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Inward Journeys: spiritual seeking in the new millennium

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes that there is a significant trend shaping itself as more and more people see themselves on inward or spiritual journeys in search of greater meaning; in search of their ‘truth’, an often highly personalised and eclectic mix of spiritual beliefs. Centred on interviews with some of these seekers, this thesis looks at why spiritual seeking in this new millennium could be described as ‘the art of redesigning lives’. It also argues that although this is about individuality, a search for greater autonomy and Self awareness, it is inevitably unfolding in a social context. It looks at why, what I choose to call a (r)evolution of consciousness is happening, and how this trend is influenced by cultural transformations of the 20th century such as the 60’s counter-culture and the New Age Movement. It is, I propose, part of an emerging worldview, one that impacts, and is impacted by, globalisation and the move from modernity to postmodernity in the western world.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*As I look in all the faces I've just got to stop and wonder,
What are we searching for?....
Will you find the truth, that light inside the darkness...
Will it ever come to be that you'll find the key that will set you free....”*
(Lionel Richie from his song *Time: 1998*)

Some three years ago now I set off on a journey. Not a geographical journey, but a journey of the mind, or more accurately of the heart and soul, of the spirit. After living the first half of my life as a reasonably predictable, socially conforming, well-educated, white middle class Western New Zealand female, without much warning to anyone, I suddenly decided it was time to discover who I really was. This question had been eating away at me for longer than I could even remember. Probably if I'd been a rebellious teenager I might have dealt with at least some of this questioning then, but I came from a strict though loving family with a strict though loving religious underpinning. Guilt and fear of failure, disapproval, alienation kept me toeing the line dutifully. I married when I was twenty and by the time I was out of university had just two years of career before becoming an at-home mother. I was not unhappy. I loved bringing up my four children who are still my best friends in adulthood. I just kept wondering who I really was behind the smiling mask of social conformity. I shoved this questioning under the mat for the most part and determined to be the most successful wife and mother I could be, and as the children got more independent, the best career person. I put my mind to being outwardly successful, but inwardly there was an increasing emptiness. So much of what I did seemed like a game, a game to prove something. But what? I didn't know and somehow it seemed too dangerous, too frightening to even put a toe along that path of questioning.

Until one day, three years ago, a young friend looked at me and asked, 'why are you so unhappy?' I was stunned. Had my happy mask slipped? I felt exposed. For the previous couple of years, since all but one of the children had flown the

nest, I had felt very unsettled but I had never let anyone get near my innermost feelings. I mostly lived in denial of them myself. My cultural and religious upbringing had taught me that to be successful I should be happy and particularly I should help make other people happy. This translated as, I must appear happy at all times and I should not admit to anyone if I was not succeeding. So, when my friend saw through the mask, even though I laughingly denied his observation, I knew my cover had been blown. I knew things would never be the same again. I was suddenly cast adrift from much of what I had held to. I was afloat on a frighteningly uncontrollable but exhilarating ride down the rapids of this thing called the river of life.

I started to assess where I was at and I didn't like what I found. What was authentic in how I felt about things and what was just social conditioning? What was my truth? Like thousands of other people, I read Joseph Campbell's admonition to 'follow your bliss' (1988:120) and it was like a kind of awakening, a flame being rekindled in my inner knowing. The feeling of excitement and promise, when not overshadowed by shock and horror at what I was doing, was boundless. As old conditioning and assumptions came up for review, to be rethought and accepted or rejected, I gained new and interesting friends, I left my long term marriage, stopped doing things just from social obligation. I even moved from New Zealand to the USA. I guess I stopped all, well most, of those expectations assigned to married women with families. I stopped mindless role playing, at least so far as my growing self-awareness allowed for. I rebelled? That is how most people from my old life would describe it. As I embarked on what I termed my spiritual or inward journey I started to meet other people who were going through their various versions of the same thing. Were there commonalities? What were their journeys about? Why were more and more people breaking socially expected, socially accepted boundaries? The seeds of the research for this thesis started to germinate. There were plenty of questions and I determined to write this thesis as a way of finding some answers, centering it on discussions I had with people I met along the way.

