARTICIPANT 18: LOCATION 4

“ There is an end-of-the-road sense that the universe has swallowed up everything, including emotions, thoughts, memories, and cares. There is a profound openness that’s thick and clear. There’s a lightness that feels grave and final. Free, but there’s no one to claim the freedom. ”

The transition and deepening into Location 4 can feel total. The silence consumes everything. Emotions, thoughts, and self are gone. All that remains is reality/existence/the universe. There is no sense of self, so despite Location 4 feeling profoundly free, there is no sense of “being free/freed”. There is no sense of continuation from Location 3 to 4, only the sense of a final and complete cessation. Nothing is left but existence/the universe.

Research Participant with Experience of Locations 1 through 3

PARTICIPANT 19: LOCATION 1

“ For me, it feels like there is for want of a better word, a “medium” within which all events occur. There is space for any outcome to unfold within this medium. There is a sense of connection between the “objects” in this medium, and also on closer inspection the removal of boundaries between the “objects”. (This is probably going into location 2 territory). Layer 2 is a more peaceful place than the Layer 1, and is a useful tool for inspecting the behavior of the mind.

”

This Finder is describing the experience of deepening into Layer 2. Initially it is experienced as the container of everything that is unfolding, and then deeper in, all of it begins to feel like one field arising. In Location 1 there is usually a mix of Layer 1 and Layer 2, because it is hard to achieve an isolated experience of Layer 2 without nondual perception, which only shows up in Location 2. Often deepening into Layer 2 can pull a Finder’s system into Location 2, as this participant noted.

PARTICIPANT 19: LOCATION 3

“ A feeling that all consciousness emanates from the divine, and that everything physical, mental or in any way tangible is an expression of this consciousness. The consciousness is experienced as pure love that radiates from the divine and that radiates through us and everything. It is felt that the only thing alive and real is the divine love / consciousness, and other things are illusory.

”

This description is more of Layer 3, or a smear of Layer 2 and 3, than of Layer 2 in isolation, as is typical of Location 3. The quality of emptiness (spaciousness, expansiveness, openness, etc.) feels full with love, and as though it pervades everything as the presence of divinity, or as the panpsychist presence, depending on how Location 3 is showing up for that person. There is still a sense of self, but it feels formless, impersonal, and in union with the all-pervading presence.

Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 2

PARTICIPANT 20: LOCATION 1

“ I have a clear memory of watching thoughts and emotions arising at a distance in open space in the early years after stepping away from ego defined life. My life went on somewhat as it had before but there was room to see and understand what was happening. This distance was extremely useful. It let me learn what parts of my personal patterns made me less free. Gave me the space to see them and to change them. Gave me room to make in the moment choices that were different from story-driven reactions, to establish new ways of being in the world that were kinder to myself and that were non-reactive. ”

Beginning to access Layer 2 can give distance from thoughts and emotions, and a sense of space around them. Layer 2 is very powerful for clearly seeing and releasing conditioning at Layer 1, as this person discovered.

PARTICIPANT 20: LOCATION 2

“ The quality of spaciousness and stillness is very familiar to me. Inside is space and stillness, outside is space and stillness. Thoughts/preferences arise within the space and stillness, and drop away within the space and stillness. The sameness of spaciousness and silence in and out has a wonderful flavor of freedom and contentment. It is very useful to living a committed human life in service. The space and silence expose and extinguish personal story. Ego does not disappear but it does not control because the intensity of silence strips it of power. Mind does its work within the space and silence which allows it to be functional, but not a driver. ”

Being nondual, the distinction between inside and outside dissolves in Location 2 (especially beyond Layer 1). The experience of the deeper layers often feels more real to Finders than anything else, because everything else seems impermanent in contrast. Again, this participant is experiencing the powerful capacity of Layer 2 to dissolve psychological conditioning arising at Layer 1. The experience of “ego”/mind not being gone relates to Layer 1 not being gone, but no longer being compelling or dominant in Location 2.

PARTICIPANT 21: LOCATION 1

“ There would be times when the mind would become much quieter. The space between objects would become very clear. I worked in a building where there was a huge atrium -- when I looked at that space while in Layer 2, the space was very apparent compared to when I looked at the space from Layer 1. There usually was a feeling of sweetness there, though there could also be a feeling of being off balance -- too much space. Like I might fall in. It was also useful for taking a break from an overly active mind. There would be attempts to reach that space after a busy day at work or a tough time with family, particularly when I was driving or on the train or in another space where I didn't have to interact or think. A sort of mini-vacation from mind activity and emotion.

”

This is still a shallow experience of Layer 2, as is common in Location 1. There is a heightened sense of space. Since Location 1 is dual, there is still a distinct sense of separation from the space and between objects and space. There is more silence/stillness in Layer 2 and Layer 1, and thus thought and emotion, are more in the background.

PARTICIPANT 21: LOCATION 2

“ Emptiness of form and silence behind sound. Openness. It seemed to be an emptiness that was almost full at the same time. The world was all the same thing and had no meaning. It would be useful as a restful level. There was the ability to be in touch with the mind, but not in it.

”

Here there is a deeper experience of Layer 2, where it begins to become apparent that form is emptiness as well—the distinction between the space and its contents dissolves. The quality of fullness within the emptiness is an aspect of Layer 3 mixed with the experience of Layer 2. Layer 1 can be observed from this deeper place, without entering into it completely.

PARTICIPANT 22: LOCATION 1

“ Much more embodied and sensuous in a way, yet light, self expanded. Mind quiet, a feeling of aliveness and spaciousness, looking at things more from a third-person point of view (less personal, but still a person there). Much easier to meditate from here, useful for not being bored!

”

Present moment experience itself predominates in Layer 2, rather than thoughts about experience, so it will often feel more here and more in touch with the senses. In Location 1 there is usually a mix of Layer 1 and 2, hence it feels less personal, but the “person” is still there.

PARTICIPANT 22: LOCATION 2

“ More like a zero person point of view, transparency, two-dimensional quality (zero distance), the joy of being “it.” Very useful for convincing people you’re enlightened! ;)

”

There is no sense of an observer distinct from what is observed in Location 2 (nonduality), so subjectively there is no real sense of distance. Everything is here.

PARTICIPANT 23: LOCATION 1

“ Felt like the background of peace and easy spaciousness. The thing/sense/place that was left when the mind calmed down. It was more of a background thing that would have to be sunk into. Not obvious all the time.

”

Layer 2 is accessible to a degree in Location 1. It is not the default, and the gravity of Layer 1 tends to make it unstable for most people. This is usually the layer that Finders in Location 1 have temporary experiences of, and then conclude they must be going in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing, when in reality they are sinking in to deeper experiences of Location 1 (Layer 2), and then being pulled back to a more shallow experience (Layer 1) by the habitual patterns in their attentional systems. These can be changed over time with consistent interruption and reorientation of attention, although this can take more effort to do from Location 1 than any later location.

PARTICIPANT 23: LOCATION 2

“ Primary aspect of experience, pervasive, neither within or without, or both within and without, but without paradox. More like the mind, thoughts, particulars come out of it and then go their way but the sense of space, connection, openness is so present it is not really background any more. It's more like thoughts, emotions, etc. are ongoing temporary fluctuations of the spaciousness which is continual and which is the more real or at least the predominant aspect of experience. ”

In Location 2, the experience of Layer 2 moves to the foreground and the sense of duality dissolves. There is no longer a sense of within or without, the spaciousness is everywhere. Deeper into Layer 2, it not only contains everything, but is also the substance of everything. It then feels more real or foundational than other aspects of experience, which are impermanent by contrast.

PARTICIPANT 24: LOCATION 1

“ It's the spaciousness, context, background, that all arises in. I think for location 1, being able to see this at any moment basically marks the transition. It's the “fundamental okayness”. ”

This participant is beginning to sense the qualities of Layer 2. Being able to see it at any moment relates to having a degree of fluidity to access Layer 2, although it is still something which is accessed; it is not the dominant or pervasive experience yet.

