

# The roots of the NEW AGE

## PART ONE

The *New Age* movement is hardly novel! Its philosophy is rooted in ancient traditions, often based on mystical experiences, each within a different context.



Anthropologically, there have always been (wo)men within "primitive" societies who were looked upon as possessing special knowledge and power. Medicine men, or shamans, had undergone a spontaneous catharsis, or were initiated and felt called upon to maintain contact with the spirit world for the clan.

When communities became more complex and organized there was little place for these loners. Society began to specialize, people realized and felt drawn to form groups, guilds, or societies, to ensure continuance and growing perfection. Contact with the spirit world was given into the hands of organized religion, which also provided an established answer to questions about the unknown and the Highest Power.

People who felt endowed with special powers could hardly adapt themselves to the corset of established faith. They went underground. Yet they endeavoured to contact kindred spirits and pupils willing to follow in their footsteps to pass on the work.

Esoteric tradition became handed down in spiritual groups, communes, or fraternities. Their mutual devotion resulted in a high degree of perfection comparable to the guilds of craftsmen. In their mystical experiences they beheld a spiritual reality that could hardly be reconciled with the dogmatic representation given by the churches. When passing on their experiences, they had to exercise extreme caution, lest being accused of heresy. Yet knowledgeable minds would understand their veiled writings, symbolic representations, or even gestures.

In spite of all hindrances and opposition, hidden (occult) spiritual tradition reached unknown shores! One of them being Europe, where interest in ancient traditions was revived at various times.

Interest in these traditions alternated. After periods of decline, often as a result of cultural and political conditions, a growing need for revival of old almost forgotten values followed. The occult tradition seems so tremendously powerful that it cannot be suppressed. It develops in cycles of flourishing and decline - each renaissance with a fresh approach, adapted to the spirit of the times.

Renewed interest in these spiritual, religious and magical traditions had a tremendous impact on the minds of man. The latest revival in a popularized form is that of the **New Age** movement in the late sixties.

The following is a brief sketch of its origins, divided in the following chapters:

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### **Grecian mysteries and philosophy / Christianity**

The 7th to 5th centuries B.C. are characterized by a remarkable global birth of religio-philosophical ways of thought of astounding profoundness: Lao-tse and Kung-Fu-tse (Confucius) in China, Buddha and Mahavira in India, Zarathustra in Persia, the prophets in Palestine and the philosophers of Greece. An attempt was undertaken by all these great sages to transcend the old myths and superstitions of their time and present an in-depth approach. An abstract, mystical way of seeing and experiencing reality was being paved.

Some of these wisdom traditions became embodied in Greek culture. Western European man learnt of their world of thought through contacts with the Middle East and in particular Latin translations of Greek philosophical works. The Greeks set them also on the trail of Egyptian culture and religion. Knowledge about this great civilisation came to the Occident indirectly however in its Greek version. Actual contact with Egypt did not exist.

The Greeks, in their syncretistic turn of mind, absorbed in their philosophy the essence of religious traditions that reached them from other cultures through trade or wars. Egyptian initiation rites, Thracian orphic mysteries and other ritual and cult practices were amongst the many that were adopted readily.

God Hermes Trismegistus(=thrice great) was considered by them to be identical with the ancient Egyptian God of wisdom *Thoth*. Modern research has shown, however, that the Egyptian magical and mystical works attributed to Hermes were written in the second and third centuries A.D. These ideas became known as the *Hermetic philosophy*. Its most important work is the [Corpus Hermeticum](#), a compilation of fifteen texts on astrology, alchemy, theosophy and theurgy.

### **The Christian myth**

Of the mystery school traditions Christianity had the most impact on the West. The originally pure Jewish sect would have gone into oblivion after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and most of its inhabitants in 70 AD were it not that it had struck root in adapted form in Jewish and Gentile communities in diaspora.

On the basis of the few documents that have survived from later centuries scholars take it that a myth struck root around the Jewish wisdom teacher Joshua (in Greek Jesus). The Christianity that became of it had absorbed popular pagan religious beliefs. The qualities attributed to Jesus are a reflection of those of the gods revered at the time. Godman Osiris-Dionysus for instance, was considered a Son of God and was born to a virgin on the 25th of December before three shepherds.

