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## NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

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by

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This has to be one of the hardest things I've ever been asked to write about. As I am not an authority on the subject, this is a very personal statement. I don't profess to be right; I expect many who will identify themselves with the title will disagree with some of what I write, and that is all right. When I was in my revolutionary, anarchistic period (around the late 60's - and where were you in the Spring of '68, comrade?), I remember saying that the next revolution had to be the revolution of the individual with grass-roots pressure-groups, the increased facilitation of movement and understanding through newer transport and communications systems and with Humanistic Psychology and New Age Spirituality. I think we are beginning to see it.

I see New Age Spirituality as the religion of the individual. This means, that for me, New Age Spirituality recognises two main tenets: the first is that there is a high degree of individuality in any expression of this aspect of oneself and the second is that, co-existent and complementary with this, there is a general recognition of the universality of all things. This latter does not conflict with the former.

This is an interesting contrast with the more formally established religions in the West. Most of them insist upon a universality of form and content before any individual approach is allowed. Occasionally the individual's interpretation of the main religion can threaten that religion (or it's form) to the extent that the divergent is corrected or persecuted. To my mind, they have got it the wrong way about.

So (trying to avoid woolly jargon, which must be as much of a curse to anything 'New Age' as dogma was to earlier formalised religions) what this means is that not only should I be free to celebrate my spirituality in almost any way that 'turns me on' but almost (by definition) New Age Spirituality is the freedom of spiritual expression for individuals.

For example, I happen to live in a (quote) New Age Spiritual Community (unquote). I am totally free - to go to Sanctuary or Meditation at the regular morning and noon times, or not: or to meditate in Sanctuary whenever I feel the need at any time, or not - whatever I do is my own formal outward expression of my Spirituality. There is no criticism if I don't go

and no 'light points' for good behaviour if I do.

Thus the form of my Spirituality is not only determined outwardly by myself, But (and much more importantly) it's content is determined inwardly as 'That Which Makes Me Feel Spiritual' and this, in turn, will correspondingly affect all my interactions, work, attitudes, relationships, aura, friendships, service, motivations, etc. How ever not?

I believe it is not so much what we do, as the way we do it. If we give to others because of our guilt or our inability to say 'no', or because we are scared they won't like us; is that a 'good thing'? If we give from our hearts, from our love or our appreciation, I believe this adds a quality to the gift that is richer by far than any money. Thus if all my actions are directed towards my spirituality and become an expression of that: is this not a 'better thing'? This inward criterion determines my Spirituality far more than any outward creed or dictate has ever done. Obviously other ideas impinge, but my Spirituality is an expression of myself trying to live in closer contact with my Higher Self, which I define as that part of me which recognises and connects with God.

If there is to be any external judgement or criterion as to how spiritual a person is - and there is a whole can of worms connected with this question - it can only be in how that person comes across in every aspect of their behaviour. If I am doing something inconsiderately,

the question could be asked, 'How spiritual am I being?' But I, and only I, can be the one who answers that. This may sound like a form of religious license, but it is a particular brand of freedom that carries with it the hardest and most severe critic or test that exists - oneself or one's own conscience and one's own continued progress on one's Path.

What is much the most important thing to me, and fundamental to my Spirituality is how I express my essential being, my Higher Self, the essence of my Spirit, in my everyday interactions. It does not matter therefore whether I have just celebrated Advent, Beltane, Thanksgiving or whatever and have been moved by the ceremony and the spiritual sharing of communal-ity with the other celebrants if, the next morning, I express a grudging resentment for one of them behind their back about their inefficient work, for example. That is not celebratory, spiritual, friendly or even humanistic.

What I am trying to say is that I believe that one main aspect of New Age Spirituality is that, not only is there a basic respect for other people (which extends to their belief systems as well), but that this respect matures into a spiritual practice if, and really only if, it is extended to all aspects of the person and at all times. This is loving ourselves, God and our neighbour.

I find myself using the word "celebrate" a number of times in connection with spirituality. I think this says something. It says

to me that religion (that I experienced as a youth never said then. The "religious festivals" never made me feel festive or religious. They carried a weight of solemnity and form that actually began to kill my spirit. That was my experience. I know many people differ radically and get a lot from the celebration and practice of their religion. However my experience caused me to seek an alternative.

So I find I am celebrating my brand of spirituality with a number of people who seem to be practicing a new form of religion, which isn't a religion; in a way which differs from any other way; in a form that changes, seasonally, and individually; and yet also seems to connect with other practitioners of other forms and in other ways all over the world. There is a universality to it all. This is part of the mystery. This is magic.