PARTICIPANT 24: LOCATION 2

“ This is the nondual aspect of consciousness. “All there is is conscious space and its content”. Sense of separateness is gone. It's all just consciousness and content. ”

This is a deeper experience of Layer 2 than in Location 1. However, it is still a relatively shallow experience of Layer 2 since there is still a noticeable sense of distinction between the conscious space and its content.

PARTICIPANT 25: LOCATION 1

“ I felt I could choose to be in the qualities of the now and step out of the narrative. It felt spacious and peaceful and was a different place than the mind. The present moment became more alive and qualitative. It wasn't like I wasn't aware of mind and time, but they were things that happened within. ”

Layer 2 feels fundamentally different than Layer 1, yet simultaneously feels as though it contains Layer 1. Sinking in to Layer 2 brings attention into the present moment, wherein the activity of Layer 1 can continue to unfold.

PARTICIPANT 25: LOCATION 2

“ I think that it came on very strongly at the time that I shifted into Location 2. Permeating everything, being spacious but also of a different nature than physical space. Like a source everywhere, the silence behind. Also my default and most restful identification, even though there is sometimes a zooming in to the individual and its concerns. It also seems like the best course of action is always clear, it emerges from what is going on. ”

This may be describing a mixture of Layer 2 with Layer 3, since it feels as though the spaciousness is permeating and underlying the existence of everything, which are qualities more associated with Layer 3. Layer 2 is typically the default of Location 2, although one can zoom in to Layer 1 and can have an experience of a more individualized sense of self. Location 2 Finders typically have a sense of a right or true direction to take in any situation, which is not based on reason or deduction. This sense is not necessarily accurate but does feel that way subjectively.

PARTICIPANT 26: LOCATION 1

“An expansion of who I am, a stillness that underlies my narrative self, an emptiness that contains pure potentiality. The stillness, like a lake on a windless day, is disturbed by the emotions that arise from old triggering, but returns to its stillness fairly easily. Useful for distancing me from my old story and for being with other’s stories. Can observe without needing to “take sides.” Allowing whatever wants to arise, to arise without resistance, so much reduced suffering.

”

The qualities of stillness and emptiness are more in the background in Location 1, underlying other levels of experience. Positive and negative emotions can still get triggered in Location 1, although the reactions tend to be more short-lived. The greater sense of distance from and space around reactions makes it easier to allow them to arise and unfold in experience, rather than needing to control them or make them go away.

PARTICIPANT 26: LOCATION 2

“More of the above, a deeper, more pronounced calmness and expanded stillness. Emotions do not disturb this as easily as location 1. Everything arises in this as this, everything is welcome. Everything is. Useful for maintaining equanimity in times of stress for others. Able to see all sides so can act accordingly.

”

Layer 2 becomes more established in Location 2 and one is able to deepen to the point where the stillness/emptiness not only contains everything, but is also everything. Everything is seen as an expression of the same thing and so nothing need be excluded from experience.

PARTICIPANT 27: LOCATION 1

“ When I experienced Location 1, the default layer was Layer 1. I’ve had glimpses of Layer 2 - perception is more spacious and crisp. Mind is zoomed out and more in the background. I noticed open space and nature are more conducive to this layer.

”

As is typical, Layer 2 is experienced more temporarily in Location 1. Finders will often have these temporary experiences spontaneously or more easily when in nature.

PARTICIPANT 27: LOCATION 2

“ Nondual, still space within which movements of life happen, sense of spontaneous / automatic action without a doer, mind is in awe of this expansive inner and outer spaciousness, there is still plenty of mind commentary, but again, more in the background and complimentary, rather than all consuming.

”

Layer 1 is in the background but still in subjective perception. The sense of personal ownership of thoughts, feelings, and actions dissolves as one deepens away from Layer 1, thus it can begin to feel as though everything is this synchronous unfolding (this sense of non-agency has a much more absolute quality in Location 4, but without having experienced Location 4 and the contrast, it is difficult to distinguish the two based on their descriptions in language).

Research Participants with Experience of Location 1

PARTICIPANT 28: LOCATION 1

“ I think I might have experienced different ‘levels’ or variations of it. It can seem very obvious that everything is ‘suspended in nothing’. All the colors etc. are floating where they are with nothing behind them. The nothing that everything is suspended in is infinitely still and present. Another variation is everything is ‘made’ of the same stuff. Has a kind of liveliness to it. A vibrancy. The mind is more or less quiet, except to marvel at how awesome this is, or in my case, rehearse how to teach or help induce this in others, or a desire to write about it. Can’t sustain it and speak with anyone, or do anything. ”

These are excellent descriptions of Layer 2. At the shallower end “the nothing that everything is suspended in” appears distinct from everything within it, but deeper in, it all appears as one. This can be deep in Location 1, where there would still be a subtle sense of duality between the observer and the field of experience that is all one, or in Location 2 where that duality collapses. Since Layer 2 is not the default in Location 1, really deepening into Layer 2 often requires active sinking in, and, as in this participant’s case, a suspension of normal activity and functioning.

PARTICIPANT 29: LOCATION 1

“ I was walking to the beach just after doing my eraser exercise 3rd week FC10. Suddenly I felt a clear inter connectedness of everything around me with almost visible lines between objects. I felt a clear spaciousness and had a kind of birds view although I was in the middle of it all. All of this together with a sense of absolute stillness. ”

This is a typical deep Location 1 experience of Layer 2, where there is the sense of all-containing stillness and spaciousness and of everything being connected or one, but with the duality of subject-object intact.

PARTICIPANT 30: LOCATION 1

“ I think I’ve experienced it in brief moments. It’s almost “externalized”, like I can sense a lot of emptiness and nothingness, almost physically around my space. The mind can have a fearful reaction to it because it IS emptiness and the mind is not. ”

Because of the dual perception in Location 1, the emptiness can feel separate to oneself or “external”. The fear of this nothingness/emptiness is not uncommon in transitioning or initial deepening into Fundamental Wellbeing and relates to a fixation of identity in Layer 1 or the sense of individualized self, which is left behind in a pure experience of Layer 2.

PARTICIPANT 31: LOCATION 1

“ A sense of the absence of noise, the mind is quiet. No discerning of anything other than it exists. Still feels separate though, as if i exist within this but still feel separate. Certainly far lower sense of personal drama, if at all... no significance. There is a recognition that I am not my mind and can almost watch it operate. ”

When Layer 1 is no longer front and center in experience, the overlay of labels, concepts, and interpretations on the pure being/existence of everything falls away. There is also a disidentification from the mind, resulting in a more impersonal observation of its activity. Its contents seem relatively trivial because the sense of self and reality is no longer invested in it.

PARTICIPANT 32: LOCATION 1

“ Seems to sit ‘above’ the mind level - the space in which the mind activity happens. The sense of ‘I’ isn’t the same, and sometimes feels gone altogether. Sometimes it seems to not really have a location in space. Really useful for perspective and not being involved in the turbulence of the mind. ”

The sense of self changes significantly from Layer 1 to Layer 2 because the personal and individualized quality of self diminishes and eventually falls away. The self not having a location in space may be a glimpse of Location 2, in which the sense of a central observer that is distinct from everything else dissolves.

DESCRIPTIONS
OF LAYER 3
-with commentary-

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 5+

PARTICIPANT 33: LOCATION 1

“ The experiences tend to be temporary and partial compared to later locations. There is a sense of a formless essence within all life, like a sense of the pure beingness, but the experience is not yet clear or complete. ”

In Location 1, Layer 3 is usually more of a partial experience that is mixed with Layer 1 and/or Layer 2. It will often be sensed as a deeper or mysterious stillness or beingness within everything. The qualities and tendencies of Location 1 typically prevent Layer 3 from being experienced completely.