### **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism originated in Egypt. The neo-platonic Gnostic school of Alexandria became its centre in the first century A.D. From it sprung Christian, Gentile and Jewish gnosticism. The latter survived in the Jewish Kabbalah.

The various *Gnostic* sects played an important part in early Christianity and the formation of the gospels. Their influence and tradition were suppressed when the Jesus myth had struck root. Faith became fused with the ruling power when emperor Constantine made Christianity a state religion in the 4th century A.D. and placed himself virtually at its head.

Gnosticism remained a source of inspiration, however, for the few who knew of its ideas, which were kept secret. At the centre was the belief that the seen and unseen world is the manifestation of the One Divine Being. Gnostic texts concern the fall of man from the divine to the material world. The spark of divine light imprisoned in man is to be set free so that it may return to the Kingdom of God. *Gnosis*, intuitive knowledge, is said to rank over analytical knowledge. It was to be obtained by various initiations. Use of hallucinogens may have played a part in obtaining mystical experiences.

Gnosticism influenced many heretical West-European sects, such as the *Kathars* in the Middle Ages, who were fiercely persecuted, and mystics as *Jacob Boehme* (1575-1624).

In the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. Baghdad had become the great intellectual centre of Arabic studies. Scientific and philosophical books were disseminated through the Moorish emirate of Cordoba, Spain. The universities of Granada and Saragossa made translations available of the great Greek classical works from Arabic into Latin.

### **Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah**

Another tradition that reached the Occident was that of Jewish mysticism. Their esoteric doctrine the 'Kabbalah' (meaning: tradition) appeared in Jewish mystic circles in Spain and Southern France in the 12th century. Its oldest part, the *Sefer Jetsira*, was written between the third and sixth century.

According to this belief God gave a second revelation to Moses together with the Law. It explained the secret meaning of the Law. This revelation is said to have been passed on down the ages by initiates. Kabbalistic studies in the Hebrew scriptures developed in a theosophical mystique and sometimes in a sort of unintended religious magic.

Shortly before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 Pico della Mirandola in Florence conceived a Christian version of the Kabbalah. He associated the Kabbalistic truths with those of Greek Hermeticism. Thus an amalgamy was introduced between the tradition attributed to the Greek Hermes Trismegistus and Jewish mysticism purportedly descending from Moses.

## Alchemy

The name 'alchemy' is derived from the Arabic *el-kimya*, Khem being the name for Egypt where it was practised even before the Christian era. It blended with the magic and mysticism of the legendary Greek Hermes Trismegistos which became known as the *Hermetic philosophy*.

In the fourth century A.D. alchemy evolved to its historical form. Its tradition reached Europe through Muslim alchemists in Spain in the twelfth century.



Mediaeval *Alchemy* contained Gnostic elements. In its popularized form it is considered the art of mutation of metals. Yet, it went deeper than that. It issued from the assumption that matter is alive and may grow. With the right rituals matter could be influenced to transmute into higher forms.

Under the cover of semi-scientific experiments its practitioners followed a secret tradition. Thus, in its mystical sense alchemy was not a search for the *philosopher's stone*, the transmutation of metals into gold. Its deeper aspect was the search for purification of the soul, the mystical transmutation of the mind necessary for obtaining direct divine knowledge.

There were genuine and false alchemists in medieval times. Amongst them were noblemen and common people, clergymen and laymen, Jews and Christians, scientists and simple artisans, philosophers and illiterates, doctors and magicians, in short from all classes of society. They wandered through Europe from one place to another. They felt themselves cosmopolitans and as such held close relationships with one another. They had their secret societies, with signs and passwords. It was an oral tradition principally, from ear to ear - mouth to mouth.

All that was written down was disguised in order to give the impression that it concerned chemical experiments only.

In spite of their being persecuted more and more they kept practising their art secretly. Nevertheless their ideas had an indirect influence on society.

One of the leading exponents of alchemy became the Swiss Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, called **Paracelsus** (1493-1541). Isaac Newton, at the risk of ending his life at the stake, conducted the greater part of his life in alchemical experiments.

## The Renaissance

The Renaissance movement of the 15th and 16th centuries was born out of a disenchantment with the Mediaeval philosophical and theological way of thinking. A return to the source of knowledge of the distant past was being advocated.

