

Davis Spangler in the Moment

an interview by Patrick J. Harbula

David Spangler has written and lectured widely on the topic of the “New Age,” its historical roots, its philosophical underpinnings, its strategies of social and planetary service, and its evolving theology. From 1970 to 1973, he served as a Co-Director and spokesperson for the Findhorn Foundation community in northern Scotland, recognized throughout the world for its visionary contribution to the New Age transformational Process.

Patrick Harbula for Meditation Magazine: *You have been a leading spokesman for the New Age for a number of years, suddenly it seems to be the “in thing.” How do you see the movement today, compared to its earlier ideals? Are the current trends just fads, or do they speak with a voice of integrity?*

David Spangler: I have my own sense of what the New Age means. Just because sometimes doesn't happen to fit my image doesn't mean it hasn't any integrity. But the question I ask is “What is the use of idea of the New Age?” I paraphrase Jesus in the New Testament by saying that humanity is not made for the New Age is made for humanity. The basic question I ask myself is “How does the idea enhance or foster our development as a people, as a culture?” If it doesn't, or in the ways it doesn't, then it is just a fad. But, if actually gets us looking more deeply into our own status, our own nature, the direction of our society, the nature of reality, and if it gets us re-examining some of our “big” questions, then I feel that it is a very appropriate and important idea.

I think of the New Age as an idea rather than an event. I think of it as a metaphor for a creative process, an innovative process because it can take a wide number of forms. However, the idea itself originated for a lot of folks as a prophetic vision. That has been true pretty much all through history. The idea of the New Age runs through western history and surfaces every now and again in a recognizable New Age or prophetic movement.

Patrick: *When you say “Western history,” how far back are you considering?*

David: ...To the time of Christ. It can be traced even further than that as a prophetic image.

Patrick: *Then, it is really nothing new?*

David: Not new as an idea. Given that our culture is rooted in Judeo-Christian thought, a key element of that thought is the second coming of Christ and the beginning of the millennium. There is an inter-marriage between the idea of the millennium and the idea of utopia – the creation of a just society. Both of these surface from time to time in the midst of Western culture as an expectation of the imminent emergence of the New Age. In this manner, it is a very traditional image.

One of the ways in which New Age movements begin to take shape is as alternatives to the existing culture. Usually they begin to see themselves as somehow antithetical to the culture---“us” *versus* them.” Sometimes that adversity becomes quite pronounced, expressed in physical violence and warfare. When it reaches that stages, the New Age movement is almost guaranteed to break apart and not really go anywhere, because there is no way it can defeat the existing culture militarily.

Patrick: *The New Age movement today has elements of that.*

David: It does. For people who are genuinely interested in the idea of a New Age, It is important to be those elements and take steps not to become adversarial again.

Patrick: *David, how can we look at the New Age in a more holographic or inclusive way, one that doesn't create that us/them model?*

David: We can look at the New Age in different ways. As a metaphor for a process of personal change and growth, it represents the overcoming of habit and the overcoming of unquestioned, familiar ways of looking at things. If say, "Well, this is the way I have always done things in my life!"- the New Age represents an invitation to re-look at that. I don't have to be adversarial toward my own path to recognize that as I grow and as time change there may be new and better ways of doing things. If I extend that out to my culture, the New Age is a way of taking about the future that again does not have to be antithetical to the past – but recognizes that we are not bound to the past either. At the moment that I become adversarial towards my past, I am accepting that I am bound to it. I'm in effect saying that I have to define my future in a way that frees me from my past. But, there could be many things in my past that are spiritually, psychologically and physically useful.

What I would really like to look at is "What could I do to meet the particular challenges and opportunities that exist now?" My attention needs to be very present-oriented. The New Age appears to be a way of talking about the future. For me, it is really a way of focusing our attention more creativity on the present---"What do I need to see about what is happening? What can I do about what is happening that I might not be seeing because of ingrained habit patterns?"

