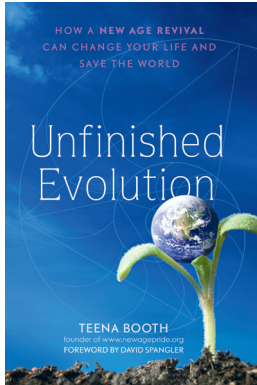


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New Age in a Nutshell (page 13)

What is the New Age? Rarely has a question caused such head-scratching confusion and voluminous guesswork among social observers. Go back through hundreds of magazine and journal articles, dozens of books, encyclopedia entries, and who-knows-how-many Web site posts – and you’ll never find the New Age defined the same way twice.

Well, here’s my definition, short and sweet:

The New Age is the most recent social expression of the Perennial Philosophy -- the philosophy of idealism -- which says that One Spirit is the essence of all reality.

That’s it. Each New Ager works out the details of “All is One Spirit“ in different ways. Still, that’s pretty much it – the New Age in a nutshell...

Beneath the surface flash of the New Age, beneath all the faddish practices and commercial pitches, the basic principle of “All is One Spirit” holds the whole movement together. This principle is what connects one New Age seeker to the other, from the physicist who sees Zen principles reflected in the behavior of subatomic particles, to the psychic who finds wisdom in her Tarot cards.

In other words, the New Age is a movement fueled by a philosophy -- a working hypothesis about what is real, and what that reality makes possible in our lives.

Windows on the world (page 21)

By most accounts, there are three primary ways of looking at the world -- the dualistic way represented by Western religions, the materialistic way represented by science, and the idealistic way represented by Hinduism and Buddhism in the East, and by Plato and his intellectual descendents in the West. For the longest while I believed it was all a matter of choice -- that we could pick whatever we liked -- and that all points of view were equally valid.

Today, I better understand that how we see the world is not exactly a matter of choice. I understand that each person’s worldview is inevitably shaped by where that person is in the process of his or her spiritual development, which in turn is inevitably shaped by the genetic chemistry and the cultural wiring of that person’s brain. This understanding was a

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huge revelation to me—a much-needed revelation that cleared up my confusion over how people can believe so differently, and how we get stuck in place.

We Are Invisible (page 63)

Here we are, with a huge slice of the population sharing a similar spiritual idealism. Such numbers should give us an enormous impact on our culture, our institutions, our politics, our future. But even a cursory glance at society will tell you that while some of our ideas have trickled into the mainstream, real impact has been slight. Clearly, our choice to avoid labels comes at a huge price...

How can we bring idealistic values into our collective way of life if we do not identify ourselves, don't identify who are and what we believe and what we want? How can we challenge the status quo, let alone transform it, if we are floating along in quiet ambiguity? The answer is: We can't.

Because we choose not to be counted as a particular something, we literally do not count. And by default, all our desires, our dreams, our hopes -- our agenda for a better society -- they do not count either. As bestselling author Marianne Williamson acknowledged in an interview posted online, the "huge cultural revolution in this country... remains unnamed and therefore pretty much invisible to the old order."

Perhaps the most debilitating consequence of invisibility is that it prevents our idealism from catching on... Spirituality without a name, however vibrantly it lives in our own hearts, becomes anemic within the larger society and unable to sustain growth. Without a common identity we have no common ideas or vocabulary to express our convictions to others, and we cannot help others to grow in similar ways. We leave those who are dissatisfied with the old paradigm with nowhere to go except to sift through the hodgepodge of subjects that make up generic, noncommittal spirituality.

What happened to the New Age? (page 75)

People who believe themselves to be the center of the universe, people who believe "all I need is me," no longer care about being part of something bigger, and they certainly don't need a movement. And so, drunk on our own self-importance (or blissed out on the non-importance of anything), we New Agers abandoned ship, abandoned the vehicle we had once expected to help us create a better world. We leapt overboard into the warm waters of me-ness and struck off on our own, each of us in a different direction.

Sadly, in the process, we also abandoned each other, and more or less left society to rot. In a world where I do my thing and you do your thing, there are precious few doing "our" thing. Instead of working together for the growth and good of all, we have found ourselves completely isolated from each other, trapped inside our own heads, with no obligation to do anything but follow our own "truth."