So I find that "out there" there are as many people who are just as "Spiritual" in a "New Age" way as there are within the community in which I live. The only difference maybe is they don't advertise it by a blatantly different life-style. However, when talking to them, they have the same basic concerns about Life, the Universe and Everything; so we get along just fine. Again there is a universality. We are connected by the fundamentals which our various religions, nearly all religions, try to address. We are trying - each in our own way - to make a better world with more love, peace and humanity. It is just that some of us need something more than just

promoting the best interests of our own species. I find that I need something that really and truly admits the presence of God in every aspect of my life, my world, my universe. A wider consciousness, I guess.

Amongst New Age Spiritual Practitioners, there seems to be a common acceptance of the universality of all living things. There seems to be an acceptance amongst others who define themselves within the New Age framework of certain other common beliefs. The Green movement is a particular form of New Age consciousness that often walks hand in hand with New Age Spirituality. Personal Growth is another concept also found very linked - which possibly leads us into Humanistic Psychology (though this does not have a monopoly on personal growth). There are others, less common but with often associated ideas: vegetarianism, non-hierarchical attitudes, feminism, alternative health practices, alternative lifestyles, organic farming, soft technology etc.

What these all say to me is that these areas allow more freedom of choice for the individual. They allow the individuals concerned to express their personality in their own way and in very simple and very fundamental ways; the ways in which they eat, live, dress, and interact. These ways often have common ethics in that they tend to inter-relate. They offer ways to respect other things; animals, plants and the planet. They often hark back to older beliefs and

earlier wisdoms (possibly even pre-Christian) which have been resurrected and brought up to date. They, in themselves, usually do not demand a particular level of performance; in that you are not damned if you don't and saved if you do. Criteria of involvement is left up to the individual. So one can eat meat, but not smoke, or be a vegetarian (sometimes) and drive a car to a Greenpeace rally. I see all these things as aspects of New Age Spirituality.

However there are always moralists to be found in any area of life and they can always lay "trips" on you, whatever you do. But then is condemning another person for not being Spiritual oneself - as compared with self-righteous? I would always ask how Spiritual they feel when they do this. Tolerance must be included in New Age Spirituality.

Thus one can be spiritual by not smoking, eating nuts not lamb-chops and wanting to save whales - if you do it with consciousness. You are also being spiritual (paradoxically) if you eat meat and respect the animal that gave it's life so that you may enjoy its flesh; if you drive a car with the awareness that you are using up irreplaceable resources and giving others difficulties by the waste products of your actions; or if you use hardwood that comes from trees which are being cut down at quite horrifying rates and you can thank the trees and also subscribe to new plantings. If you do these things with as full a consciousness as you can, then you are being Spiritual - I think. At least, that is what I

try to be, when I am doing these things. And it is hard - living in an imperfect world.

We do live in a very imperfect world. There are and have been horrors perpetuated daily that can make us feel revolted, furious, impotent, frustrated and despairing. How does one, or how do I, maintain a belief that there is something greater than myself; something wondrous and magnificent; something universal and omnipresent; something that has the power to ordain every aspect of life to the last minutest detail?

I face this one very frequently - possibly daily. There are belief systems that can help; affirmations that strengthen; the manifestation of the things that are needed at the moment they are needed; synchronicity of events and people that are important, tranquillity and sometimes guidance that comes in meditational practices. All these help, but they are really only tools that aid and support. They do not address the central core of belief. New Age Spirituality, I believe has at its core the concept that everything matters, absolutely everything.

In that sense, I don't think it is any different from the fundamentals of any major religion. I think that if you substitute "Spirit" for "God", "Allah" or "The Tao", you would find few New Age people who would disagree today. The popularity a few years ago of the 17th century inscription found in a Boston cemetery which got printed

widely as "desiderata" indicates too that there is nothing really new about any of this. The tenets are the same in any religion, basically.

Fundamentally, as most people truly believe, there are minor differences only between the major religions - differences of origin, suitability to the culture and temperament, different forms of worship, perhaps. What might be new; what hopefully is new in New Age Spirituality is the way in which these tenets are applied. There is a new level of tolerance. We are fighting fewer wars between different religious orders. Not much fewer, but some - the creeds tend to be called more political than religious nowadays. Not only is the equality of all the major religions more recognised and that a seeker after truth is worthy of respect be he or she a Muslim, Jew, Baptist, Zoroastrian, Protestant, Catholic, Pagan or whatever, but also that in one's own individual search after truth it may be that one needs to become a Muslim, Jew, Baptist or whatever in order to find that truth for oneself.

I also think that there are new practices being formed. What is happening in the Church of St. James, in Picadilly, London is also "New Age". There is a greater recognition that the Churches have to change to fit the new age as much as anything else. Thus we see sincere efforts on the part of many Church people to interact in meaningful ways in politics, peacemaking and pressure groups (e.g. CND).