That is one way of looking at it; another way is that the New Age represents the timely emergence of a recurring theme in human history. That theme is one that anticipates the unfoldment of a sacred world, a world that is characterized by harmony and abundance, in which I am an integral participant. That image has definitely been in western culture and emerged at different times. In more explicit ways, you could say everything we have today in our society is the product of that particular desire to create a utopian world, a sacred world.

People do not go about creating societies that will be deliberately harmful. In some ways they hold a vision that will be good for themselves, the rest of humanity, and for the earth itself. Their vision may turn out to be quite problematical, but their intent was to create a world that worked for people in beneficial ways.

Our western society emerging out of the industrial Revolution had that intent. For all the challenges of the industrial models and the capitalist model, it really developed as a way of harnessing individual creativity to produce a world of abundance for people. In the past two or three hundred years we have come to recognize the shortcomings, but the shortcomings were due to a lack of knowledge- we didn't have what Gregory Bateson calls "systemic thinking," the ability to think in terms of the whole.

The desire to create a sacred world is still very much alive. Its resurfaces when we come to a point at which we recognize that the world we are creating isn't as sacred as we thought it would be. Then we have to take stock and re-look at things. That can come about both because we encountered problems that arise out of the way we are doing things and because we encountered new information that opens up a new understanding of how the world works. Both of those things are happening today. The New Age in that sense is a re-affirmation of a very basic human impulse to choose to be in our world in a way that helps its work more positively and beneficially for everybody involved.

Patrick: *As we speak, I am wondering what creates the us/them separation. Is it that some people (they) do not recognize that what the world has been doing isn't "working" completely, yet other people (we) recognize that as a "fact." "We" say, "These people are not New Age." What creates that separation?*

David: there are a lot of dynamics going on. The us/them split is not necessarily associated with the New Age, as much as with how we identify ourselves. I think one of the thresholds we are trying to cross at the moment – in board sense, rather than just individually - is to understand the manner in which we are part of a whole system. That understanding, in one way, goes against the grain of what has been a general trend in western thought for some time – the development of the self-sufficient individuals. One of the ways we develop our individuality is by draw boundaries a very positive attributes but, when over-used, gets us into problems.

I have observed first hand that a lot of people see the New Age idea not so much in its own terms but as a way of identifying themselves:” I’m a Democrat, I’m a Republican, I’m a New Ager.” The moment they do that, they run very close to the line of saying,” I’m a New Ager and you are not.” Part of the rationale for doing that is not so much to put “you” down as it is to identify a personal circle of safety and security: “This is what I am, I am a New Ager.” In this process they forget the very essence – for me at any rate – of what the New Age stands for, not anti-individualism, but rather the ability to extend our individuality outward into a more inter connective state, to go beyond those boundaries that we draw in order to separate ourselves from the word. In that sense, if I say , “I am a New Ager and you are nor,” I have ceased begin a New Ager.

In our culture, we are surrounded by all kinds of cultural voices that invite us to be adversarial. It is a habit of our thinking. A lot of the mechanisms of our culture are adversarial. They very foundations of our government are adversarial – congress *versus* the president *versus* Supreme Court: the entire system of checks and balance was set up because it was felt that kind of adversariality would preserve a greater freedom.

Patrick: *Exactly, it seems to be based on a lack of trust.*

David: For us, it is a natural thought pattern to fall into. it is definitely one of the issues that we are troubled with in our world. We see so many different factions, each of which wants to be the whole. We need to learn that the movement to towards wholeness does not come at the expense of any other faction. It comes through inclusivity.

Patrick: *I am recognizing that the seed for wanting change and the desired to have a better world exists in every one of us.*

David: That’s absolutely right. It is a paradox that we must go beyond our own self-identification in order to build a larger identification and see the world as a wholeness.