I set out to discuss spirituality as it related to these inward or spiritual journeys. The term ‘spirituality’ as I was conceiving of it meant ‘of the inner spirit.’ It had nothing necessarily to do with religious dogma or theology unless of course one thinks of religion as being simply ‘of the inner spirit.’ I soon realised that the way I envisaged this term I could just as well be talking about ‘emerging identity.’ Back in the 80’s Zbigniew Brzezinski, chairman of the United States Security Council (quoted here by Marilyn Ferguson), spoke of an increasing yearning for something spiritual in advanced Western societies where materialism has proved unsatisfying.

“People are discovering that five percent per annum more goods is not the definition of happiness. Traditional religion, he concluded, does not provide a substitute: - “the spiritual quest begins for most people as a search for meaning. At first this may be only a restless desire for something more. ...Ultimately every human being, once he reaches the stage of self-consciousness, wants to feel that there is some inner and deeper meaning to his existence than just being and consuming, and once he begins to feel that way, he wants his social organisations to correspond to that feeling. This is happening on a world scale” (Ferguson 1987:363).

This statement resonated within me and I knew it answered at least in part the ‘why’ of my search. What about other people? Were they also looking for some inner and deeper meaning in their lives? Were they also looking for social organisations that supported this quest? Was there some sort of significant trend shaping itself? I wanted to find out.

With this in mind, I set out to record the individual journeys of a number of ‘spiritual seekers’ by inviting them to share their stories. The format was more of a taped ‘extended conversation’ than a formal interview, taking place in living rooms, coffee shops, moving vehicles, wherever and for however long people wanted to talk (but usually not more than two hours). The selection of participants was to be random and “snowballing” (Roseneil 1993:195) – random in the very loose sense of being limited only to people I met in my travels in New Zealand and the USA between mid 2000 and mid 2001 who indicated a degree of passion for being asked to share their story. I also attempted to ensure a spread of ages to see whether the responses were different from younger or older people, men or women. Some of these stories were included in last year’s honours research paper,

a pilot study for this thesis. I present them again, and sometimes in greater detail, to celebrate the richness of these stories. As I explain more later, part of honouring these stories is to present them as closely as possible to how they were told to me. And I do the same with the writings of authors I refer to in this thesis. Rather than re-wording what they say, much of the time I prefer to honour their input to this thesis by quoting verbatim. In light of the concept that will be discussed throughout this thesis, that we live in a world of relationships, I like to see this as a collaborative effort.

This work is no sort of statistical sampling but is intended simply to add further ethnographic material to the discussion of identity, self-awareness, and contemporary spirituality. It will focus on understanding better what is pushing people's buttons in engendering such an enthusiasm to search for greater understanding of the self, and also on what are the social and cultural implications of this. It is a small glimpse, a fleeting glance, through the window of the lives of a number of people who claim to be on such a search. It is a story of the art of re-designing lives, or as anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson calls it, improvising lives. "When the choices and rhythms of lives change," she says, "as they have in our time, the study of lives becomes an increasing preoccupation" (1990:4).

Of course such spiritual journeying is not a new phenomenon. People have always embarked on such journeys. However, according to a recently published book, *The Cultural Creatives*, authors Dr Paul Ray (a macrosociologist concerned with the evolution of culture) and Dr Sherry Anderson (a psychologist specialising in qualities of inner experience) maintain that since the 60's 50 million Americans, 26% of the population, have made a complete shift in their values and way of life, their 'culture' (2000:xi). According to Ray and Anderson close to 50% of this number (25 million Americans) are more educated, leading edge thinkers who combine a serious concern for their inner lives with social activism and have strong values of personal growth and spirituality (2000:14). Officials of the European Union launched a similar survey based on that used by Ray in 15 countries in 1997 and found at least as many across Europe (Ray and Anderson. 2000:4). I have not found any statistics for New Zealand but a look at the comparative amount of shelf

space devoted to self-help, motivational, spiritual literature in bookshops in New Zealand and the USA indicates a very similar trend. According to Paul Heelas, New Zealand stands alongside the USA, Britain, Israel and Germany as the leaders in this trend (1996:120).

