

# ***NLP on the Spiritual Path***

**by Jimmy Kyriacou**

In the blockbuster movie *The Matrix*, the character Trinity sends Neo a message: "Wake up Neo! The Matrix has you." Later in the movie Morpheus says to Neo: "And what is the Matrix? The Matrix is the world that has been pulled over your eyes."

In many spiritual traditions, the spiritual path is described as awakening or, just as often, enlightenment. In an address to the American Philosophical Association at Columbia University in 1906 William James, the father of American psychology, stated: "Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources." Hence, the spiritual path can usefully be thought of as awakening from the Matrix of our everyday lives, the 'hypnosis of social conditioning' as Deepak Chopra described it.

In one of the Buddha's remarkable dialogues, he is stopped by a man in the road, awestruck by his radiance and serenity. "Are you a god?" he says. "No" replies the Buddha. "Are you an angel?" "No" he says. "What then are you?" asks the man in exasperation. "I am awake!" says the Buddha.

How then can *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)* help us to awaken? NLP was developed in the 1970's by two great thinkers at the University of California in Santa Cruz, viz. John Grinder, a Professor of Linguistics, and Richard Bandler, a mathematician and Gestalt therapist. NLP is an integration of the field of cognitive psychology, computer science and linguistics, with many powerful applications in fields as diverse as therapy, coaching, business and sales, sports and, of course, spirituality. The reason why NLP can do this is that it is a powerful model of how the brain ('hardware') and the mind ('software') interact and communicate and allow us to create changes in our individual lives as well as with others. By enabling us to better understand our language, behaviour and mental models, NLP can be a powerful aid on the spiritual path.

NLP is made up of a collection of Principles, Models and Techniques. NLP Practitioners learn to apply these tools through a comprehensive Certification process. For example, one of the Principles of NLP is the expression *The Map is not the Territory. Our thoughts and ideas are our maps; the reality is the territory.* First coined by the remarkable Polish philosopher, Count Alfred Korzybski, in 1933, this metaphor is an important reminder to us all that our ideas, opinions, beliefs and assumptions about the world are similar to the relationship between the map and the territory, or the menu and the meal. If we confuse the description for the reality we run the risk of becoming dogmatic and intolerant, thinking that we have found the 'one right answer'. Instead, NLP reminds us that all of our ideas, even our most cherished ones, are still only a map, and that the territory, (ultimate reality or Spirit), is always, as Zen reminds us, 'beyond words.' Hence 'ultimate truth' is to be found in the silence, in the 'power of now' as Eckhart Tolle describes it.

What then is the role of language, both on the spiritual path and in our day to day experience? In the mystical traditions, both east and west, language is rightly regarded with some suspicion. While wonderful for everyday practical purposes such as “Can you pass the butter please?” students are cautioned not to get trapped by wordiness, but to go beyond, to the actual experience. Nonetheless, many verbal teachings or scriptures are regarded as ‘*skilful means*’, useful tools to assist us on the spiritual path, provided we are careful to remember that ‘*The Map is not the Territory*’. In the words of another great thinker, Winston Churchill: “Language is a wonderful servant, and a poor master.”

The philosopher Ken Wilber has been described as the foremost thinker on the planet today; the *Einstein of Consciousness*. His genius lies in his incredible ability to synthesise a vast range of teachings, east and west, ancient and modern, into a breathtaking spiritual vision in which NLP can play a small but important role. I cannot do justice to the scope of Wilber’s thinking in this short article. A useful introduction to his work is in the recently published book ***The Integral Vision***. Basically however, one can begin to approach his work by thinking that, just as in the material world there are three dimensions of length, width and breadth, so to in the world of *being* there are three dimensions of **I, we and it/its**. In other words, any conscious experience can be approached from multiple perspectives – from the perspective of the individual self, the community of which he or she is a part, and the physical dimension they belong to. Think about it in the following way: every language that we know of has three perspectives or ‘persons’ in its grammar; 1<sup>st</sup> person **I**, 2<sup>nd</sup> person **you/we** and 3<sup>rd</sup> person **it/its**. While this seems obvious and almost trivial, approaching any issue from these perspectives creates a depth of meaning and understanding that one would not otherwise have.

NLP can play an important role in empowering individuals with understanding and techniques that allow them to change their experience of reality by consciously changing their perspective.

The NLP Process called **1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Position**, while it predates Wilber's model, is in fact totally consistent with it. Here is a small exercise you can try to experience this for yourself. You may record it and then play it back or have someone read it out loud for you. Or you may even read it to yourself as many times as you need in order to remember the steps:

1. Begin by thinking of another person that you would like to understand better. This can be someone that you have had some minor difficulty with, or someone with whom you already have a great relationship and you would like to enrich it even more.
2. Imagine that person sitting or standing in front of you. See them, imagine their posture, what they are wearing; hear them, notice their tone and tempo of voice, the volume; what they are saying and notice how you feel about them from your own perspective, your 1<sup>st</sup> Position. Notice any thoughts and images that may arise in you.
3. Now go over to their position and imagine 'becoming them'. Step fully into their shoes, sit (or stand) the way they would and imagine having their thoughts and feelings. Trust your intuition to give you useful information. Look back at yourself; see and hear yourself through their eyes. Notice how you must look and sound to the other person. After a few minutes of this, step out of this position and go to a 3<sup>rd</sup> Position where you can imagine seeing both parties from the perspective of a detached but friendly Observer, This is the Witness perspective. There is no blame or

judgment in this position, only a fairness and curiosity. Bring with you the knowledge gained in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Position. What do you notice in 3<sup>rd</sup> Position that neither of the two parties recognises in their position? Make a mental note of the learning and bring that with you back into the 1<sup>st</sup> Position – the place you originally started from. Allow it to settle in you.

4. Now think about what you've discovered. How is this good for you and the other person? Think about the next time you are likely to see this person again and imagine relating to them with the compassion and wisdom you experienced during this process.

For further information on NLP or Ken Wilber's *Integral Vision* contact Jimmy Kyriacou on 082 570 4483 or email [jimmy@inlp.co.za](mailto:jimmy@inlp.co.za)

Jimmy Kyriacou is a former Advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa, whose life was powerfully impacted by his discovery of NLP in 1987.

Wanting to contribute more significantly to empowering people to realize their full potential, he made the shift from the practice of law, to management consulting and training, in 1991.

He was certified as a NLP Trainer, by NLP co-developer Richard Bandler, in 1993 and has presented NLP trainings to many people since then. In 2001 he was certified as a Trainer in the cutting-edge NLP innovation of *Neuro-Semantics*, by its developer, Michael Hall and as a *Meta Coach* in 2004.

In his consulting work, Jimmy has specialised in the areas of Strategy, Performance Management and Leadership Development. He has also been involved in a number of Modelling Projects of excellent performers in business.

Jimmy has read and studied widely in numerous fields. In addition to his Legal degrees, he holds an Honours degree in Philosophy, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Management from a leading international university. He is a long-time practitioner of meditation and other forms of contemporary spirituality.

In his training, consulting and counselling work, Jimmy brings a high level of insight, integrity and compassion, and is known for his respectful commitment to assisting people in the fulfilment of their noblest dreams.