Patrick: *Then, the idea of individuality does not have to be discarded in process of doing that?*

David: I don’t think we can go to the larger state of wholeness except through the lens of each person’s unique contribution. It is really the model for a dynamic ecology in which everything that is part of that ecology is learning how to be symbiotic with everything else.

Patrick: *You mentioned in “Emergence, Rebirth of the Sacred” a challenge that groups face-balancing the individual with the group goals. This is that our group, for example, has struggled with. Do you have any insights on how to maintain balance or how, in a practical sense, a group that has deadlines and schedules can fulfill those individual needs?*

David: Part of the challenge is. I think, the way we perceive the structure of anything, whether it is a group or society or organization that we interact with in our society. The group and the individual are not a thing, not a solid structure. We have a tendency to see the group as having an inflexible structure, defined in a number of ways: projects, deadlines, lines of authority, procedures, etc. It might just be defined inside ourselves as an important part of our identity. The opposite of structure is not anarchy with all doing their own thing, but rather a kind of process. The model I use for that is one in which I do not think of the structure as always existing. The

structure exists at any given time when people come together and put their attention together in a way that brings it into existence. The actual reality of the organization only comes into being when people are willing it into being.

Let's say you are gathered together to do the next issue of the magazine. That issue is like the crystal or the mandala or the point of incarnation that holds you together in a willing way. It would appear that this issue is another project of an ongoing structure. But if we say the structure exists where the will exists and where the spirit exists, then only when you are all actually working together and communicating does the organization come into being. The legal structure and all the rest are just fiction, an illusory shell that has no real energy in its own right. But, it does have a powerful illusory energy to convince us there is something there when in fact there isn't.

One of the things our group always had to remind ourselves was that we were the group. At times it was easy to talk about the Lorian Association as if it were an entity existing outside ourselves. When we would do so, we would enter issues like "Lorian needs to do this and Lorian needs to do that and because of that, I need to do this, you need to do that." At times this created very strange contortions. If I just drop the Lorian out and say, "I am choosing to do certain things," I may happen to identify some of those things with the name Lorian, but Lorian has no will or body or spirit of it's own, it only has what I and others give to it. So when I am choosing to do those things that I call "Lorian," it is still me choosing, willing those things to be done with the other folks I am working with. I need to keep that image very alive and present in my mind, because at that moment the group comes alive as a community of individuals who are co-creating something. The moment I reverse that - I am a mechanism by which the group will does its thing - I become the product of the co-creation, as if the project exists first and then it invokes me to get itself done. Then I have dis-empowered my own being, and part of me begins to feel very disconnected, both with myself and also with the group. It is out of that disconnection that difficulty arises. There can be genuine difficulties that exist between the others in the group due to differences of opinion, or what have you, that would need to be addressed. But, those have to be addressed, I feel, in terms of our interaction together rather than in terms of abstractions like group harmony or group togetherness or group obedience.

Patrick: *Group consensus can become somewhat of a weapon against the individual, kind of a protectiveness.*

David: Well, that is true, but if you really examine that, I think you would find, in almost every case, what is really happening is one or two people's individualities are being identified with the group in a way in which the group now becomes an instrument for their individuality, even in organizations that work by consensus. This situation could be very simple to see in an organization which is very hierarchical but, even in groups working by consensus, there is often a bidden hierarchy or a hidden politics never really spoken about. If you examine the dynamics of the group you discover that really it is not a group as much as it is the collective expression of one or two people's individuality. I am someone who advocates very open politics in a group, rather than saying that we have no politics and do everything by agreement. I'd rather get the critical agendas out in the open.