PARTICIPANT 33: LOCATION 2

“ I spent a lot of time here with little access to Layer 2 but good access to the Layer 1. It feels like a centerless, all-pervading field or presence without limits, flowing through and as everything. Inside is the same as outside, it is equally present everywhere. The pure light of consciousness pervades everything, yet is simultaneously independent of everything. It is spontaneous, uncaused, and unchanging. There is a deep quality of silence, which allows all things to arise and fall away without being moved. It can feel transcendent of the phenomenal world, making action and engagement less forthcoming. The essence of oneself and all things feels sacred, complete, and untouched by all experience. ”

Finders who reach Layer 3 in Location 2 often develop a natural fluidity between Layer 3 and Layer 1, sometimes even minimizing access to Layer 2. This allows them to maintain a high degree of functionality while simultaneously being able to sink in to deep peace and stillness. This participant is describing the deepest centerless reaches of Layer 3. There is a deep quality of stillness at Layer 3, more than any preceding layer, and the stillness or silence feels as though it pervades and encompasses everything—all objects and all experience. Likewise, it also feels as though it transcends everything, or is somehow more foundational, real, or permanent than everything else.

PARTICIPANT 33: LOCATION 3

“ The presence of divinity reveals itself in and as all of life. Its radiance can be so magnificent that the mind is silenced in awe. It is all-pervading and indistinguishable from one’s own essence. The center dissolves and there is only the fullness of the presence flowing through and as everything. The perfection and sacredness of life in all its forms is unmistakable. There is a deep sense of fearlessness and peace. The field feels infused with love and compassion, and feels like it radiates out to all life as a blessing. But even beyond this, love as the manifestation of divinity reveals itself as the presence itself. ”

Layer 3 is the default layer of Location 3 and is experienced as the divine or panpsychist presence in everything. Deep into Layer 3, it will feel like it is the substance of everything; however, initially it feels more like an essence or presence infusing everything. There is a sense of being in union with this all-pervading field or presence that is without limits, flowing through and as everything. This quality of presence or being feels more fundamental and real than anything else. The mind is much quieter at this point, and can often be eclipsed by the stillness of Layer 3. The stillness is simultaneously infused with a profound quality of fullness. The all-encompassing feeling of love, joy, and compassion pervades experience, and there can be a deep sense of perfection, beauty, or even sacredness to everything.

PARTICIPANT 33: LOCATION 4

“ Layer 3 disappeared suddenly in the transition, which was very unexpected as I had thought it was absolute. All that remained was existence in ceaseless unfoldment. In time I could find Layer 3 again. This can begin to feel distinctly not human. There is no center, only the infinite field. Awareness is the infinite context of all experience. It is without distinctions and is equally present everywhere. Awareness as the light of the Infinite shines as all of existence. These descriptions are probably mixed with Layer 4. ”

It is common for Location 2 or 3 Finders to experience Layer 3 as foundational to all existence, like the source or ground of being. It feels as though it is always there and untouched by all experience. For those who experience the divine (versus panpsychist) version of Location 3, the transition to Location 4 can sometimes be disconcerting because any sense of the divine disappears. When Layer 3 is experienced in Location 4, it is usually a smear with Layer 4, which is what this participant is describing.

PARTICIPANT 33: LOCATION 5+

“ The centerless aspects of Layer 3 seem to come and go when mixed with the Layer 4, but seem to be out of reach when approaching Location 7. It is much like what I described for L4. The phenomenal world appears fluid and insubstantial, transparent to the light of the infinite. There is no center, no content, only infinite context. Mixed with/seen from the Layer 4, Layer 3 feels neither empty nor full and is indistinguishable from Reality itself, which is self-illuminating and self-revealing. ”

On the Path of Freedom, which this participant is describing, perception roots increasingly deeply into Layer 4, until Layer 3 becomes difficult to access. It can sometimes show up again in later locations in a highly integrated form where it will feel like every layer is a quality of reality/existence. The loss of dimensionality that occurs in later locations is evident in these descriptions, where sensory perception and differentiation increasingly fades into the flatness of raw reality/existence.

PARTICIPANT 34: LOCATION 4

“ I am only writing this for Location 4 as at the time I had not been able feel emotions for many years. Awareness is both the container of all and transcends all. Time condenses down constantly layering directly on the now. Awareness is seen as the stillest point that all is passing through. As awareness deepens, the capacity for thinking and self-reflexivity is eclipsed. This style of experiencing is antithetical to the formation of long-term memory and only brief impressions will form especially at the later depths. Eventually Awareness becomes peace beyond peace and time collapses down onto a continuous now that is without reference and lies outside of the normal timestream as there is nothing to reference. Awareness is eternal. Contains all, precludes all and is beyond all. ”

Eventually Awareness becomes Isness, Allness eternal. No distance, no difference from itself. Pure experiencingness. A singularity that can only be beheld with nothing left over. This unity state is totally out of phase with the thinking mind and will start to dissolve the moment it's "thought about". There is a feeling of resting as some deeper level that is refreshing and rejuvenating way way beyond sleep. Like a thirst that was never known was finally quenched. At this upper end of allness the state as wonderful and rejuvenating as it is was always left as its so incompatible with functioning and takes immense single minded dedication and substantial time to become.

There is a complete absorption of attention in the present moment in Location 4, which tends to preclude thought and reflection on experience. The silence/stillness dominates internal experience. The deepest reaches of Layer 3 can feel like a very pure or foundational level of being or isness.

PARTICIPANT 34: LOCATION 5+

“ I am not sure if this is indeed my location or not but thought I would include it anyway as it does fit with the visual marker. I have been practicing removing self-reflexive attention whilst looking at the world. Very similar to the Location 4 descriptions of the earlier end of awareness but totally psychedelic. Basically the mind tries to homogenize everything into an internal mapped representation. “Grass” for example, which is a really mono concept is referenced when looking out at grass. By referenced I mean that the internal representation is actually the main focus of attention by default.

This must be some learned automatic mechanism that is necessary for children to develop functionality in the world. We don’t realize it until its dropped as a function just how much attention is paid to the internal representation and how much it filters down all the meaning and information from a vast infinite endless sea of details, all the way down into just – “grass” As you look at a patch of grass, to keep with the example.

You may notice that the sensory information is touched by awareness, but at the same time the mind part of you will flick back and forth between what is being seen and an internal representation of the grass. Its possible to drop this function and just see the grass. I do this whilst paying attention to all periphery and every other sense in a relaxed way centered on peace/stillness. Every time the mind/reflex is to pull attention back into the internal map/representation I double down on just perception of experience in a relaxed way. After a while perceptual experience begins to flood awareness in a very profound way.

The visual field is flooded with rippling patterns as Awareness cascades across all the shifting details. Time is sliced into searing moments, like constantly experiencing now, now, now, now. Every detail feels flooded with inherent indescribable meaning, like an infinite way of interpreting each moment as if comprehending a vast landscape of possibility for the very first time. Just looking at one’s hand, perception is found to be swimming in endless patterns of details coming in and out of focus, the hairs, the skin pattern, the lines then the shadows.

Endless. This rippling undulating pattern of awareness is remarkably similar in structure to what psychedelics produce. Freed from projected meaning all senses combine into energy that stacks onto itself. Things seen and heard are felt as body sensations. Depth perception is radically altered. There is a constant outpouring of energy infusing everything from perceptions itself as if the act of looking is rushing out and through all. Underneath and beyond all is a great stillness, like felt sense of a vast lake of tranquility that is awareness itself and can be rested on.

”

Intensely analyzing the mechanisms of consciousness and perception itself at a very low level seems to be the most reliable way for people to transition to Location 5. Deepening into Location 4 and later involves stripping away or getting beneath the processes that filter perception, until all that remains is increasingly raw sense data. This produces a loss of dimensionality of perception, which becomes progressively flat in later locations (although someone is not likely to notice unless they come back to an earlier location).