To what extent this has happened throughout time and what numbers of people are involved is not the issue in this thesis. I am not interested in statistics so much as in focusing attention on something that is capturing the imagination of a great many people. I will pay attention to how this trend, this phenomenon, is part of much broader cultural/historical processes – how, for instance, it is connected to the social and cultural issues of globalisation, modernism, postmodernism and the 60's counter-culture. These people undoubtedly share something cultural, a common spiritual inclination even though it may be manifested in a multitude of expressions. I would contend, however, as Van Biema does in a *Time* cover story that, “There is no conscious movement here, just a work in progress” (1996:65).

Why are so many people going in search of their truth or dream or passion, and in particular what is the connection between this and contemporary spirituality? According to Professor of Religion, W.C. Roof in *Religion and American Culture*, “a new style of spirituality is emerging: ‘reflexive spirituality,’ a more deliberate, self-conscious awareness that we must take charge of our inner well-being – our sense of self...” (1999a:131). It appears to me that individuals are creating a unique personal spiritual synthesis, a sort of eclectic mix of diverse spiritual teachings of western, eastern, mythological, indigenous, and psychological origins. And maybe this is not surprising in light of the broad cultural, social, economic, political and religious developments in the western world particularly during the last half of the twentieth century.

I acknowledge that I am coming from the position of a white middle-class western ‘spiritual thinker’ and therefore despite my best efforts to be objective my own reflexive positioning will become apparent from time to time. At least to some extent we all hear, and read, what we want to hear, and read, to affirm what we believe. We tend to ignore what doesn't fit our model of reality. And yet, as this

thesis will argue, growing Self awareness brings with it greater awareness and openness towards other people's models of reality.

In justification of writing about spiritual seeking from an 'insider' perspective, I nevertheless take heart from Christopher Bache that "there is a kind of knowledge that comes from digesting other people's experiences and another kind entirely that comes from taking the inner journey oneself. If one has only secondhand knowledge of these states one labors under a great disadvantage" (2000:6).

I believe the presentation of people's philosophies of life and their 'experiences of being alive' (Campbell 1988:xvi) should offer as Bateson says: "alternative ways of being, none of which can be replicated but each of which offers materials to be incorporated in a personal synthesis... We all compose our lives differently" (1996:xi). And yet a person is almost always in relationship to others, 'in community'. Therefore the task of understanding others in their fullness is in perceiving the dance, the interplay of the individual in relationship to others, in relationship to their social and cultural underpinnings, much of which they may be largely unconscious. Not all individuals are particularly 'self conscious' and therefore this process is a journey, a 'becoming.'

This thesis then is about the increasing number of individuals on the journey towards what they believe to be greater autonomy. It proposes that there is a significant trend shaping itself: an increasing search for individual 'truth,' one's own often highly personalised and eclectic mix of spiritual beliefs. It looks at why what I choose to call *a (r)evolution of consciousness* is happening on such a large scale, and how this phenomenon is grounded in the social and cultural transformations of the twentieth century, in particular regarding the concepts of modernism and postmodernism. It looks at why spiritual seeking in this new millennium is about the art of redesigning lives.

In the following chapters I begin with recording the stories of a few spiritual seekers. I then go on in chapter three to look at why I have called these stories inward or spiritual journeys and what spirituality means both to these people and in

a review of relevant literature. The literature review continues in chapters four and five with an historical overview of spirituality, focusing particularly on the 1960's onwards: what has been termed the 60's counter-culture, New Religious Movements, the New Age Movement, Baby Boomers, and the influence of modernism, postmodernism and globalisation on this spiritual seeking. Chapter six asks participants what they think is happening out there that so many people are going in search of their truth, are on a spiritual search, and whether this is a trend that can be called a (r)evolution of consciousness or is even a changing worldview. It also looks at the significant influence of the new physics in this changing thought world. Chapter seven discusses theoretical issues around Self awareness and the social self as they relate to spiritual seeking, chapter eight provides a very brief overview of literature that supports this seeking, and chapter nine draws all these threads together in the conclusion.

“The dividing lines between a secular science of the social world and sacred understandings of that world are now being challenged and, in some cases, erased. Interpretive ethnographic writing in the twenty-first century will move closer to a sacred and critically informed discourse about the moral, human universe.... a new ethics of inquiry” (Denzin 1997:xviii).

My hope is that this thesis provides such a discourse.

