

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: New Age

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Quote:

Introduction:

The New Age Movement is in a class by itself. Unlike most formal religions, it has no central organization, membership, formal clergy, geographic center, dogma, and does not use mutually exclusive definitions for some of their terms. The New Age is a spiritual movement; a network of believers and practitioners who share similar beliefs and practices, which they add on to whichever formal religion that they follow. It lacks the place of a central organization; seminars, conventions, books and internet, and sermons and religious services.

Quoting John Naisbitt:

"In turbulent times, in times of great change, people head for the two extremes: the personal, spiritual experience...With no membership lists or even a cohesive organization, it is difficult to define or measure the unorganized New Age movement. But in a European city, thousands who seek insight and personal growth cluster around a bookstore, a spiritual teacher, or an education center." 1

The New Age is definitely a heterogeneous movement of individuals; most do not hold any beliefs onto their regular religious affiliation. Recent surveys of US adults show that Americans hold at least some new age beliefs:

- 8% believe in astrology as a method of foretelling the future
- 7% believe that crystals are a source of healing or energizing power
- 9% believe that Tarot Cards are a reliable base for life decisions
- about 1 in 4 believe in a non-traditional concept of the nature of God with New Age thinking: 11% believe that God is "a state of higher consciousness that can be reached"
- 8% define God as "the total realization of personal, human potential"
- 3% believe that each person is God.

The group of surveys cited above classify religious beliefs into 7 faith groups. The largest, they are: Cultural (Christmas & Easter) Christianity, Conventionality, Practitioner, Biblical (Fundamentalist, Evangelical) Christianity, Atheist/agnosticism. A longitudinal study from 1991 to 1995 shows that New Agers represent a significant population, and are consistently the third largest religious group. 2

New Age teachings became popular during the 1970's as a reaction against

the failure of Christianity and the failure of Secular Humanism to provide guidance for the future. Its roots are traceable to many sources: Astrology, Gnostic traditions, Spiritualism, Taoism, Theosophy, Wicca and other New Age movements. The movement started in England in the 1960's where many of these elements were established. Small groups, such as the Findhorn Community in Inverness, were formed. The movement quickly became international. Early New Age milestones were a "New Age Seminar" ran by the Association for Research and Enlightenment and the establishment of the East-West Journal in 1971. Actress Shirley MacLaine is a famous current figure.

During the 1980's and 90's, the movement came under criticism from a variety of sources. It was ridiculed; seminar and group leaders were criticized for the fortunes of their followers. Their uncritical belief in the "scientific" properties of crystals was one of the things the movement has become established and become a stable, major force during the past generation. As the millennium comes to a close, the New Age movement is being promoted by the social backlash against logic and science.

The "New Age" that does not exist:

Major confusion about the New Age has been generated by academics, conservative Christians, Fundamentalist and other Evangelical Christians and traditional Muslim groups. The following are:

Many of the above groups have dismissed Tasawwuf (Sufiism) as a New Age movement. It has historically been an established mystical movement within Islam, which has been in a state of tension with the more legalistic divisions within Islam. It has no connection to the New Age.

Some conservative Christians believe that a massive, underground, high-tech organization exists that is infiltrating government, media, schools and churches. This organization exists.

Some conservative Christians do not differentiate among the Occult, Satanism, Neopagan religions. Many seem to regard all as forms of Satanism who prey on children. Others view The New Age, Neopagan religions, Tarot card reading, channeling, work with crystal energy, etc. as merely recruiting programs for Satanism. Occult, Satanism, Neo-pagan religions are very different phenomena, and should be treated as such. Carl Raschke, professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver, views New Age practices as the spiritual version of AIDS; it destroys the ability of people to think. He describes it as "essentially, the marketing end of the political packaging of the occult ground for a new American form of fascism."

New Age beliefs:

A number of fundamental beliefs are held by many New Age followers; in fact, they go to "shop" for the beliefs and practices that they feel most comfortable with.

Monism: All that exists is derived from a single source of divine energy.

Pantheism: All that exists is God; God is all that exists. This leads naturally to the New Age.

divinity of the individual, that we are all Gods. They do not seek God as
as exists in a remote heaven; they seek God within the self and through
Panentheism: God is all that exists. God is at once the entire universe,
as well.