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 4

PARTICIPANT 35: LOCATION 1

“ I believe my experience of Layer 3 in Location 1 had a sense of presence of a kind of substance that permeated my consciousness. I felt this presence permeated my entire experience. ”

Layer 3 has a quality of all-pervading fullness or presence, and tends to be difficult to access from Location 1. The experience of it remains more of a shallower experience than at other locations. At the early end of Layer 3, it feels like an essence or presence infusing, but different from, experience, which is usually perceived as it begins to infuse the spaciousness of Layer 2.

PARTICIPANT 35: LOCATION 2

“ Layer 3 in Location 2 feels like a clear field of intelligence with a quality of transparency and spaciousness. ”

Layer 3 has a field-like quality, which is not a metaphor, but a literal description of a subjective experience. This description would be a smear with Layer 2, and thus an early experience of Layer 3, because the quality of spaciousness tends to disappear as one more fully moves into Layer 3.

PARTICIPANT 35: LOCATION 3

“ Layer 3 in Location 3 feels like a dense, rich, and yummy field embracing all contents of experience. ”

Deeper in Layer 3, the field can feel increasingly rich and even dense or thick. This is not the deepest experience of Layer 3 because there is still a sense of duality between experience and the all-embracing field. That is evident here from use of “embracing” rather than a term that would equate the field as everything.

PARTICIPANT 35: LOCATION 3

“ Layer 3 in Location 4 feels like a space of retraction from “normal” consciousness. I experienced it as pure and utter simplicity and freedom. A dimensionless point of awareness. ”

This response may contain a smear with Layer 4, which is common in Location 4. This would relate to “utter simplicity” and the loss of dimensionality. Freedom is perhaps one of the most salient characteristics of Location 4, and does not relate to a layer per se.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 3

PARTICIPANT 36: LOCATION 1

“ Layer 3 seems like an all-pervading space that has luminous qualities to it, and could be seen and felt simultaneously as light. During location 1, this came in and out of focus. ”

Some people will experience Layer 3 as light, using descriptions such as “the clear light of being or consciousness”. When this is the case, one way it is perceived is as an unmoving, luminous field that is experienced as pervading everything. Experiences of Layer 3 are typically temporary in Location 1.

PARTICIPANT 36: LOCATION 2

“ Yes, but a glimpse only. I am not in location 3, but I feel that something like pre-location 3 is beginning to unfold. It is a deeper silence, mixed with a type of benediction/blessing, which seems universal. The space of reality itself seems to have as its underlying substrate this unbound love, mixed with silence. ”

This person is deepening into a way of experiencing Layer 3 in Location 2 that is very aligned with Location 3, where Layer 3 is the default layer of depth. There is a deep quality of stillness at Layer 3, and the stillness or silence feels as though it pervades and encompasses everything. Simultaneously, it also feels like it transcends everything, or is somehow more foundational, real, or permanent than everything else.

PARTICIPANT 37: LOCATION 3

“ There was a full-to-overflowing experience of divine love everywhere and in everything. At times I felt as though I was seeing the world as, or through the eyes of, divine love. Things felt almost magical. If my read of when I was here is correct, this was a time when my healing work became much stronger, and went past the methods I used and just happened. The influence on others of one's being here could be very strong. ”

In Location 3, Layer 3 is experienced as the presence of divinity, or as divine love itself, in and as everything. Being deep in Layer 3 can seem to have a noticeable influence on other people. Especially in Location 3, Finders sometimes develop the perception/belief that their state of being is somehow of benefit to humanity or life as a whole.

PARTICIPANT 38: LOCATION 1

“ If any it was brief and hard to maintain without being in Location 2. I think the mind and self-narrative have pulled me out of Layer 3 in Location 1. ”

Layer 3 is usually experienced in a shallow and temporary form in Location 1. Deepening into it typically pulls a Finder's system into Location 2, which is more aligned with the qualities of Layer 3.

PARTICIPANT 38: LOCATION 2

“Layer 3 for me has always been what I call my home level (state) in Fundamental Wellbeing. I think I am one of those people who spent very little time in Layer 2. I can recognize Layer 2 and have been there but for some reason move quickly out of it or skip it all together and enter Layer 3. The level of awareness, depth of it, has grown for me as I move further along the FW location continuum. I still believe I am in Location 2... Layer 3 for me in Location 2 has a very wide range. It is full, not empty, ever expanding, can get almost thick like gel, the deeper I go into it I can feel like I lose my center and the I of me but there are flashes of “I” ness, causing discomfort but not pulling me out, like they are there to be looked at and if I do, I can go further when their issue is resolved.

My system is more comfortable hanging out in Layer 3 than Layer 2 when moving from Layer 1 of Location 2. I am surprised at how deep Layer 3 can be. If I hang out at the lower level, I am pretty functional but the higher levels, or the deeper in I go, I can become less motivated to be functional in day-to-day activities. Awareness watching awareness watching awareness watching that awareness, growing fuller and richer and larger and never ending...That is where meditation brings me. It feels to me like in the state of awareness there is a sort of different higher level of “intelligence” being accessed guiding “me. It feels different from intuition, more complete, fuller, more all present, all-knowing wisdom. It is hard to explain but sort of like a presence you are part of but separate from your mind.

”

Finders who reach Layer 3 in Location 2 often develop a natural fluidity or integration between Layers 1 and 3, often largely skipping over Layer 2. Layer 3 is probably the vastest of all layers to explore subjectively. Quite deeply into Layer 3, the field-like presence can feel dense or thick like a liquid, although not everyone experiences this. There is very little sense of an individual self left at the deepest centerless reaches of Layer 3, but fragments of the self that formally constituted the complex individual sense of self can still rise into awareness. These are typically viewed as something to release or go beyond. Layer 3 is often perceived as have a quality of innate intelligence, beyond that of the linear conceptual mind.

PARTICIPANT 38: LOCATION 3

“ More of the same with a dual twist. In location 3 it can be just exploding with radiance as if that were God, then ok that is it, and if there were no God, that the indescribable beauty of that magnificent light and presence of being is it, I am not there, but I am a little to observe it, to be aware that it is not me, it is awareness watching itself over and over. I have become so small barely visible, barely existing as it grows. ”

This is a great description of the subtle duality of Location 3 and the sense of deepening into an increasingly complete union with the divine, in which any sense of individual self progressively dissolves.

PARTICIPANT 39: LOCATION 1

“ I have been in Location 1 and experienced Layer 3 as more of a glimpse than an abiding experience. During meditation, such as self-inquiry, or subtle noting, I've sensed the presence of Layer 3 and its distinction from Layer 2. The feeling is that of infinite potentialities that are yet to be expressed. It is at once everywhere and nowhere. ”

As previously mentioned, access to Layer 3 tends to be temporary in Location 1. Layer 3 is sometimes described as a field of infinite potentiality because it is formless and unmanifest, yet feels profoundly full and like the source underlying all differentiated existence. It feels like it is everywhere—there is nowhere it is not—yet it is not localized anywhere and it does not have spatial dimensionality, so also feels like it is nowhere.

PARTICIPANT 39: LOCATION 2

“ I had a clear experience of not being the body, everything unfolding by itself, and a knowing intelligence inside everything, and yet not there. It felt like Layer 3 was at the interface between the yet to be and that which is. ”

Deepening in the layers brings further disassociation from the body. Layer 3 is sometimes experienced and described as an all-pervading field or presence of pure intelligence, that is the source of existence/creation.

PARTICIPANT 39: LOCATION 3

“When the mind is quiet, a place opens up from inside. There Layer 3 feels like it has the qualities of knowing, joy, abundance, love. It infuses, and maybe powers all experience. It is a well of potential that seems to coexist with what is. It is possible to feel Layer 3 as a spring of benign vitality, love, intelligence, that is analogous to a spring that is constantly pouring out. It feels like Layer 3 resides outside of time, a place where the unmanifest can be felt. The usefulness is that it feels like insights and love and compassion for all beings result from directly experiencing it.”