CHAPTER 2

STORIES

...paying attention to the ways in which people reflect on themselves

Before further discussion of the implications of this quest for meaning, I want, in Anthony Cohen's words, "to begin by paying attention to the ways in which people reflect on themselves" (1994:28). I do not intend to dissect these stories in order to analyse why I think they think the way they do. How would I know? I would agree with Paul Heelas if people say they are enlightened the academic simply doesn't have the tools to assess that claim. "The spiritual realm – as adherents like to attest – lies beyond the compass of intellectual inquiry. Accordingly, there are no grounds for engaging in academic deliberation" (1996:6). And, further on, "the 'ego-operations' of the academic cannot do justice to what the New Age is all about – the wisdom of the experiential" (1996:9).

These stories then simply stand as examples of what is happening out there, each one a celebration of uniqueness and courage in the search for greater self-awareness and 'something more.' While it might appear I am devoting an unnecessarily large amount of room to these, I present them as a minute representation of the rich tapestry of lives in motion that I for one see as a great awakening or (r)evolution of consciousness. The reader will no doubt observe though that there are certain commonalities in these spiritual journeys: such things as frequent referrals to looking for 'something more,' a need to understand themselves better and their relationship to God, the Universe, or a higher being of some sort, an unwillingness to follow the status quo, and in many cases some sort of epiphany or significant event in their lives which propelled them out of their comfort zone. Subsequent chapters will look at the social and cultural implications of such journeys, and whether they are part of a significant trend, a changing world view.

As each discussion interview took up to two hours it has been necessary here to simply provide extracts from the rich ethnographic material that I recorded on tape as each participant shared the story of their journey. I have not however edited the actual flow of words as I believe it is important to 'hear' these stories unchanged. At the request of participants, some of the names are changed. Answers to questions such as what spirituality means to them and why they think so many people are on such journeys are dealt with later.

Diane's story

(Diane is a 60-something American)

I remember Bertrand Russell saying, just think of yourself in a boat on a dark sea and all you can do is call out to others and let them know where you're at. This is a little gloomier sense of life than I have but it's a basis for me saying that the one thing I can do for anyone else is to share where I am at, to share my journey. I think this is important because this is your way of getting to know me in my depths. And if I believe my God of love wants to call forth from me the very uniqueness and depth of who I am then only I can fulfill that role in the whole universe. I have a very unique role to play. So how did I do this? How am I going?.. So much of the journey these days is the inner journey that prefigures the outward one.

My origin story is one of alienation, alienation from mother and from father and from sister. Enough love that I didn't grow up incapable of trusting, but still at the same time...and this is a woman's issue too...not having a sense of who I was. So that the alienation.... I was smart and I had gifts from the spirit. But my question turned into why am I not like other people? What do other people know that I don't know that I need to know to be like other people. Rather than seeing myself as a person. Catholic grammar school, Catholic high school, Catholic college, Fullbright scholarship to France. *Happy within that system?* Totally. Very happy. Remember praying for my fever to go away when I was five and having the fever go away. Vision of some sort when I was third grade. Loved the church that gave me the stability my family didn't give me. Loved the nuns and they loved me. Loved the sacrifice, loved the depth, loved the liturgy, didn't feel alienated at all, didn't feel oppressed, didn't feel guilty. College was an all-girl Catholic college with some extremely intelligent wonderful role model women, who really cared about me. And all the other women. And it was just a given that we were there to learn so we could go out and share. That was just the culture.

Anyway I went to France on a Fullbright and it was my first time away from home so I didn't learn much, but it was a growing experience. Came back and married ... the kid I met my first year in college....Went to Chicago, got my PhD, he became an attorney, I had a six months miscarriage and a wonderful wonderful mystical experience in the hospital after that. Where I looked out the window with

this gold light coming in. That's all it was. I said, that's Christ. But I realise I was doing the naming out of my tradition. It could have been.... It was just a golden light. But it was a transcendent experience, not just something inside me projecting out.

Started teaching at the University of Illinois at that point. At the same time opened up a tutoring project in the South Side. More interested in the tutoring project than my career at that point... Had a baby boy who just lived four days. My husband and I were totally involved with civil rights..... We were both very together in this but then when the Vietnam war came along he was a Lt commander in the reserve and my Catholicism was turning more and more radical....he was still down the middle, so that the political split plus the baby plus the emotional, all of that, we ended up separating.....Very out of control at that time. Myself, personally... some drugs, lot of sex, angry, early 70's..... So at that point I wanted to trash the patriarchy, patriarchal institutions including marriage and the university and anything. *What about the church?* There was enough of a radical strand in the church that I was not alienated. I was angry.