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Individualism (page 78)

The older we are, the stronger our individualism, and the more likely we feel justified in the choice to abandon our collective ship. The older we are, the more we feel we have earned the right to do as we please (which of course we have), and the more difficult to rouse ourselves from the comfortable cocoon of narcissism to accept the social consequences of our actions. This is true not only in an abstract sense, but in the concrete sense of how the brain is neurally imprinted with habits of thought over time. In older brains, the neural pathways of individualism are thick and strong and hard to rewire.

Younger idealists with neural pathways still forming are less likely to be hard stuck in their individualism. They are also more likely to notice that we are stranded, isolated, miles away from shore. But young or old, all of us are surely becoming more aware that the future is in jeopardy. All of us long to get to a better place.

The care and feeding of complacency (page 82)

On the cover of *Time* this week, (3 Apr 2006) is a special report on global warming, “Be Worried. Be VERY Worried,” says the cover with the polar bear stranded on melting ice.

“Look on this picture and weep over it!” wrote Thomas Paine in the darkest days of the revolution. Is anyone today weeping? Is anyone really worried?

I am worried. I wring my hands, ask myself what I can do. The one thing I know how to do is write. I have spent months writing pages for the Web site and now feel foolish for overkill. I fear I’ll numb people’s minds with my slew of words.

But what else do you do in an emergency? You scream and yell for help. As Thomas Paine also wrote: “There are cases which cannot be overdone by language, and this is one.”

I don’t know how else to say it but in these stark words, Please help, please join me, please let’s do something, please let’s take the next step, please let’s combine our strength, please let’s move this crazily tilting planet toward sanity.

The source of the problem (page 95)

It is difficult – and painful -- to accept that we idealists, full of love and good intentions and goodwill toward all, can be source of the problem. It seems much more logical to blame the state of the world on *them*, the unaware hordes with all their unenlightened policies. But we cannot force others to see differently, or make them grow any faster than they can grow. And if we shift the responsibility of generating change to *them*, then we make ourselves helpless.

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“Without the capacity to see ourselves as the cause, our efforts become either coercive or wishfully dependent on the transformation of others,” Peter Block writes. “Taking responsibility for one’s own part in creating the present situation is the critical act of courage and engagement, which is the axis around which the future rotates.”

We are the ones who have to change, *we* are the ones that have to choose differently, *we* are the ones that have to construct the new paradigm. The future has always depended on *us*, not on them.

Chicken Little (page 97)

In writing words like these -- The world is at risk! – I realize I’m taking on the role of Chicken Little, lamenting the falling sky to people who have heard it all a thousand times. We have been exposed to similar words of alarm over and over and over again since the dawn of the atomic age. News of our impending extinction is now positively dull and mundane, with no power to move us.

Even if we do understand the dire nature of the situation, it still near impossible to rouse ourselves to action. The usual analogy to insert here is of those idiot frogs, slowly being cooked to death in that pan of heating water, when they are perfectly capable of jumping out. But that analogy has become mundane, too.

Turning It Around (page 104)

We idealists may have unintentionally wandered off toward irrelevance, but we can turn around and head back to the empowering fold of community and take up our important world-saving mission at any time.

Yes, it is important to understand the drawbacks of labels, how they can limit and reduce, and how the ego often craves them for its own purposes. And it is certainly true that the need to belong to a group is often based in ego. But far more egoic is the idea that we are too unique to belong to any group at all.

Our decision to reject the New Age emblem -- an emblem with the potential to unify and galvanize us as a community and move us up the spiral of development-- has proven to be terribly shortsighted. The further we have drifted away from a common identity, the greater we have drifted into fragmentation and narcissism.

The Role of Seeker (page 108)

New Agers tend to refuse labels and prefer to describe themselves in terms of being a “seeker.” Yet few stop to understand how playing the role of seeker devastates community, and undermines all our hopes for an alternative future. After all, a seeker is little more than a tourist, just passing through, picking up knick knacks and souvenirs

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along the way. Playing the seeker conveniently absolves us of accountability, makes it easy to avoid responsibility for anything going on. It allows us to move unresisting through the gears of the old paradigm, and leaves us unchallenged to help create something new and better. And of course, it leaves the ego unscathed.

If we truly want to get our egos out of our way, and be able to work together to create a better world, we have to move beyond seeking, and start finding. “The New Age is about self-discovery,” writes David Spangler. “But it is also about self-definition and incarnation. It is about making choices, setting boundaries, defining limits.”