Reincarnation: After death, we are reborn and live another life as a human
many times. This belief is similar to the concept of transmigration of the

Karma: The good and bad deeds that we do adds and subtracts from our
karma. At the end of our life, we are rewarded or punished according to
reincarnated into either a painful or good new life. This belief is linked to
also derived from Hinduism

An Aura is believed to be an energy field radiated by the body. Invisible
detected by some as a shimmering, multi-colored field surrounding the body.
detecting and interpreting auras can diagnose an individual's state of mind
physical health.

Personal Transformation A profoundly intense mystical experience will lead to
use of New Age beliefs and practices. Guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation,
use of hallucinogenic drugs are useful to bring about and enhance this transformation.
hope to develop new potentials within themselves: the ability to heal oneself,
powers, a new understanding of the workings of the universe, etc. Later,
people have achieved these powers, a major spiritual, physical, psychological
planet-wide transformation is expected.

Ecological Responsibility: A belief in the importance of uniting to preserve
which is often looked upon as Gaia, (Mother Earth) a living entity.

Universal Religion: Since all is God, then only one reality exists, and all
paths to that ultimate reality. The universal religion can be visualized as
sadhanas (spiritual paths) to the summit. Some are hard; others easy. The
All paths eventually reach the top. They anticipate that a new universal
elements of all current faiths will evolve and become generally accepted.

New World Order As the Age of Aquarius unfolds, a New Age will develop
which there is world government, and end to wars, disease, hunger, pollution,
racial, religious and other forms of discrimination will cease. People's
nation will be replaced by a concern for the entire world and its people.

The Age of Aquarius is a reference to the precession of the zodiac. The
of the zodiac approximately every 2,000 years. Some believe that the era
Aquarius in the 19th Century, so that the present era is the dawning of
believe that it will occur at the end of the 20th century. It is interesting
constellation changes were:

from Aries to Pisces the fish circa 1st century CE. This happened at a time
emerging religion, and many individuals changed from animal sacrifice to
embracing the teachings of Christianity. The church's prime symbol at that time

from Taurus to Aries the ram circa 2,000 BCE. This happened at a time of
widespread ritual sacrifice of sheep and other animals in the Temple.

from Gemini to Taurus the bull circa 4,000 BCE. During that sign, worship
common in the Middle East.

New Age practices:

Many practices are found among New Agers. A typical practitioner is acting

Channeling A method similar to that used by Spiritists in which a spirit is conjured up. However, while Spiritists generally believe that one's soul remains after death, most channelers believe that the soul evolves to higher planes and usually try to make contact with a single, spiritually evolved being. That being is channeled through the medium and relays guidance and information to the client through the medium's voice. Channeling has existed since the 1850's and many practitioners are independent of the New Age movement. Perhaps the most famous channeler was Dolores Schucman, (1909-1981), over an 8 year period. She was an Atheist, and not a New Age believer. However, she took great care in recording accurately the messages received.

Crystals Crystals are materials which has its molecules arranged in a specific internal pattern. This pattern is reflected in the crystal's external structure, forming symmetrical planar surfaces. Many common substances, from salt to sugar, form crystals. They can be shaped so that they will vibrate at a specific frequency and are used in radio communications and computing devices. New Agers believe in the healing energy of crystals.

Meditating A process of blanking out the mind and releasing oneself from worldly concerns, often aided by repetitive chanting of a mantra, or focusing on an object.

New Age Music A gentle, melodic, inspirational music form involving the flute, etc. It is used as an aid in healing, massage therapy and general relaxation.

Divination The use of various techniques to foretell the future, including pendulum movements, Runes, Scrying, Tarot Cards.

Astrology The belief that the orientation of the planets at the time of one's birth that birth predicts the individual's future and personality. Belief in astrology is common among New Agers, but definitely not limited to them.

Holistic Health This is a collection of healing techniques which have diverged from the medical model. It attempts to cure disorders in mind, body and spirit and to achieve balance in the individual. Examples are acupuncture, crystal healing, holistic massage, various meditation methods, polarity therapy, psychic healing, reflexology, etc.

Human Potential Movement (a.k.a. Emotional Growth Movement) This is a collection of methods involving both individualized and group working, using both men and women. The goal is to help individuals to advance spiritually. Examples are Esalen Institute, EST, Gestalt Therapy, Primal Scream Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Transpersonal Therapy and Yoga.

The Canadian Census (1991) recorded only 1,200 people (0.005% of the total population) who identify their religion as being New Age. However, this in no way indicates the prevalence of new age ideas in the country. Many people identify with Christianity and other religions, but incorporate many new age concepts into their faith.