Again, the description of unmanifest potential is often given to Layer 3 because it is undifferentiated and formless, so it appears to underlie and give life to manifest existence. There is still a subtle duality or separation perceived between form and formless, manifest and unmanifest, which disappears at greater depths, particularly at Layer 4. Especially in Location 3, where Layer 3 is experienced as the divine/panpsychist presence, it can feel as though it brings about universal love.

PARTICIPANT 40: LOCATION 1

“I experienced it as a sense of aliveness, energetic awareness. A sense of beingness. It feels great and quiets the mind and body and allows one to feel stillness.”

In Location 1, it is usually more of a partial experience of this Layer, mixed with previous layers. It will often be sensed as a deeper or mysterious stillness or beingness within everything. The qualities and tendencies of Location 1 typically prevent Layer 3 from being experienced clearly and completely.

PARTICIPANT 40: LOCATION 1

“I experienced it as having a mix of both spirituality and awareness. I noticed a sense of aloneness and loneliness but I also sensed a fullness instead of only emptiness. It has a more completeness than spirituality.”

In contrast to Layer 2, which has that quality of emptiness, Layer 3 feels profoundly full. This description is of a mix with Layer 2, beginning to sense the shallow aspects of Layer 3 infusing the emptiness. Initially, as one deepens through Layer 2 into Layer 3, it can feel like the emptiness becomes infused with fullness. The sense of aloneness is a quality of Layer 2, particularly in Location 2.

PARTICIPANT 40: LOCATION 3

“ I experienced it as a sense of wonderment, a sense of fullness. I was...visually able to see for miles and take in the vast universe. I was the universe and what I was seeing. I felt completely full and all sense of loneliness left me. I was united with all. ”

One can note the progression in these descriptions deeper into the experience of Layer 3 with each change of location. Now, there is a profound sense of fullness and vastness, and unity with all life (characteristic of Location 3, but also of deeper in Layer 3).

PARTICIPANT 40: LOCATION 3

“ I would now guess that my initial awakening 24 years ago was either into Layer 3 of Location 2 or the Layer 3 of Location 3. I have always said that my initial shift was more a realization of “everythingness” than nothingness, and it was an experience of overwhelming fullness that included everything and also all time. The initial few months after that was filled with waves of bliss and powerful energies moving through me. And if it was Location 3 at first, I may have settled in there, except that I became a spiritual teacher on the satsang circuit. ”

I now think that in service to that function, I may have moved into Location 2 from Location 3 and also became much more fluid in moving in and out of Layers 2 and 3, as well as the mind, as there was a pull to explore much more of the different levels in support of being able to both introduce the different aspects of being to students and to be better able to meet them wherever they happened to be, and to guide them further into FW.

In some sense, I was unusual for a “nondual” or “Advaita” teacher as I always emphasized presence and the fullness of experience, instead of the emptiness and spaciousness of consciousness, although I also could drop into Layer 2 easily and could write and speak about it in depth. I always sensed that there was a larger container for Layer 2, and one way I expressed this was that I would often say that nonduality included all of duality, and my interest always included this larger container of Layer 3.

Listening to Jeffery this week, I was just nodding and smiling along with him as everything he was saying fit my experience more than the typical descriptions of the Layer 3 that go with the typical nondual worldview. My sense now is that while I could drop deeply into a pure experience of Layer 2, that over the years that I was in Location 2, I gradually started to spend more and more time in varying degrees of either Layer 3 or a smear of Layer 2 and 3.

I learned to dive deeply into feelings of emptiness or lack to uncover the underlying qualities of presence that would gradually reveal themselves within the emptiness. For me the experience of Layer 3 was always much more satisfying even while still in location 2. I found it to be much more functional than pure Layer 2, because I think I also stumbled upon the easy access of Layer 1 from Layer 3, and that also appealed to me as it allowed me to be very functional in the world when needed, and then drop into Layer 3 as my home base.

”

This description illustrates the confusion that is produced by many spiritual teachings when they emphasize and favor one spot in Fundamental Wellbeing over every other. There are many forms of Fundamental Wellbeing, and even many forms of nonduality in different layers and locations. Each feels subjectively like the most true and real when someone experiences it, including Finders who are fluid across many layers and locations.

PARTICIPANT 40: LOCATION 3

“ Because I spent so much time at Layer 3 when I was in Location 2 for so many years, the experience now at Location 3 is not that different. One way to describe it is that I now feel all aligned inside. My experience of Layer 3 just fits better now and there is much less pull both down into Layer 2 or down into Layer 1, although I seem to have retained the ability to drop pretty easily into the mind when I need to for functional reasons. But it is like there is now a powerful magnet under Layer 3 that wants to pull me back into whenever I am in another layer. This fits with the idea that it is the home base for Location 3.

As for the qualities it has, just as in my description of the experience of Layer 3 in Location 2 above, I could just post almost all of Jeffery’s bullet points from the talk this week. They are all still present and probably even more noticeable than ever. I would say that it is harder now to access Layer 2. It just does not interest me, and so now more than ever, I just jump to the mind when needed and then pop all of the way back to Layer 3 when I am sinking in. I am also having more of the experience of no center, and also of a thick fluid like presence that Jeffery described as being typical of the deeper parts of Layer 3. Those are not unfamiliar, but again these experiences are much more available or present now.

Because of my being somewhat immersed in nondual “dogma”, I also now wonder if I interpreted my experiences of no center as being a kind of emptiness. That was more what my experiences of “no-self” felt like, especially as the years (and decades) progressed after my awakening. It always felt more like an everything-self than a no-self.

”

There is a natural affinity of Location 3 with Layer 3, and perception naturally centers and deepens there with very little pull towards earlier layers. Layer 1 is usually still quite accessible for practical purposes. Layer 3 and Location 3 can feel more like an allness or “everything-self” than a no-self, which is more characteristic of Location 4, Layer 4 (and in a lighter form, Layer 2, Location 2).

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 2

PARTICIPANT 41: LOCATION 1

“ Things have their own luminosity and connection to source/creation energy, immediacy, and presence rooted in both the physical realm as well as metaphorical or symbolic levels. Moving through this world feels like moving through fluid, the way that little eddies and flows of blood look like in vessels in a microscopic video. ”

Qualities of luminosity, light, radiance tend to relate to Layer 3. Layer 3 can be experienced as a source or ground of being that pervades all levels of being, yet simultaneously transcends the specific forms that are manifest. The all-present field or presence can feel dense or fluid-like, particularly deeper into Layer 3.

PARTICIPANT 41: LOCATION 2

“ Aliveness and inner luminosity are more pronounced, and a connectedness to these things in my environment is strongly felt. I feel very much a part of their creation, as both creator and experiencer. Very cognizant of other people’s energies and movements, and sensitive to the interplay of energy between myself and others. ”

Layer 3 can feel like an all-pervading, alive, and luminous presence that is both the source of experience and which experiences everything. Especially when Layer 3 shows up at deeper levels and is perceived as a thick, fluid-like experience, people can believe they perceive what seems like patterns of energy and interaction in the environment and other people, like ripples that then influence or determine their responses.

PARTICIPANT 42: LOCATION 1

“ It has been years since I experienced what your research has identified as Location 1. What I most remember before my big awakening (which threw me into Location 3) was the experience of the observer, thoughts and feelings arriving with space around them and the observer noticing them. But I also remember periods of great calm and contentment, a rich complete sense to life, a meaninglessness to events but a fundamental meaning and value to life itself. The importance of me dropped away. Life was experienced as a mysterious blessing infused with joy. My observer was acutely aware of the lack of meaning of individuated life, so these times were essential to my well-being. They provided existential meaning. These periods were different from the much briefer, sharper experiences of what I called epiphany when everything felt transformed, outside of knowing, a drop to my knees in awe kind of experience. ”

The experience of space around thoughts and feelings is related to Layer 2. The perception of innate completeness to all of life, which is intrinsic to its being as an expression of life itself, can relate to beginning to sense Layer 3. The experience is often not very clear in Location 1, and so is felt more as a mysterious essence within everything.