Patrick: *So, if we recognize at every moment that each person is a conscious creator or co-creator with the seed that has drawn us all together, then we are working as that alive organization.*

David: That is right. I do believe there is a group spirit. But I think there are two kinds of group spirit. One is nothing more than an accumulated habit of the particular collective, like the group

memory. It can become very powerful in terms of regulating people's behavior, the same way that our own habits regulate our individual behavior. But the other group spirit manifests a genuine synergistic effect - the invocation of a group presence would not be there if you only had the work of a single individual. When you have two or more folk working together, understanding they are now invoking a creative act, a group spirit is invoked which can greatly enhance the capabilities of the individuals involved. The key to all of that, to me, is that the group exists in this moment. To think of a group existing over time in a way is a kind of illusion. I can even extend that to say that I really only exist in this moment. To think of me as existing over time is an illusion, too. It is a convenient habit of thought.

Patrick: *Some people might not understand that statement. It seems I have a past and am going to have a future.*

David: Absolutely. Well, we have a past only because we remember a past. Functionally we have a past, people have records through the bank, government and so on. I think of my past not so much in terms of data but in terms of a living presence in my life at the moment. My past has meaning to me not as a set of records but as a pressure to move and to act in a certain direction, as a way of finding myself, to say this is who I am, that I have continuity. My history - the story I tell myself about my past - can be very different from the past that is told in my records, because my memory can become quite selective. My perception of events and what they mean to me can be very different from what other people perceive. My past is an extremely subjective story that I have told myself in order to understand my present - my personal myth. The past's power to effect us is always in the present. The power of my future, in the sense of dreams, desires, wishes, imaginative projection, also only effects me in the moment. This is the only time I have - *right now* - to which I can bring my thoughts, wisdom, and spirit to bear while making choices. I don't have a past in the sense of a comet's tail trailing behind me that is always there, but I do have a past in the sense of a continual process of re-definition of how I should be or act in the moment.

***There is an inter-marriage between the idea of the millennium
and the idea of utopia – the creation of a just society.***

Patrick: *That is a really good description of 'being in the now.'*

David: The New Age says you are capable of defining yourself in ways that go beyond how your past could define you. Therein lies the power of that image.

Patrick: *In your book, "Revelations" you report communicating with an archetypal force, the Spirit of Limitless Love and Truth, is that like a group spirit?*

David: I have an ongoing relationship with that presence. I no longer call it "Limitless Love and Truth," I honestly don't call it anything. Sometimes I suppose I think of it as the Spirit of our times or the Spirit of what our time would like to grow into. I have no sense of a particular entity, more what I would call an archetypal quality that is inherent in all of us.

Patrick: *So, it is a group Spirit in the sense that it is humanity's group spirit?*

David: That's right, that is exactly how I would see it.

Patrick: *How would that differ from a more individualized group spirit?*

David: Well, let's take your working together at magazine: there is a particular objective, desire, image that all of you create that defines it as being something other than *New Realities* or *New*

Age Journal. There is a particularity about it, within which it obviously deals with themes and issues that are universal. I imagine that there are articles that can appear quite happily in your magazine, *East-West Journal*, *New Age Journal* and so on, without running afoul of the different editorial plans. But there is something particular about your magazine that helps define you as a particular collective.

This is the old metaphor of the magnifying lens that takes the diffused light of the sun and focuses it in a small and brilliant spot. If I am going to make a mark on the world, I need to do it in two ways. First, I need to be diffused and in every way available, like sunlight. Second, I myself have little effect except as a potential presence unless that presence is focused. The relationship between something being diffused and being focused is very important because the power of the focusing is in direct proportion to the extent of the diffusion.

I can illustrate that with your magazine. If you were the only magazine that was putting out information on meditation, spirituality, the New Age, and so on, you would have an impact. But, it would have a very different impact than if there are many other magazines, people and activities that are bringing the same ideas into focus, thereby mutually enhancing each other. So, diffusion is important. On the other hand, if I am going to have an impact, and create some effect in my world, I also need focus. Group process creates focus.

A particular group spirit can be seen as the angel or guardian or the enhancer of focus. It can be the intermediary between the diffused state and the focused state. A group spirit is what mediates between those two states and keeps them functionally from going out of balance.