The right identity (page 109)

If we truly want to help create a new age of harmony, we need to surrender the individual ego to a collective identity -- an identity that encourages accountability even as it remains open to possibility. An identity specific enough to serve as a cohesive force for community, yet flexible enough to accommodate different beliefs and practices. An identity that will soothe the isolation of individuality without stealing away its freedoms. An identity that allows us to find a balance between solitude and society, self and other, ego and soul.

The only identity I know that meets all these needs is the New Age identity. It takes the best from old wisdom traditions and from new scientific insights and combines them in a spirit-based philosophy that fully addresses all aspects of ourselves – body, mind and spirit.

It also offers the most integrated philosophy, and most inclusive identity, to be found on the planet. It is the only identity I know that allows one to be a Zen Pagan Christian, or a Kabbalah-studying Taoist, or a yoga-practicing bohemian, and makes it possible for all of them to relate to each other. Like a masterpiece of music which allows all manner of instruments to play a wide range of notes in harmony, the New Age supports the great range of beliefs which rise from the core principles of the perennial philosophy.

The New Age Brand (page 113)

The definition of a brand is this: “A collection of experiences and associations connected with a particular entity.” New Age beliefs and ideals have already been branded by the culture. Today, it is a widely misunderstood, widely mocked brand that has become a liability whenever we communicate our beliefs in the context of the mainstream.

Most spiritual idealists today try to distance themselves from the New Age brand, as if it has nothing to do with them. But the reality is, popular culture is a perpetual

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motion machine that labels and brands us regardless of our approval or disapproval. Instead of trying to run away from an inevitable branding process, why not turn around and embrace it and do something positive with it?

A good brand is an asset, not a liability, and can open the doors to untold opportunities. Instead of abandoning the creation of the New Age brand to those who don't understand it, we should take ownership of it and create a brand that better communicates, better inspires, and better transforms.

The Story of Creation (page 163)

From the smallest atom to the largest galaxies, all parts of the universe have conspired together for the purpose of creating self-conscious life. Yet this purposeful universe is also inconceivably vast, and we who inhabit this small corner of it can feel lost and insignificant. Many times I have wondered how I, one person out of billions, living on one planet out of billions, can be important.

But I have also read the words of the wisest of men, and I have listened well. In the beginning, God stretched himself across fiery new space so that I might have life. How do I know this to be true? Because I am here. The telos of being is always here in this moment, and all that exists in this moment is the purpose of all that has ever existed. Each of us is backed by all of creation.

My life, your life, all life, was brought forth from within God for the purpose of his own self-discovery. I live to learn who I am so that God may know who he is. I live to experience the infinite possibilities of existence so that God may experience his own existence. I am here to learn, to experience being, and everything I think and feel and do adds another brushstroke of color to God's self-portrait.

And because I am a one-of-a-kind instrument of God's self-awareness, my one small life is immeasurably significant. "Even if this were only the relationship of a drop of water to the sea," wrote Carl Jung, "that sea would not exist but for the multitude of drops."

The Opportune Moment (page 313)

I have been working on these pages for months, years, reading everything I can find about the New Age movement and its dramatic rise and fall in our culture. I have studied its philosophy, its meaning, and its promise as a vehicle for transformation. And now that I am resting my case, I cannot help but wonder -- how practical is this effort?

Have I been toiling on a pipe dream, or is revival a real possibility?

On one hand, it will be a tremendous uphill battle to rekindle a movement that many assume to be extinct. Sometimes I feel that trying to talk people into bringing the

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New Age back is no more sensible than trying to get one of my favorite TV shows back on the air. The kids on the Brady Bunch are all grown up and have moved on, as well they should.

On the other hand, rekindling the movement could be far easier than we might expect. After all, the idealistic movement formerly known as the New Age did not really die. There are still just as many idealists in the world going quietly about their lives, working to live up to their ideals. We merely stopped calling the movement the New Age and, without a name for it, stopped thinking about it as a collective force at all. But the movement is still all around us, burgeoning with potential.

William Irwin Thompson suggested that even though the New Age has “desiccated,” there is every reason to believe that, like a tightly-packed spore that goes underground for the winter, it will make itself known again. Even when there is no aboveground evidence that there is anything there, he writes, as soon as a new opportune moment arrives, then wham! The hidden and underground mushrooms will spring up everywhere, and we will again have the opportunity to be part of a movement that will change lives and save the world.