Although the Renaissance movement is usually known for its influence on art and literature, in recent years it is realized that it was also accompanied by a renewed interest in the study of old occult Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions.

Around 1450 a Platonic Academy was founded in Florence. In 1471 a Latin translation of the recently rediscovered Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* (see above) appeared. The translation aroused renewed interest in the Hermetic philosophy of the Greeks and went through many editions



Paracelsus



*Illustration from "Theosophica Practica" by 17th century mystic Johann Georg Gichtel, showing seven chakras*

The magical mystery religion of ancient Egypt, being the oldest civilisation one had any knowledge of, exercised a great fascination over the Renaissance men. The mysterious hieroglyphs were considered to be symbols of hidden knowledge revealed by God to men that could not be passed on in words. Symbols and gestures became means of conveying truths and values. The cosmos was seen as an organic unity. It was peopled by a hierarchy of spirits which exercised all kinds of influences and sympathies. The practice of magic became a holy quest, a search for knowledge, not through the intellect, but by revelation to the pure in mind.

## Freemasonry

The influence of the fresh interest in wisdom traditions in the wake of the Italian Renaissance movement also found its expression in Freemasonry, which became organised in lodges around 1600 in Scotland.

Modern Freemasonry springs from the Medieval stonemasons who wandered from one town to the other looking for assignments to build a church, or even a cathedral, which required enormous skill, intellectual and organizational talents. Guilds were set up in order to guard the secrets of their craft.

The prestige of the architects, whose edifices were an object of great admiration, was high. Being a member of the guild was considered a privilege and had to be earned. Members recognized each other not only by passwords, but also by their devotion and philosophy which was laid down in the so called *Old Charges*. The earliest version of this credo of the Freemasons, dates back to 1400. Later versions circulated in the 16th century.

The Old Charges embody the Hermetic quest for the lost wisdom of the ancients. The Freemasons placed emphasis on morality and the study of geometry. Ancient Egyptian knowledge and the masters behind the great architectural design of the lost Temple of biblical king Solomon were in high esteem and a source of inspiration for the development of masonic creativity. Master mason Hiram of this temple, murdered because he would not reveal masonic secrets, was a source of inspiration.

Masons felt also akin to the revered building guilds of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The amazing architectural skill of the ancient builders was attributed to supernatural powers. With great devotion their treatises on geometry and mathematics were being studied when they became available.

These craftsmen belonged to the "operative" side of Freemasonry. Later members of the upper classes were admitted as well to Masonic lodges. Their pursuit of occult and spiritual sciences may have been responsible for the development of a "speculative" side.

The aspiration of Freemasons for more freedom of thought, political and religious reform, made it paramount that the activities were conducted in utmost secrecy. Eventually the "operative" elements would disappear.

In Scotland *William Schaw* (1550 - 1602) is considered to be the brain behind the re-organisation of the mason guild. In Great Britain *Elias Ahmole* (1617-1692) was the forerunner. In the diary of this astrologer is a record of his initiation in 1646 into Freemasonry, which already counted many members then, none of them being stonemason by profession by that time.

### The Rosicrucians

Associated with these traditions is the *Rosicrucian movement* which appeared in the seventeenth century. They should not be mistaken for the modern Rosicrucian groups, which have no direct connection with the ancient movement.



At the basis of their emergence is the publication in 1614 of a pamphlet, named *Fama (see image)* (of the Fraternity of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross) addressed to the learned in general and the governors of Europe. Its author is presumably Johann Valentin Andraea (1586-1654), a young German Lutheran pastor. It purported to be a message from certain adepts concerned for the condition of mankind. In truth it is thought that its source was a brotherhood of disappointed Lutherans who were not satisfied with the results of hundred years of Reformation.

In the *Fama* it was proposed that all learned men throughout the world should join forces towards the establishment of a synthesis of science. Behind this effort stood allegedly an illuminated brotherhood - the children of light, who had been initiated in the mysteries of the Grand Order. This "Brüderschaft der Theosophen" was said to be founded by Christian Rosencreutz (1378-1484), who had become an initiate during his travels in the Middle East in the fifteenth

century. He founded a brotherhood which was supposed to have operated in secret ever since.