Patrick: *Would it be beneficial for groups to meditate on that group spirit or intermediary force?*

David: I think so. Group spirit is two-sided: the universal diffused aspect and the particular face of a group. If I can embrace that paradox in my meditation, it can be very helpful in aligning with it.

Patrick: *David, what do you see in store for the 90s? They are a focal point for talk about planetary shifts, etc.*

David: I feel very good about the 90s, actually. I am quite convinced we have entered into a phase that will be the equivalent - but on a higher level of the spiral - to the burst of new vision and idealism we had in the 60s, but, without a lot of the turmoil that went with it. Simply because it is on a higher level of the spiral, our qualities can be more grounded in our experience.

I don't focus a lot on things like the earth changes, partly because they are contingent on human direction, partly because they only have meaning in a context. People can certainly get shook up by an earthquake, but there is no guarantee it is going to precipitate some change for the better. If there is a context in which things are already moving in a certain direction, then something like an earth change can be a catalyst to tip the scales toward that direction. On the other hand, so could any number of things.

The extent to which we live in a world of imagery - and in effect are psychological/spiritual creatures - is really overlooked in the New Age. At one time in our history as a species, the impact to change came through our physical world. But now, the most significant motivation toward change comes to us through our psychological world and through our world of imagery. We are really struggling - not to be masters of the physical realm, we have pretty much achieved that - but to be masters of the realm of imagination. The challenges that we have are basically challenges of imagination: the challenges of our images. We could at this moment, on a purely physical level, feed, clothe and house everyone on earth at a level of abundance. The technology is there; everything is there. What lacks is the imagination to do it. We are saddled with a lot of images that say we can't or shouldn't do it.

I don't see an earthquake or a planetary change on a physical level really accomplishing very much. To me most New Age prophecies are rooted in older consciousness. It has been my experience that a significant number of people who are psychically tuning into the prophecy are actually tuning into collective memories, not the future. Or maybe it is the future, but they are interpreting it through collective memory. The kind of earthquakes we need are image quakes, image shifts - things that impact our imaginations. There could be a physical event that helps to catalyze a change of imagery but it needs to have that imaginative resonance, I feel, to be effective now. In that sense, the thought of an earthquake could have more power than the actual earthquake itself.

*Structure exists where the will and the spirit exists – only
when a group is working together and communicating
does the organization exist.*

Patrick: Right - there's an image there. When I said "planetary shifts," I didn't necessarily mean earthquakes, but that question is on the minds of a lot of people.

David: I do feel, though, that there is a lot of shifting going on politically and economically. There is going to be a lot of movement in those areas over the next ten years. I see the next ten years very optimistically. In any process of change, there's going to be discomfort, but, again, the level of one's discomfort is often associated with the level - the quality - of one's imagery. On the whole, this next period of time is going to be a splendid one, largely because there will be more and more creative intention focused on real problem areas. That will be very, very good. Of course, it can always be painful to sit down and look at where we have to change. But that's it healthy kind of process.

The important element in all this is that we are all connected with that process. One of the phenomena I've encountered - I've worked with the idea for 20 years - is a tendency for people at times to feel disempowered. The very notion of the New Age is long-range - like saying "Winter is coming?! Well, who can do anything about that? A vast planetary process is going on, and 'all I can do is hunker down and hope I survive.'" But, it's not that way. It is an emerging process. It's not something that should be disempowering. Just the opposite - it empowers by calling us to be the instrument of those changes, through the manner in which we change our own thinking.

Patrick: *You say you're optimistic about the 90s. Do you see specific changes, in terms of politics, science, the economy?*

David: At the beginning of the 80s, one of the images I got through my own meditative process had to do with changes in the world political pattern, that catalyst for change would be a profound alteration in the governmental structure of the Soviet Union. This was back when Brezhnev was still premier of the Soviet Union. At the time the message said the individual who'll be responsible for this is Gorbachev. About 3 months later Andropov came into power. He died and then, after an interim premier, Gorbachev came into power. Something I've consistently received over the years is the powerful, creative nature of the relationship between the United States and Russia. Both countries have a potential for being destructive, and both have a potential for being very creative. Those potentials are very much intermingled.