PARTICIPANT 42: LOCATION 2

“ I do not feel empty. I am complete, entire. My life arises within vastness and silence, but it isn't an empty, stark vastness and silence. The silence and space are lush and warm, alive and tender. The stillness resounds – as if the most exquisite music is being played just beyond my range of hearing. There is no loneliness. Although personality, thought and feelings arise within a field of vital awareness, there is no me being aware. There is no center. Awareness looks out of my eyes: an infinite field inside and outside. Is this useful? If the purpose of our life is to be happy, then it's very useful. My felt experience of awareness is alignment, being in the dance. I have consistent access to joy and equanimity. My personality can express the joy with a huge grin in situations where a grin is not the normal human response. I delight in my ordinary human life. ”

This individual experience is barely a breath, without meaning, and yet has meaning as an expression of life itself. The phrase “at play in the fields of the lord” captures both the joy and the sense of mystery unfolding.

Although I have no current experience of deity, life feels divine. ... I place myself in Location 2 because, after I worked myself out of Location 4, I did not return to the love saturation, bliss and sense of divine presence that was my experience in Location 3. I also have the lived experience of “this” and “not this.” Although increasingly it feels more like “both.” However, I may straddle near the line because joy lies within each moment even when my attention is not on it. “Beloved” is my mantra - although I no longer have a sense of a god outside of me. There came a time when God moved inside. And I do experience life’s events as “blessings,” both the pleasant and unpleasant events.

”

This is a much deeper and clearer experience of Layer 3, now from Location 2. There is no sense of emptiness or loneliness when deep in Layer 3. The quality of fullness prevails, and can feel immeasurably vast and deep. Layer 3 is experienced as a centerless, aware, unmoving, all-present field. At this point, the distinction between inside and outside seems meaningless.

This is another example of a Location 2, Layer 3 experience that is more in the direction of Location 3 (i.e., with a sense of divinity and profound joy). For others, the silence and peace may predominate.

PARTICIPANT 43: LOCATION 2

“ I’ve struggled with trying to determine if I’m in Location 2 or 3. The most recent video added some clarity with the possibility of a sense of joy experienced in Location 2 Layer 3. I feel ecstatic and jubilant though different from the descriptors of Location 3 as I still have good access to Layer 1 to accomplish everyday activities. IMO, this might be the most useful location on the continuum as it gives access to some of the joy of L3, access to Layer 1 at L2 for being functional in the world and a sense of fullness of the latter locations.

”

Again, there are many ways in which the experience of Layer 3 can appear, especially in Location 2. It can go in the direction of deep stillness and peace, which can have very little affect, or the experience can be infused with joy, love, or even a sense of sacredness or divinity. The latter variation will seem much more similar to Location 3, but it will be nondual instead of involving a sense of union with an all-pervading presence, it will typically have easier access to Layer 1, and the joy will not show up as part of a single meta-emotion like in Location 3.

PARTICIPANT 44: LOCATION 2

“ Even since I transitioned into Location 2, I’ve had the sense of the thickness that was described. It’s not so much visual for me, but a field-like density of presence/beingness that feels very nurturing. I definitely experience the delight and joyfulness of the Layer 3 field. There is a blissful undercurrent that permeates the field which is most always accessible and can be sunk into. A lot of my practice has been sinking into silence and stillness, and this has become more pronounced and very lovely at Layer 3. The silence is most always accessible. Although I experience a mix of Layers 2 and 3, the experience of fullness has become more predominant than the emptiness. This level has various uses, one just being a very delightful ‘place’ to hang out. I am a healer by profession, and dropping into Layer 3 seems to help clients access something much deeper and some seemingly magical stuff can tend to happen in these interactions.

”

This describes a deeper experience of Layer 3, which can become a full, even dense, field-like presence pervading everything. Layer 3 can feel simultaneously infused with joy and silence/stillness (also love, sacredness, divinity, isness, beingness, and light, though not all of these necessarily show up). This can be part of what confers its rich quality, in contrast to Layers 2 and 4.

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Location 1

PARTICIPANT 45: LOCATION 1

“ I think of Layer 3 as the perspective from which Layer 2 can be known, just as Layer 2 is the perspective from which Layer 1 can be known. In other words, Layer 3 experiences Layer 2 which experiences Layer 1. I may be wrong but it seems that Layer 3 is the aware underlying background field in which all of the contents of Layer 2 arise. When I focus on what is persistent as I am aware of what I’m being conscious of [what’s in consciousness], that is Layer 3. It’s the sense of ‘being online’ which remains even if all of the contents of Layer 2 were to be removed. I think Layer 3 is knowing that I am conscious - popularly phrased as ‘being aware of being aware’. I’m not sure that any of the ‘being aware of itself’ language really makes sense.... ”

The layers are like holons, in that each successive layer feels as though it contains or enables the content and existence of the preceding layers. Each feels like a greater or more foundational context for the unfolding of experience at preceding layers. Movement deeper into the layers subjectively both transcends and includes the layers that came before. The deeper layer feels more foundational and absolute than the more shallow layer(s). Especially at Layer 3, there is a distinct quality of presence/being, which feels deeper or more real than anything previously experienced. It can be described as a very pure experience of being, pure beingness or isness, timeless presence pervading everything, or the ground of being.

This is a good example of beginning to experience Layer 3 from Location 1. Its existence is sensed as something that is aware of Layer 2, or the context that makes experiences of Layer 2 possible, but its intrinsic qualities are not yet clear or pervasive in experience.

PARTICIPANT 46: LOCATION 1

“ I think sometimes during deep meditation or sinking in, when I deepen in Layer 2 I have some glimpses of Layer 3. I feel it as some sort of aliveness that is in the background and is manifested into the emptiness. As if this aliveness is what really ‘animates’ all of reality but is hidden ‘inside’ it. ”

This is a nice example of beginning to sense Layer 3 from Layer 2. Deep into Layer 3, it will feel as though it is the substance of everything, but initially it feels more like an essence or presence or aliveness infusing everything. It feels like it pervades everything, but is simultaneously independent of everything. It feels untouched and untouchable.

PARTICIPANT 47: LOCATION 1

“ Actually I’m not sure, but I seem to be able to experience what I would call a ‘primordial’ level – just pure potentiality prior to form.... It seems to be a zone of spaciousness, location-less, person-less, timeless, permeating form somehow. It can be visited, but I don’t stay for long before moving down towards the mind. ”

Layer 3 can feel like the foundation or source of manifest existence, like the ground of being. Because it is undifferentiated and formless, the only way the symbolic mind can conceive of it is as unmanifest, pure potentiality. It is common for this to be a temporary experience in Location 1.

PARTICIPANT 48: LOCATION 1

“ I believe I do experience this layer, and am naturally drawn to it - even over what you refer to as Layer 2. I think my tendency is to move through the open spaciousness of Layer 2 to what I experience as more balanced and balancing - the fullness of form with the spaciousness has a lusciousness, a syrup smooth entirety of all with openness of nothing. Saturated in the fullness of being, simultaneous with the lightness of being. Time shifts, the back of my body opens, physical perception (visual, auditory, felt sense..) is experienced as coming through awareness. Effortless and seamless.

Direct experience of joy, delight and “just so.” More seriously, this Layer 3 is extremely supportive of facing any obstacle or challenge that arises because it brings a deep, loving perspective. Physical pain can move more background. When the winter storm hit Austin my spending three days calling on Layer 3 was of immeasurable support. As a location 1-er, it is quite easy to shift out of this experience, but it is where I go when the asynchronous bell chimes. For me I believe it is a blending of Layer 2 and 3.

”

This is quite a clear experience of Layer 3 for someone to experience in Location 1. It is possible that they are shifting to a further location when they sink in. There is a perception of experience being known through the non-localized field of “awareness”, rather than through the body.