The pamphlets of the Order of the Rosy Cross were probably inspired by Hermetic and NeoPlatonic scriptures which circulated at the time. *The Faerie Queene* of Neoplatonist Edmund Spenser, and published in 1590 concerns an English knight 'Red Cross'. The Rosicrucian philosophy also contained elements found in freemasonry and alchemistic writings such as the conception: "As above, so below" - signifying that man mirrors the whole universe. Other ideas are reminiscent of those of the great alchemist *Paracelsus (see photo)*

The Rosicrucian manifesto created quite a stir in European circles. Although many applied for initiation there are no records of the brotherhood having survived long. By 1623 the German Rosicrucian movement was crushed under the weight of the Counter-Reformation led by the Jesuits. The occult Renaissance had come to an end. The tide of witch-hunts had begun.

### *The Age of Enlightenment*

The grip of fundamentalist Christianity weakened in the course of the following decades. The weltanschauung of European man was ever broadening out. The world seas were being explored and contact made with other cultures. The increasing population in an expanding and more demanding society called for inventive skills. European civilization struck root. Man of genius contributed to its culture. Exploring nature with an intelligent mind became a coveted pursuit. Anna Maria Schuurman (1607 - 1678) became the first woman to be accepted as an academic. A new kind of philosophy emerged, distinct from the Christian world-view of medieval theologians.

The Age of Enlightenment can be said to have begun in 1687 by the publication of Isaac Newton's; *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural philosophy). It was the basis of exploring nature in an objective manner. The best minds dedicated themselves to this critical pursuit: Galilei, Robert Boyle, René Descartes, Francis

Bacon. Diderot began publishing instalments of his famous *Encyclopédie* in 1751. Alchemy was still considered a scientific pursuit and is being described in the encyclopedia in quite favourable terms.

The idea of freedom of thought emerged. Holland attracted many persecuted Jewish, Huguenot and other refugees for its liberal religious views. Spinoza in Amsterdam contributed to biblical scholarship. For the first time critical notes were placed behind biblical texts. Stripping the Bible of its holy mystery had become common place by the 18th century. Critical deism attacked and downgraded conventional Christianity. Voltaire, Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are rated among the deists.

The esoteric tradition had less to fear now.

### Mesmerism and the French Revolution

Towards the end of the eighteenth century new scientific discoveries and inventions had captured the public's mind. Specifically experiments with electricity gave fuel to the most amazing and weird theories involving fluidum, ether or phlogiston to explain its wonderful properties. It is nowadays generally hushed up that the great minds of that era, like Newton, believed in heretical notions that would nowadays relegate a scientist to oblivion by the academic community.



*Mesmer hypnotizes somnabule*

In the eighties of the 18th century an Austrian spirit healer, Franz Anton **Mesmer** (1733-1815), exerted an enormous influence on the beau monde as well the general public of France. Ten years before the outbreak of the French revolution his ideas captured the imagination. He attributed his healing power to manipulating a fluidum: *animal magnetism*. He worked with trance-induced states on subjects called *somnambules*.

His occultism became generally accepted, except for the members of the scientific community with whom he always was at war.

Other occult brotherhoods like Freemasonry, Rosicrucians, Kabbalists, Swedenborgians and alchemists thrived, as did spiritualism. The healing aspect receded in the background, communication with spirits of the deceased, work with magical symbols and building a new vision of reality came in its place.

This flight of ideas, its conflict with established order and aristocracy became the breeding ground for the French Revolution. Some of its leaders were once steeped in the world of mesmerism.

# The roots of the NEW AGE

## PART TWO

### The oriental renaissance of the 19th century

The philosophers of the 18th century were disenchanted with the state of civilization they saw around them. Praise of another culture became popular. China was one of them. *Chinoiserie* appeared on furniture and porcelain. Operas and plays had Chinese themes. Some even considered the wisdom of Confucius superior to the tenets of Christianity.

The fascination with the Orient reached its peak during **Romanticism** (1790-1815). Western scholars had begun to study Sanskrit in the 17th century. But it was not until the 19th century that translations of Indian scriptures became available in the West.