I'm very heartened by the way things are going in the Soviet Union. I'm not a Soviet-phile nor somebody who ascribes all things good and peaceful to the Russians. But the changes that are going on - if Gorbachev is able to hold it together, and I personally think he will - are going to set in motion a very positive restructuring. So much of our own national, collective energy has demanded that Russia be an enemy. If that can be loosened up, even to a small degree, then energy is freed and can begin to reassign itself.

That meditative image also depicted the United States throughout most of the 80s in a quiescent stage - not very politically creative - and working through some internal dynamics. Also shown was that the catalyst for creative change on a political level would shift, is shifting, had shifted, away from this country to, not just the Soviet Union, but to some of the third world countries, which would take the lead in the 90s for instigating creative change at a political and economic level. And, as our country moves through its own internal process in the early nineties, we will come to a time that creative change would begin to refocus itself in our country at a political level; and we will see some form of political restructuring going on here too, probably not as dramatic as what we have in the Soviet Union, but still, dramatic enough. It might not be an actual structural change but a consciousness change.

I anticipate those changes and feel that, in many ways, Reagan has done an absolutely bang-up job as a transitional President between one mode of being and another. In my own personal observation, Reagan has been a New Age president unconsciously. He's definitely been an important transitional figure.

Patrick: *Couldn't a great deal of that be due to the consciousness of the country itself and its people?*

David: Oh, it's definitely a symbiotic relationship: the president, by being an almost mythic figure, plays against the collective, and the collective plays against him. It works both ways. That's been one of Reagan's strengths actually, his whole arena of operation depends largely on the level of imagination and imagery, Reagan set a mythic tone that allowed things to come to the surface and play themselves out that were there anyway. They needed to come out one way or another. We're probably now at a point where we've had enough of that and we need to try to consolidate.

Patrick: *You're speaking of some of the difficulties that this administration has had?*

David: The Reagan era has allowed what I would call childish characteristics to emerge and be played out in order to clear some space for a more mature perspective of ourselves and the world to take shape, by contrast.

Patrick: *It sounds like you're saying what we need in this election year is a president to ground all of this.*

David: I'm fairly sure that by 1992, or the early 90s, we'll be ready for some significant change in the quality that we express as a nation. I think we're at a point where we could begin to initiate that now, but I'm not sure that the process has run its course too where we're really that ready. In fact what might be needed is a continuation of the Reagan momentum, but without Reagan, in order more clearly to experience the downside of that movement freed from the mythic charisma that he provides.

If Bush gets in, we'll have Reagan without Reagan - not that I think Bush would be a bad President, but I just think he won't be able to sustain the energy Reagan initiated. It's going to be a real questing for alternatives. If Dukakis gets in, he may well be able to initiate new direction. Again, he's not the most mythic figure. He doesn't seem to want to. What I think we'll be

confronting is a more realistic sense of our place in the world without any glamor attached to it, and a challenge to accept that place and do something creative about it.

It seems to me that may be another 4 years before we come to a point of national will, no matter who's president, where we begin to say we want to build a new co-creative relationship with the rest of the world and where we have the will to do that. I guess I look towards 1992 for that to begin to surface on the part of the collective.

That's my personal interpretation, obviously. But I do feel this desire stirring in our collective, that we want to make some real changes, and we're not altogether sure how to go about doing that. In that sense, the New Age movement could offer something extremely valuable in terms of stimulating and inspiring the imagery. In order to do that, we're going to need people who can speak to that level of relevancy, that level of the empowerment to change.

Patrick: *David, thanks you very much for your time, we really appreciate it.*

David: Thank you. 