I also find that the rejection of many of the old value systems that happened in the 60's and 70's, is now not happening. What is happening is an integration of value systems with different practices. We are beginning to understand that some of the old hierarchical structures don't work so well. Fine. They get changed. There is more of a sense of decisions by consensus and attunement; of meditating on matters of business or finance; of an openness to guidance or help from whatever source; a sense of involvement with things on many levels; and hopefully a sense of purpose wider than just the immediate. Businessmen are looking for things other than just profit. Ethics are creeping back into life.

The scientific constraint of proof which defines our Newtonian universe is beginning to crack a bit and admit the possibility of psi-forces, auras, mental powers and energies as yet unmeasurable. Interestingly also, it is finding such universalities within the structures of the minutest particles and in theories of the formation of the cosmos that New Age scientists find little or no conflict between their work and their spirituality.

Whatever the outer form, one can begin to discern again some of the inner realities. People are more in contact with their Higher Selves. Past life beliefs and reincarnation theories are not held in so much conflict with traditional views of our present existences. There is an openness to wider views. All this is New Age Spirituality - as I

see it. This is my definition, I suppose, of Spiritual Practice or "How I Relate to God".

I am incredibly lucky. I have 4 beautiful children. I have a number of good friends. I do work I enjoy. I have sufficient for my needs. I give thanks for all these to God - and in so doing I acknowledge them, myself and God. Also I live in a very beautiful place. The energy of the natural world is very strong here. I missed that living in a city. One cannot really appreciate the wondrous beauty of nature and not acknowledge the presence of God.

It takes some courage to give up the city, the fast life, the ideas of success and failure, the 'reality of our modern world' a little in order to find something more alive, more meaningful and less tangible. It may not be necessary and I wouldn't say that the Spiritual Path is always one of sacrifice. However for me, it was and is hard. It affected my work, my livelihood and my career. However I found something else that I had felt was missing, which was how to combine work (as a psychotherapist) and spirituality. Obviously I am helping others in their personal growth and thus on their path. But how to do it in a real, moment-to-moment way?

Within my practice of psychotherapy, I find that, as I listen to my clients, I begin to get more and more a sense of where they really are and who they really are. This is not a sympathy, more an empathy. In the same way that one tuning fork will vibrate in

empathy with another, I begin to resonate with them in some way. When this happens; when I am really beginning to resonate with the other person in the room; then something really starts to happen. Not only do they feel that there is someone else there with them that understands a little of how they feel; which is sometimes all that they really need: not only does this happen, but something else happens too.

At this point, where there are two people in a room in a sort of harmony with each other, something else seems to enter into that space. The session takes off. The course of the therapy changes radically. The depth increases dramatically. I believe that this something that comes in is Spirit. It is somehow also then much easier to bring Spirit, past lives, Higher Self, etc into the content of the session - where relevant. The topic follows the experience. This is the way that I try to bring God into my work.

I am involved deeply with people and with growth and change. The more I get in touch with the people around me, with my deeper emotions and with my body - either getting my hands in the soil or by going sailing in the bay - the more I am in touch with my spiritual side - whether I choose to acknowledge it or not. Spirit is there. I don't really have to try; it is one integrated package - real life and spirit, God and nature, growth and spirituality. Trying to transcend the physical in order to find the spiritual is (for me) a lot of baloney. I was asked recently,

"What made my heart sing?" Well, I can tell you that when it does, I write poetry. I have written quite a lot these last few years. I think this is true of all creativity. One has to be in touch with the spiritual side of oneself in order to create. Sometimes this is very painful, at others it is fulfilling like nothing else.

There is also for me a discipline in Spirituality that I am beginning to learn. It is not an externally imposed one, but an internal one. When I meditate -and get something; when I ask and receive; when I pray and there is an answer; then I must acknowledge that, having made contact with the aspect of God within myself, I need not only to recognise and acknowledge that, but also follow its guidance. I must act. Oh - I have a choice of course. But if I do not follow that guidance, then something doesn't really make sense and all this is just words. It is hollow. If I act, then I commit myself to my God, follow the Word of God and make myself an instrument of his or her Will. It sounds so simple - and is so incredibly hard, but seems to be the name of the game and the only game in town.

So here is the crunch. I eventually - as maybe we all do - have to define what I mean by God. So - I define God as that part of me, within myself, that is in contact with all other living things and beings everywhere and from which I get my inspiration, my love and my strength - and everything else of worth. It is a very personal definition with a very personal aspect and I believe there is another side to God that is much more universal. I can sense it. I relate to it. I see it in Nature and in other people when they share their truth. I don't really have the words for it though. So I would like to end with a quotation. Hildevert de Lavardin, in 1125, wrote this when he tried to define God. I think it still applies today and I think it also relates to New Age Spirituality - how not!

"God is Over all things,  
Under all things;  
Outside all;  
Within, but not enclosed;  
Without, but not excluded;  
Above, but not raised up;  
Below, but not depressed;  
Wholly above, presiding;  
Wholly without, Embracing;  
Wholly within, Filling."

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