French scholars took the lead. Along with Sanskrit (1785) other languages were deciphered: Pahlavi in 1793, cuneiforms in 1803, hieroglyphs in 1822, and Avestan in 1832. The path was now paved to the treasures of Eastern thought. Authentic texts of Buddhism were discovered by Hodgson in 1821 while living in Nepal. He obtained 400 Sanskrit and Tibetan volumes. A Pali grammar was published in 1826 by Burnouf and Lassen.

A young Hungarian, Csoma de Koros, went so far as to enter monastic life in Tibet in 1850. Prinsep deciphered inscriptions of the Indian king Ashoka between 1834 and 1837.

The study of Islam and the Far East was well on its way. Authorities in Semitic, Indic and Chinese published its literature. Translations of pre-Islamic writers, Persian poets and mystics, along with Chinese poetry were printed one after the other.

For the first time Oriental religious philosophy became generally accessible. It led to a veritable *Oriental Renaissance*. The philosophy and way of thought contained in the Eastern scriptures astounded the Western cultural elite towards the middle of the 19th century and influenced such philosophers and writers as Schopenhauer, Goethe, Heine, Nietzsche, Shelley, Emerson, Baudelaire and de Balzac.

A greater respect grew for Eastern religions now that their great works appeared in print. In 1785 Wilkins published the *Bhagavad Gita*. Translations of the Rig Veda, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Vishnu Purana and Lotus sutra followed, along with an "Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien" by Burnouf.

The spiritual approach of the re-discovered religions was felt as a relief from the prevalent Christian dogmatism. The idea emerged of the unity behind all religions.

## Spiritualism

In the wake of change of values some spiritual movements gained a fresh following. Mesmerism was to reach its peak in the middle of the nineteenth century. Fluidism and somnambulism were being studied all over Europe. Its healing method through "animal magnetism" and work with trance-induced states was seen as another proof that mind could rule matter. Spirit involvement in healing was implied.

Some of these ideas found their way in the *Christian Science* and *New Thought* movements.

Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910, later known as "the Poughkeepsie seer") became one of the founders of modern Spiritualism in the United States. Like the later Edgar Cayce he could give an accurate diagnosis of a patient's disease whilst under induced "magnetic sleep". A believer in mesmerism he developed a spiritualistic philosophy of his own.

Meanwhile Spiritualism got a fresh impulse. When in 1848 Karl Marx began his "Kommunistisch Manifest" with : "A ghost wanders through Europe", spooks made a stir in Hydesville (N.Y., U.S.A.). Daughters of the Fox family managed to communicate with the spirit of a dead man by means of raps. The press saw to it that these events became nationwide news. [Spiritualism](#) came in the wake of the inventions of the telegraph and telephone that made it possible to send messages over long distances. It was presumed that communication with the dead - nowadays called *channeling* - might be discovered soon. The sensational reports of the Fox family communicating with the dead made holding seances at home a popular pastime.

Even president Lincoln (photo) had contact with mediums and took part in seances. At the European courts the situation was no less different. The spiritualistic movement was under way, claiming millions of believers.



## Theosophy

It was *Madame H.P.Blavatsky* (HPB for insiders) who forged the European esoteric tradition, Spiritualism and the Oriental Renaissance into one coherent system that took on aspects of a religion. She provided it with a secret doctrine, a martyr (herself), a mysterious origin and finally, but not in the least, she gave it the form of a (semi-religious) fraternity. She claimed to have received from Masters of Wisdom a key to the mysteries long kept secret from mankind. This *White Brotherhood* - these pioneers of mankind - were thought to reincarnate at all times to enlighten mankind with their advanced ideals and culture.



*H.P. Blavatsky and her masters Morya,  
Koot Hoomi and Prince Ragoczy*

Thus she presented a remarkable and revolutionary concept of life in the universe. At the same time she gave man a new purpose of living based on Indian religious and philosophical traditions.

In spite of ridicule these ideas and approach made a deep impression on late nineteenth century's society and is still the foundation of the *New Age* movement.

Yet, without her being aware of it, HPB's philosophy was imbued with the spirit of the age. In her system the intellect could unriddle the mysteries of the universe. Her motto "There is no religion higher than truth" was aimed more at intellectual exploration, than intuitive insights gathered through meditation and contemplation as was the case with

mystical theosophy (without capital!) of former ages. In all fairness it should be said that in later years Theosophy stressed the importance of development of intuitive insight through the practice of Eastern disciplines such as Raja yoga and meditation.

