

What do you know about the waves of evolutionary development of human consciousness? Let Forevermore tell you.

After listening to a podcast dissect a psychological theory called Spiral Dynamics, Forevermore's Jared Storm was transfixed. "Spiral Dynamics says that, as we look back into human history, we see a progression of thought and conceptual complexity that can be broken down into a series of distinct phases," he explains. "These phases represent fundamentally different ways of seeing the world, which have profound implications for how one interacts with it. Interestingly, the same progression through stages of consciousness, which occurred slowly throughout human history, can also be seen within individual persons." The stages are umbrellaed under two tiers. Each stage of the first tier sees all other stages as incorrect, viewing itself as the sole bearer of truth. The second tier represents a monumental shift in human thought; it begins to recognize that not only do all stages of human consciousness have some partial truth to offer, but that these offerings are an essential part of human development. Under the first tier are six colors, each representing a specific worldview and its motives. Each color corresponds to a period in human development as well as a general pattern of progression seen in individual people. Within colors and tiers, Spiral Dynamics maps out an integrated vision for identifying our evolutionary history, and ourselves. So, naturally, Forevermore decided to write a record about it.

"Our sound caters to people who analyze for technicality, and to the more general metal listener. In the same way," explains the band's drummer, Sammy Vaughn, "Although you'll learn more if you have an understanding of Spiral Dynamics, you can still appreciate the record without knowing anything about the theory."

But why would you want to?

Integral, the band's new concept album (and sophomore release on Solid State Records), tackles Spiral Dynamics through sound, color, and lyric. "Our first album wasn't very cohesive," notes Storm. "We love it, but developing it was motivated by passion and impulse; this go-round we wanted to be more computed and intentional." They approached the lyrical content of the album by writing through the lens of an eternal observer. "The lyrics are written through the lens of an immortal man who's lived the course of human history. He's experienced each of the time periods and the values within them, and he conveys spiral dynamics and how it applies to the individual." For instance, the first tier's color is beige, represented by the first song on the record, "Nascent." "Nascent" (meaning something that is beginning to come about, like the initial development of the mind) represents the first cultural time period analyzed by Spiral Dynamics. "This color represents when culture was primitive and humanity was driven by instinct and the struggle to survive," says Storm. Lyrics like, "In spite of revelation / I'm compelled to persist / The pursuit of wisdom forsaken / I fight to exist," portrays the primal instinct that dominated culture over one hundred thousand years ago.

Due to the inherent ability of the human mind to change and adapt to new circumstances, each new phase arose as a response to the context created by the previous way of thinking. The record models this by having each song catapult itself forward in the same way. "The next cultural shift is the color purple, and the second song, 'Noumina,' examines that. Larger social groups or tribes shifted from being driven purely by primal instincts to acquiring a mystical view of the world. There's an emphasis on magical forces determining events, so humanity works to appease the spirits through ritual," explains Vaughn. "The song tells the narrative of a tribe who,

having been in a draught, summons a mystical force in control of the weather to evoke rainfall.” Musically the song carries a similar air of mysticism, with layered vocals and repetitively patterned guitar, offering a dimension of unearthly intensity.

From the track “Overlord,” which represents the color red — a time of warlords, conquest, and respect — to “Order,” which represents the color blue — a time of order, predetermined purpose, and absolute truth — the songs dive into historical evolution spanning the last hundred thousand years. And although each song is restricted by its own perspective, the second tier (represented by songs “Prism” and “Pandameca”) begins to see truth in other value systems outside of their own. “Above all,” explains Storm, “understanding Spiral Dynamics should promote tolerance and understanding when dealing with someone whose worldview differs from your own. By understanding the fundamentally different modes of thinking that large groups of people inhabit, and how the values and motivations of those modes interfere with our ability to fully understand and communicate with each other, we gain a new perspective with regard to interpersonal conflict.”

The final and title track on the record, “Integral,” provides a panorama of these historical perspectives by including attributes gleaned from other time periods, and offering lessons learned throughout the phases. You can enjoy each song individually — whether it be for the strength and grit of Kramer Lowe’s vocals, the attractive melodies, or the compelling technical demands — or you can step back, like the immortal man, and recognize the interwoven developmental constructs of humanity in an effort to unite mankind. In the end, the immortal man’s wisdom puts it best:

Countless values left in the dust
Forever seeking harmony
Surrendered dominion, retired my crown
Gave up myself, my reason, voided my vows
The journey never ends
Unless you stop seeking

Integral is a sophisticated, esoteric unfolding of human development and its search to understand itself. Listening to the album means equipping yourself with a broader awareness of being a human, and being part of humanity. That is, unless you stop seeking.