

What is New Age Religion?

New Age Religion is not a religion at all, but a vast syncretism (amalgamation) of numerous religious and philosophical ideas. This has been going on since the time of Alexander the Great, but was eradicated under Christianity and its enforced dogma starting growing again around 325 AD. Alexander's vast empire opened the door for Eastern religion and mysticism to move West, while Greek philosophy and reason moved East. Today the same process continues, but on a global scale with the internet.

It has some similarities to Gnosticism (knowledge based) adopting both its methods and its individual nature. Most often rejecting reason and science, New Age religion more than anything is emotional, filling in a void left by a secular culture and discontent with traditional religious beliefs. Radical climate change tactics could be broadly classified into New Age religion because of its exaltation of nature. This is part of the continuing process of this mixing of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought

Introduction

The New Age Movement is in a class by itself. Unlike most formal religions, it has no holy text, central organization, membership, formal clergy, geographic center, dogma, creed, etc. They often use mutually exclusive definitions for some of their terms. The New Age is in fact a free-flowing spiritual movement; a network of believers and practitioners who share somewhat similar beliefs and practices. Their book publishers take the place of a central organization; seminars, conventions, books and informal groups replace of sermons and religious services. The New Age is a diverse movement of individuals, most transplant some new age beliefs onto their regular religious affiliation. Many people in the USA have at least some new age beliefs such as:

- 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** which are often associated with New Age thinking:
 - 11% believe that God is "**a state of higher consciousness** that a person may reach"
 - 8% define God as "**the total realization of personal, human potential**"
 - 3% believe that **each person is God**.

New Age teachings became popular during the 1970's as a reaction against what some perceived as the failure of Christianity and the failure of Secular Humanism to provide spiritual and ethical guidance for the future. Its roots are traceable to many sources: Astrology, Channeling, Hinduism, Gnostic traditions, Neo-paganism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, Wicca, etc. The movement started in England in the 1960's where many of these elements were well established.

During the 1980's and 90's, the movement came under criticism from a variety of groups. Channeling was ridiculed; seminar and group leaders were criticized for the fortunes that they made from New Agers. Their uncritical belief in the "scientific" properties of crystals was exposed as groundless. But the movement has become established and become a stable, major force in North American religion during the past generation.

The "New Age" that does not exist

Some conservative Christians believe that a massive, underground, highly coordinated New Age organization exists that is infiltrating government, media, schools and churches. No such entity exists. Some conservative Christians do not differentiate among the Occult, Satanism, Wicca, other Neo-pagan religions. And they seem to regard all as forms of Satanism who perform horrendous criminal acts on children. In fact, the Occult, Satanism, Neo-pagan religions are very different phenomena, and essentially unrelated.

New Age beliefs

Several fundamental beliefs are held by many New Age followers; individuals are encouraged 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 concept of the divinity of the individual, that we are all Gods. They do not seek God as revealed in a sacred text or as exists in a remote heaven; they seek God within the self and throughout the entire universe.
- **Panentheism:** God is all that exists. God is at once the entire universe and transcends the universe as well.
- **Reincarnation:** After death, we are reborn and live another life as a human. This cycle repeats itself many times. This belief is like the concept of transmigration of the soul in Hinduism.
- **Karma:** The good and bad deeds that we do adds and subtracts from our accumulated record, our karma. At the end of our life, we are rewarded or punished according to our karma by being reincarnated into either a painful or good new life. This belief is linked to that of reincarnation and is also derived from Hinduism
- **Aura:** They believe that this is energy field radiated by the body. Invisible to most people, it can be detected by some as a shimmering, multi-colored field surrounding the body. Those skilled in detecting and interpreting auras can diagnose an individual's state of mind, and their spiritual and physical health.
- **Personal Transformation:** A profoundly intense mystical experience will lead to the acceptance and use of New Age beliefs and practices. Guided imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and (sometimes) the use of hallucinogenic drugs are useful to bring about and enhance this transformation. Believers hope to develop new potentials within themselves: the ability to heal oneself and others, psychic powers, a new understanding of the workings of the universe, etc. Later, when enough people have achieved these powers, a major spiritual, physical, psychological and cultural planet-wide transformation is expected.
- **Ecological Responsibility:** A belief in the importance of uniting to preserve the health of the earth, 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 religions are simply different paths to that ultimate reality. The universal religion can be visualized as a mountain, with many sadhanas (spiritual paths) to the summit. Some are hard, others easy. There is no one correct path. All paths eventually reach the top. They anticipate that a new universal religion which contains elements of all current faiths will evolve and become generally accepted worldwide.

- **New World Order:** As the Age of Aquarius unfolds, a New Age will develop. This will be a utopia in which there is world government, and end to wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty. Gender, racial, religious and other forms of discrimination will cease. People's allegiance to their tribe or nation will be replaced by a concern for the entire world and its people.
- **The Age of Aquarius:** A reference to the precession of the zodiac. The earth passes through each of the signs of the zodiac approximately every 24,000 years. Some believe that the earth entered the constellation Aquarius in the 19th Century, so that the present era is the dawning of the age of Aquarius. Others believe that it occurred at the end of the 20th century.

New Age Practices

Many practices are common amongst New Agers. A typical practitioner is active in only a few areas:

- **Channeling:** A method similar to that used by Spiritists in which a spirit of a long dead individual is conjured up. However, while Spiritists generally believe that one's soul remains relatively unchanged after death, most channelers believe that the soul evolves to higher planes of existence. They usually try to make contact with a single, spiritually evolved being. That being's consciousness is channeled through the medium and relays guidance and information to the group, through the use of the medium's voice. Channeling has existed since the 1850's and many groups consider themselves independent of the New Age movement. The popular A Course in Miracles was channeled by Jesus through a New Age psychologist, Dr. Helen Schucman over an 8 year period.
- **Crystals:** Crystals are materials which has its molecules arranged in a specific, highly ordered internal pattern. This pattern is reflected in the crystal's external structure which typically has symmetrical planar surfaces. Many common substances, from salt to sugar, from diamonds to quartz form crystals. They can be shaped so that they will vibrate at a specific frequency and are widely used in radio communications and computing devices. New Agers believe that crystals posses healing energy.
- **Meditating:** A process of blanking out the mind and releasing oneself from conscious thinking. This is often aided by repetitive chanting of a mantra, or focusing on an object.
- **New Age Music-** A gentle, melodic, inspirational music form involving the human voice, harp, lute, 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 I Ching, Pendulum movements, Runes, Scrying, Tarot Cards. Astrology The belief that the orientation of the planets at the time of one's birth, and the location of that birth predicts the individual's future and personality. Belief in astrology is common amongst New Agers, but not limited to them.
- **Holistic Health:** This is a collection of healing techniques which have diverged from the traditional medical model. It attempts to cure disorders in mind, body and spirit and to promote wholeness and balance in the individual. Examples are acupuncture, crystal healing, homeopathy, iridology, massage, various meditation methods, polarity therapy, psychic healing, therapeutic touch, reflexology, etc.

- **Human Potential Movement:** This is a collection of therapeutic methods involving both individualized and group working (sort of like yoga or transcendental meditation) using both mental and physical techniques. The goal is to help individuals to advance spiritually.

Close

Why don't we hear more about the New Age Movement today? The short answer is that it is still with us but is being somewhat combined with other beliefs and "re-labeled." For example, what is known as Modern Paganism, also known as Contemporary Paganism and Neopaganism, is a collective term for religious movements influenced by or derived from the various historical pagan beliefs. There is a significant overlap between modern Paganism and New Age. Paganism parallels the New Age movement in some ways, differs sharply from it in others, and overlaps it in some minor ways.