Of the original purpose of the *Theosophical Society* when it was founded in 1875, "the study of ancient and modern religions, philosophies and sciences", little remained. Instead it became an exploration of the views of Mme Blavatsky on this subject. These were strengthened to a great extent by her claim that she was guided by Masters. These great men with their extraordinary powers purportedly communicated with her telepathically as well as in "precipitated" letters, which came to her in mysterious ways. At first she received them from the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor in Egypt. Later they came from the White Brotherhood in far away Tibet.

Proof of existence of such Mahatma's, as portrayed by her, has never been found. However, there is a case for acquaintances of HPB, with spiritual qualities less than alleged, having stood model for them. (See "The Masters Revealed", below).

HPB' view of life appears to have been strongly influenced by Maçonic tradition she came in contact with in childhood and from members of lodges, especially in Cairo and Paris before she moved to the U.S.A. The Mahatma Letters have the appearance of psychic communications, and are strongly influenced by her personal circumstances.

This in itself should not detract from their value. After all parts of the Old Testament fall in the same category.

Mme Blavatsky gave mankind a grand vision of the universe as opposed to the corset of the narrow-minded dogmatic outlook of Christianity at the time. It was generally believed then that creation took place some six thousand years ago. She countered by postulating that it was billions of years ago and that mankind lived for millions of years on Earth. She introduced also the concept of a holistic universe. The popularity of present-day ideas of *reincarnation* and *karma* - now household words - can be traced back to her.



*Annie Besant*

At the time that she was hounded by scandalous rumours she found a worthy successor in *Annie Besant* in 1889. A woman of extraordinary talents and a great orator. Historian Arthur Nethercott writes: "During her eighty-five years Annie Besant lived many lives, some of them so incredible that it seems impossible they were lived at all." Besides giving fresh impetus to Theosophy, she was also to give India back its respect for its own culture. She was a powerful force in the campaign for Indian Home Rule before Gandhi and later Nehru took over.

### Krishnamurti

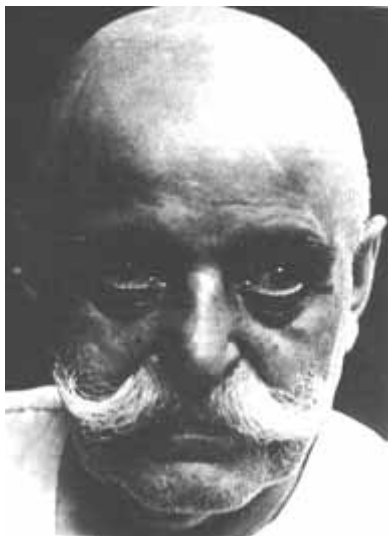
She is also known to have taken care of the education of a very special Indian boy *Jiddu Krishnamurti*. Son of an Indian Theosophist,

Jiddu's gift was discovered by Annie Besant's closest colleague C.W. Leadbeater in 1909. To her dismay after reaching maturity he became to advocate quite a different approach to life than Theosophists did. His disbanding in 1929 the *Order of the Star in the East*, especially founded for him, came as a blow to the Theosophical Movement. It had already been plagued by split-ups. Theosophy became after the thirties a shadow of the former mind-swaying movement. Its role was taken over by others.



*Krishnamurti, Saanen 1967, ©author*

### The Fourth Way



*Gurdjieff*

One of them was founded by *George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff* (photo). The life-history of this spiritual teacher is as much shrouded in mystery as that of Mme. Blavatsky. In fact they had many similarities. It is assumed that he was born in Alexandropol (Repl. of Armenia), around the time that the Theosophical Society was formed in 1875, from a Greek father and an Armenian mother. Gurdjieff claimed that as a young man he had travelled extensively. He had even reached Tibet in 1902, much like HPB. Again some believed that he was a Tsarist agent. In his book *Meetings with Remarkable Men* Gurdjieff describes his quest for Hidden Masters of Wisdom, which took him to Egypt (like HPB) and thence to Central Asia and Northern India.