DESCRIPTIONS
OF LAYER 4
-with commentary-

Example Experiences from Research Participants with Experience of Locations 1 through 5+

PARTICIPANT 49: LOCATION 1

“ It is very hard to get a sense of, and tends to be partial and temporary. A sense of the deepest mystery in everything, where there is no distinction or separation between anything. Everything appears more uniform. It is all This, no fundamental differences are possible. The mind feels very distant and irrelevant. ”

Layer 4 is very difficult to access from Location 1. Those who can get a sense of it are mostly Finders who have deepened into Layer 4 in further locations and are pulled back down to Location 1 due to circumstantial reasons. This sense would typically relate to a quality of flatness and loss of dimensionality that comes with Layer 4, in addition to greater peace, stillness, and silence. This is as far as you can get away perceptually from the experience of the mind, and also from the experience of and association with the body in Location 1.

PARTICIPANT 49: LOCATION 2

“ It is initially sensed as an even deeper stillness or silence than that of Layer 3. This deepest stillness brings with it a loss of dimensionality and seems flat or stark when compared to the richness of Layer 3. There is only “This”. There is no longer the sense of anything pervading everything, or containing everything. There is only existence itself, which is complete and total as this moment. ”

Any sense of separation disappears at this point, and nothing appears to have individual existence of itself. Distinctions begin to fade into the flatness (which happens more and more the later the location gets).

Layer 4 brings a loss of dimensionality, which gives it a distinct quality of starkness or flatness. This quality is so noticeable that Finders who experience it often use these terms when referring to it, such as calling it “the Flat Absolute”. In contrast to Layer 2, there is no sense of a container. The unfolding does not happen in anything; rather, it is total and complete in itself. Similarly, there is no longer any sense of an essence pervading everything.

There is nothing arising from or within this; it has no content and no distinctions. It is the complete and final dissolution of any sense of separation, and therefore of individual existence or self. Perception is increasingly isolated into this layer as locations get later, resulting in an increasingly complete loss of dimensionality and any sense of self. Layer 4 is rare and difficult to access from Location 2, and it is nearly impossible to stabilize, except in cases of fluid, late location Finders who find their way back to Location 2 and have deepened into Layer 4 in later locations.

PARTICIPANT 49: LOCATION 3

“It felt like the absolute unknowable depth of divinity, the Godhead, in which I no longer existed, but was swallowed up in the divine darkness, which was the end of all self. It felt like the ultimate surrender, to surrender life itself to God, to relinquish conscious awareness to That which could never be known. It was not God as it is known through relationship, but God as it is unto itself. Supreme and forever beyond all comprehension. It was not possible to stay here persistently, nor to function whatsoever from this state. It is possible now after coming back from later locations.

”

This is a nice description of a divine experience of Layer 4. Note that it also entails the loss of individual self, but in the context of its total dissolution in divinity. In earlier locations, it is common for Layer 4 to be experienced as an unknowable or a mystery. This is partly because one is unable to deepen into it and stabilize in it, and partly because it cannot be known objectively—or even subjectively in the usual sense. While in Layers 2 and 3 there is the subject of experience (and usually objects as well), in Layer 4 there is neither subject nor objects.

PARTICIPANT 49: LOCATION 4

“All at once, Layer 3 disappeared and it took time to investigate this internally and find that it had collapsed into pure existence, no form, no formless, no being, no nonbeing. In a way it is like dying into pure existence, only the completeness remains. There is only existence. This can never be gained or lost and is all that ever could be. There is only This. It is all just existence unfolding spontaneously as a manifestation of the intrinsic power of Life itself. The body is equal to all other objects and functions autonomously. There is no possibility of death; life has no opposite and cannot die. The most fundamental fear of death and bond to the body that had apparently survived through earlier locations was suddenly severed. Existence has no cause, nothing causes anything.”

When shifting deeply and exclusively into Layer 4, which almost always only happens from Location 4 or later, it can feel like Layer 3 collapses or disappears. This is what produces the sense of a “return to the body” in Location 4, because it is a return to the raw existence of everything. There is no longer the sense of anything within or beyond it—no sense of all-transcending or all-pervading formless presence or beingness. What remains actually and perceptually is the body and everything that is physically present. The experience of everything is reduced to raw sense data, and it feels as though it is all just existence unfolding spontaneously. The body itself appears as part of that unfolding and no different from any other aspect of life.

There is a sense that nothing can die because nothing exists of itself, and it therefore has no independent existence to lose. Life in its totality has no opposite and cannot die. Thus, there is a distinct subjective quality of absoluteness that cannot be adequately described, other than to say that it is uncaused and can have no opposite and nothing outside of it. It is a sense that this is reality itself and can never be gained or lost, but is the condition of everything that is or could be.

PARTICIPANT 49: LOCATION 5+

“ More and more, there is only the universe. It is the infinite context of all existence. Much like Location 4, though at some point the unfolding ceases, and there is only This, total and forever beyond all distinction. Perception no longer has spatial dimension and there is no inside and outside at all. Experience as such ceases to exist; it is not experienced, it merely presents itself. It is reality appearing as colour, sound, sensation, thought, feeling, energy, none of which exist as themselves. These too fade to the background and there comes a flatness. No matter where you look there is only the universe/reality. The silence can become so total that it feels like there can be no way back.

”

Statements like “there is only the universe/reality” are often used by late location Finders, especially from Location 7 and later. The sense of unfolding diminishes as locations get later, until everything feels instantaneous and total. It feels as though everything collapses into silence. The silence is total and intrinsic to existence itself. It no longer feels experiential. There is no sense of distance or space. Even the field of awareness disappears, leaving no sense of any dimension—only the all-present reality. With previous layers, everything is inside. This notion loses all meaning—there is no inside and no outside, no locality or reference point at all. Everything appears as an intrinsic quality of reality, and does not feel experiential, nor does anything appear to independently or essentially exist of itself. There is only raw undifferentiated reality. This comes increasingly to the foreground of perception as locations get later, resulting in an extreme flatness to perception. There is a powerful gravity to these late locations, making it difficult and rare to get back from them.

PARTICIPANT 50: LOCATION 4

“ It is complete simplicity. It just feels like everything is purely this. There is nothing more to it or beyond it or within it, it is pure existence alone. All form is only This, as This. The formless disappears and there is only This. It is the most real and concrete, more than anything ever. There is also a distinct experience of nothing being sacred, not that it is somehow not sacred, but that the concept loses all relevance. Sacredness, richness, aliveness, all these disappear. So there is a certain flatness to this level – it is in no way negative, but it lacks the richness of the lower levels. ”

What this participant describes relates to the disappearance of Layer 3 from perceptual awareness, at which point concepts of form and formless, or of anything pervading everything, lose all significance. This shift entails a loss of dimensionality to experience. Even the conditions of aliveness and being are left behind. Although these descriptions can sound far out, subjectively it feels in no way mystical or extraordinary. Rather, it feels like complete simplicity. All notions of sacredness or holiness lose relevance because they only have meaning in duality, in relation to a reference point. The completeness of reality is beyond attributes or conditions, because it is not relative. It is total and self-fulfilling.

PARTICIPANT 50: LOCATION 5+

“ The essence of this layer is the cessation of all perception of separation, all opposites. There is only pure reality, besides which nothing else exists. All things are seen to have no existence of themselves, but exist solely as reality itself. There is only That. What appeared to be self-existent entities were merely constructions in the mind – these have no inherent existence and only create an illusion of difference where no distinctions exist. This is so for self as well. There is no self, no other than self, without distinction both concepts become meaningless. ”

It is beyond all states and experiences, which are all relative. Not being definable as a state means that subjectively there is no attainment, no becoming and no entering this, nothing at all is gained, only the illusion of any separation falls away. There is no enlightenment, no unenlightenment, no freedom, no ignorance, no state of any kind and no thing to which any state or condition could pertain. The only condition is that of pure existence, forever beyond all distinction.