His later training and teachings were the gist of the instruction he said to have received from various masters in esoteric schools. They are a departure from the

Theosophic tradition. Yet, as most teachings do in order to catch on, they breath the changed spirit of the era.

Gurdjieff's instructions were aimed at the harmonious development of the supposed centres in man. It came at a time that Freud's psychology was being discovered.

When Russian ballet, notably that of *Diaghilev* made a great impact in the West, Gurdjieff introduced his revolutionary form of ballet.

So Gurdjieff's system took advantage of fads and fancies of his lifetime.

A noted Russian author *Peter Damien Ouspensky*, who had departed from Theosophical thought and had explored the time dimension in his book *The Fourth Dimension*, met Gurdjieff in 1912 in Moscow. Gurdjieff was to present his ballet < the of Struggle>there. Ouspensky became impressed immediately by the mysterious figure, but never trusted him completely either.

In *In Search of the Miraculous* Ouspensky gave an account of the unusual training and adventures they went through at the time of the Russian revolution. Finally in 1919 both of them arrived in Europe and settled in France and Great Britain respectively. By that time they had grown apart and initiated their own schools.

Gurdjieff established the *Institute for the Harmonius Development of Man* in chateau du Prieuré des Basses-Loges, France, in 1922. It became notorious for its harsh treatment of followers. This

Gurdjieff considered necessary. He termed it *voluntary conscious suffering*, essential for his devotees, who were still asleep, to wake up to reality.

More of such training centres would follow by rival Gurdjieff followers. One of them being *John G. Bennett* who was to introduce [Subud](#) to the West in 1957.



*Ouspensky*

## **New Age - a rediscovery**

What became known as the New Age movement injected new life into almost forgotten traditions at a time that Christian faith had lost its meaning for the younger generation.

New Age's greatest growth has been in the United States. This is not surprising, as it was based on already existent, but dormant, religious/philosophical movements which had come to a head in the nineteenth century.

As we have seen Oriental religion and the European occult traditions had made a great impact on the intellectual elite of America in the nineteenth century . The second president *John Adams*(1767-1848) is known for his fascination with Oriental thought. He was a voracious reader of the translations of Eastern religious works.

The leaders who stood at the cradle of the birth of the nation were influenced by Masonic, Spiritualistic and Rosicrucian thought. "A New Order of the Age begins" proclaims the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States.

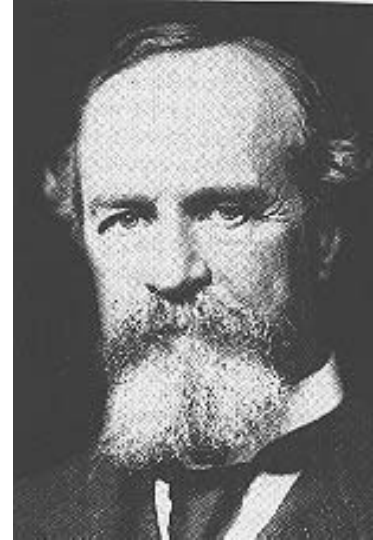


Eight signatories of the Declaration of Independence were Freemasons, amongst whom *Benjamin Franklin* (see image) and *George Washington*, as were sixteen subsequent presidents.

Prominent American writers, who became known as the *Transcendentalists*, were deeply influenced by Eastern thought. *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1803-1882) was one of the great admirers of Oriental religious classics, notably the *Bhagavad Gita*. His secretary, *Henry David Thoreau* wrote *Walden*, a source of inspiration for hippies a century later.

One of the foremost American psychologists of the time *William James* (1842-1910) published in 1902 his pioneering [Varieties of Religious Experience](#), building a bridge between psychology and religion. It has become the cornerstone of scientific study of religion to this day. Prof. James also called for a serious study of paranormal phenomena and played a leading part in the foundation in 1885 of the *American Society for Psychical Research*. /p>

A noteworthy event was the *Parliament of Religions* held in Chicago in 1893. It was the first time that a platform of this kind had been organized. Before an audience of four thousand people leaders of the great religions presented their views on life. One of the results was a greater appreciation for Oriental religions, who were well-represented. *Swami Vivekenanda* expounded inner Hinduism; *Soyen Shaku*, abbot of a Japanese Rinzai monastery: Zen-Buddhism. *Anagarika Dharmapala* established after the congress an American branch of the Maha Bodhi Society, the first Buddhist society in the West.