Reality is absolute and not subject to any condition, even that of being. There is neither being nor non-being. To say “I am” or “This is” is inaccurate. This “I am” disappears with the cessation of the reflection of consciousness upon anything. Without this there is no inside and no outside. There is no centre. There is no experience in the usual sense since there is no ‘knower’ of experience. There is no awareness as distinct from form or content. Awareness itself collapses into existence itself. Subject and objects disappear, and there is only Life which knows itself intrinsically. There is only the one self-illuminating reality, which is neither form nor formless. It feels like everything merely presents itself, it stands forth as the reality itself.

”

From the perspective of Layer 4, there is no separation or distinction of any kind. It is without any sense of duality or possibility of duality. Nothing appears to have independent or essential existence, and there is only undifferentiated reality. The concepts of self and no-self cease to have meaning. There is no sense of “I” or “I am” —no process of association or reflection. This dissolution of sense of self is so complete in later locations that even the experience “no self” falls away. That experience is actually relative to the experience of self and is a positionality or fixation in a perspective or reference point. As one deepens into late locations, this is no longer referenced, and there is only existence itself. This cessation of the reflective movement in consciousness is central to the falling away of the subjective sense of self in Location 4 and later.

Layer 4 feels like absolute, irreducible reality, in which there is no state or condition, nor any existent thing to which a state or condition could pertain. This way of experiencing Layer 4 is more relevant to Locations 4 and later, where it can stabilize. When it is only touched upon temporarily, it does not necessarily feel as though it is not a state because the sense of individual self remains partially intact in earlier locations. Layer 4 is then experienced in the context of there being a self-existent experiencer that entered and left the experience. In Location 4 and later, where the sense of self is dissolved on a very low level, it feels as though that illusion of self just fell away, leaving only existence in spontaneous unfolding. Hence it does not feel like anything is attained—who could attain it when nothing but existence could ever be? From this perspective, all perceived states are illusory, and there is only undifferentiated existence.

In Layer 4, there is a radical dissolution of all duality. This is subjectively beyond even the duality of being and non-being, existence and nonexistence. There is no “I am”—reality is beyond all attributes and conditions, including that of being. To say “This is” or “I am” is redundant and implies that “This” is subject to and distinct from the condition of being or existence. Although that can sound theoretical and abstract, it is actually subjectively experienced.

It feels like all states and experiences show up as a quality of existence, and are not experienced; they are existence unfolding. This unfolding is spontaneous and self-revealing, so there is no sense of awareness distinct from it. This “collapse” of “Awareness” relates to the field-like, all-pervading presence of Layer 3 disappearing from subjective perception. There are no distinctions to conceive of anything pervading everything. There is no content, and there is no object to know, because this is the reality of all that exists. The knowing feels objectless, contentless, and intrinsic to reality, which is self-illuminating and self-fulfilling.

PARTICIPANT 51: LOCATION 4

“ The distinction between awareness and form diminishes. It’s like you’re sensing awareness as the substance of which form or consciousness is made. As this deepens, the presumed subject to awareness, the identification itself, falls away. There is actually no subject. Awareness is recognised to be a spontaneous quality of the infinite context of the existence itself. Upon this realisation, you begin experiencing awareness as not other than form. It is not the same as saying the essence of form – it is not the essence of form but form itself, the indivisible nature of existence. Awareness as such collapses. There is no formless, no form, only pure existence unfolding as a revelation. Nothing causing anything.

”

This participant is describing their experience of shifting from Layer 3 to Layer 4, as well as the deepening into that in Location 4 and later. This is quite common with the transition to Location 4. Finders often initially experience a mix of Layer 3 and Layer 4 after initially transitioning to Location 4. They may even experience other layers in this mix. If they remain in Location 4, they will typically go through what they often describe as a “deepening” in that location, which typically involves their system moving more solidly into Layer 4. From this point on, it becomes more difficult to return to previous locations.

PARTICIPANT 51: LOCATION 5+

“

This total disappearance of all duality affects the perception of causality. Internally there is no experience of time or causality. There is only the unfolding of potentiality into actuality as the fulfilment of infinite reality. Nothing causes anything. Everything unfolds spontaneously as a manifestation of the intrinsic power of Life, beyond all intentionality.

At some point that is all experienced as simultaneous, and time merely the artifact of potentiality unfolding to perception. Nothing is moving, everything is instantaneous, the silence swallows everything. Life has no cause and is complete and omnipresent.

It therefore feels without beginning or end or possibility of these because it is not relative. Life in its totality has no opposite and cannot die.

”

The experiences of time and causality relate to perceptual processes that fall out of subjective awareness in late locations. With no distinction or separation at all, there can be no distinct cause and effect. There is only the spontaneous unfolding of existence/reality. Time appears to be a conclusion produced by the sequential processing of perception, which is the consequence of positionality and has no objective reality.

Deeper into later locations and Layer 4, the stillness becomes so total that even the quality of unfolding ceases to predominate in subjective experience. This results in an increasing flatness in perception, and sensory perception tends to fade more to the background. There is a complete sense of deathlessness. It feels as though nothing dies because nothing exists of itself; thus, it has no independent existence to lose. Presumably, because all fundamental human fear originates from the fear of death, this perception brings an incomparable sense of freedom and peace. The peace is of a different order than that of any other layer because it is not dependent on any positionality, such as “I am awareness”, or “I am”. The untouchable quality of Layer 3 becomes irrelevant (untouchable in relation to what?), because nothing but reality could ever be. The peace feels absolute and of a different dimension than emotional or psychological peace.

“ In essence it is the quality of infinite, undifferentiated, and pure potentiality, which almost seems dark in that it cannot be known objectively, and the light of awareness cannot penetrate it. The silence is all-consuming and awe-inspiring, though not in any emotional way.

This is the universe. This. There is nothing which it is not. The universe is the source of everything, everything is made up of that alone. It has no existence of itself. There is nowhere for anything else to be and nothing else anything could be but a manifestation of the universe.

It is foundational to all that is or could be. If you go to the root of anything there is only that. You and all that you see around you are nothing but the body of the earth, and if you take that further, that in turn is nothing but the universe. So at its depth, the identity of everything is only the universe.

So what is the universe? It is the infinite context of all existence. Infinite not in a measurable sense but as that which has no boundaries and can have nothing outside itself.

The universe is the a priori condition for being – that everything be in and of the universe. So it is the context for existence or being itself, which means it is not subject to being. And so we say “this is beyond being and nonbeing”.

The experience is without relationship, it is the universe as it is unto itself. Consider this, to us fire is bright, but how it is known in itself? To know objectively is entirely different than to be that which is known. From the perspective of the universe there is nothing to know because nothing objective exists, there can be no objective knowledge. There is only the all-present reality which knows itself intrinsically, without any content.

”

This is a description from a late location Finder of Layer 4, which they experience as “the universe”. People who get to late locations (e.g., Locations 7 through 9) frequently use phrases such as, “There is only the universe/reality”(Location 7+), “It is like there’s only the universe looking out of these eyes”(mostly Locations 8 and 9), or some variation thereof. This relates to the experience of Layer 4 at farther out locations on the Path of Freedom, and the remarkable consistency with which people use the same words across cultures may reflect the degree to which any individual or conditioned sense of self has been eliminated from the experience.

Despite sounding far out, when late location Finders are asked whether the universe is anything beyond what is in this room/space, they typically say no. What they mean by the word is not what we think when we hear it. This is unavoidable because it is beyond all conventional understanding and description. By nature, it is beyond these because any concept or description is dualistic and relative in nature, which means that they imply their opposite.

Subjectively, is it also beyond experience or knowing in the usual sense because there is no object or subject of experience. It feels contentless and indivisible. Nothing is known, and nothing is not known. There is only reality unfolding as a revelation. It stands forth complete, total and self-illuminating.

Any sense of “I” or “I am” is the origin of separation and a positionality that produces the perception of duality. Without this reference point, there can be no distinction and no perception in the ordinary sense. This does not mean that someone deep in Layer 4 cannot see trees, mountains, and rivers; rather, the “reporter” or “interpreter” of experience has fallen away. This “reporter” or self is an artifact of the impersonal process of consciousness reflecting on experience.

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