*William James*

This was merely the beginning of a flow of Eastern teachings and guru's to effect Western thinking.

At the same time the Western esoteric tradition also found a following in new schools, movements and cults. Too numerous to go into here presently.

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New Age was primarily a movement amongst the younger generation in the late sixties that demanded to play a greater part in all aspects of society. Through the use of mind-expanding drugs a greater reality was being unfolded to them that called for other explanations than traditional religion could give. Its concepts of God and Love were too narrow to accommodate the overwhelming experiences they had on their trips. Transcendence, self-realisation, yoga, meditation, all part of existing traditions, were being rediscovered and practised.

Originally it had been given the name: the *Age of Aquarius* to signify the new era of spiritual enfoldment as foretold in *astrology*.

In the early seventies, when the movement was well on its way, the name *New Age* was adopted. Of course it was a term with whiskers on. William Blake schreef al in 1804-08, in zijn voorwoord van Milton: "Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age!"

As might be expected *New Age* unleashed counter-forces from the side of fundamentalist Christian denominations. Especially after Marilyn Ferguson wrote in her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* that the fraternity dedicated to this philosophy constituted a worldwide network. Dedicated persons would recognize each other in a few minutes without secret signs, but merely by a short exchange of ideas. This was seen as a sort of Satanic conspiracy. Especially people who followed so-called occult practices came under suspicion. The orthodox Christian establishment found allies in the equally dogmatic Sceptics and members of CSICOP in their efforts to suppress and misrepresent New Age and occultism in the media.

But in effect it were the Christians who started misrepresenting the life of Jesus. This is the conclusion of some modern biblical scholars. The oldest document of the Jesus tradition that survived is that of the Thomas gospel, part of the Nag Hammadi papers discovered in Egypt in 1945. In it a gnostic Jesus comes forward that has more affinity with the New Age than the fundamentalism of extremist Christianity.

Christians consider the Bible the word of God whereas a little research shows that the oldest 4th century codices we have is the product of countless copying errors, inconsistencies, alterations and invention of fairy tale-like stories, often borrowed from pagan sources, to instill awe in the figure of Jesus who supposedly endorsed their dogmatic views but who may have been a heretic himself. For one thing, the gospels were not written by the apostles. The most important event in Jesus life, the crucifixion, may not even have taken place. It is not mentioned in the oldest first century documents. The later Christians instilled fear in followers with their prediction of the end of the world to come in in their lifetime, started bloody persecution of heretics and Jews. Thus they made a mockery of what their supposed founder taught.

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New Age has not traveled to the end of the road yet. It is reaching a stage of maturity in which wheat is being separated from the corn. Yet, it still comprises a broad spectrum of activities from the commercial rip-off to unselfish dedication to serve mankind spiritually. Many do not wish to be associated with the name because it reminds them of the turbulence associated with the uprising of the younger generation in the late sixties and the lamentable drug excrescences.

One may pray that the movement will sustain its original purity and raise high the spirit of new generations, giving it an immense vista of life and a purpose to live for.

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Meanwhile read on the psychological processes that are at work in spiritual movements by clicking [On the psychology of spiritual movements](#)

[This web-page received the dubious honour of being blocked in Saudi-Arabia!](#)

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**Links:**

- [Wikipedia Encyclopedia: New Age](#)
- [The Christ myth](#)
- [de wortels van de New Age \(Dutch\)](#)
- [BBC 'Beyond Belief' radio discussions about these subjects](#)
- [Historical Jesus Theories](#)
- [The Jesus seminar](#)
- [Alchemy Web site with 40MB of information](#)
- [The old charges of Freemasonry](#)
- [The Mystica encyclopedia](#)
- [Egyptian Antiquity Information](#)
- [The Fourth Way and Esoteric Christianity](#)
- [Internet sacred texts archive](#)
- [New Age \(Dutch\)](#)
- [Who is who in the History of Mysticism](#)
- [Religion detoxification](#)
- [Recording of a direct voice communication purportedly of Annie Besant](#)