Out of this angry period a friend showed up and said 'I'm getting together my husband and kids with some people in Washington DC and they're very interesting and we want to do something. We want to start something.' There was something about the way she was talking and the way she was changing her sense of herself that I really liked....So I joined the Finders...and met M.D. Petty who was talking about how at this historical moment in time people who were capable of it should simply withdraw themselves from the mainstream and begin to experiment with social conditions to create some kinds of models of smaller groups of people living together, and then ideally these groups would extrude a...a basic grassroots level up leadership ...the whole point was not to save the world or social justice or peace but simply to create a model with all the people who were part of this huge network who were working together.... I was disaffected with the church to the extent that the Catholics couldn't do it alone and they were acting like they could.... M.D. Petty was saying, we all agree with the great unspoken wisdom, we're for that, but we don't take a particular form. So that was okay with me.

So I ended up in this group for 18 years. Sex, money, power all combined with some thirty odd people give or take. We would call it more of a tribe. Very intense. Living a life of low consumption....I just thought we were saving the world which I had to do. But it began getting to 'us' and 'them.' The lifestyle began becoming so much different from anybody around us so we were getting increasingly isolatedalways a different environment. And we would also be travelling. We were living a day at a time. Which you can do for years.

...late 1986 ...I saw a sign Environmental Ethics and Religion and they were going to have a conference. The minute I saw that sign it was like this is so important. So I went to the conference and all of a sudden I knew the environmental movement was going to be really boiling up and I knew I didn't want to sit it out on the sidelines, taking care of us who weren't turning into great global models. The revolution didn't happen.

So it took me a couple of years to work up the courage to leave. It was very frightening because I didn't know where I was going to go. I didn't know what I was going to go. And I was afraid. When I walked I was 53. I had no friends to speak of, no family relationships to speak of. No money. I finally left. I took \$4000 from here and there, different accounts. And here's how my brain is going: okay, I know that I am made in the image of God. One thing I want to do before I die is arrive at self-knowledge.

...when I left the Finders I went to a retreat house on the other side of town by Catholic University.... I went into the bookstore and I opened the bible and it was Mathew, anyone who asks shall receive. And at that point Christ came to me and so I happily went back to my Catholic roots without any problems whatsoever. The spiritual search in a way was over. The deepening process began.

My life has been extraordinary. Truly. For an example, I said the one organisation I would really like to work with is the North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology...worked ...for a couple of years and put on some major programs....determined that for my spiritual growth I had to stop working so much. You know that I needed time for my own....working late all the time you know. So I did that. I got a contract with USAID, the agency for international development editing a book and working on their development studies program.I had gone to a meeting up in Boston and heard that there was a woman there who had a lot of money and was paying people to go to the Earth Summit in Rio. So I literally ran into her in the hall and I said 'O hello I'm Diane, who are you?' and she told me and said, 'are you going to Rio?' This is the conversation. So I said well I'd need some support to do that and she said, oh yes, she said see Patrick. So I went to Rio and put on a big concert there, The Celebration of the Universe, the four parts, to over 5000 people, with John Denver and Olivia Newton John and... all participated.

I'm still on the journey I think. I'm next door to the Catholic church but it's not where my energy is and actually I just spent the weekend at the earth thing but on the side when I closed my door I'm reading Jack Spong's autobiography 'Here I Stand.' I'm now going through a revolution about Spong. So I've got to start rethinking. I never thought I'd be unhappy with Catholicism again. *How do you feel about what he's writing?* I think there's so much there I have to continue to investigate it....So where my belief structure is at this point, I have no idea...Pastorally I am a pluralist but theologically I am inclusive. And I think that's where I come out. There is a radical difference there that is yet to be unravelled in my mind. But that's sometimes. Other times I'm a sort of Zen Christian and say well there's Buddha in the East and Christ in the West and they both came...

I'm more peaceful now than I've ever been. Much more. I was peaceful from the time I left the Finders because I knew I did the right thing in such a radical way and the rewards in my life were coming so rapidly it's just been a wonderful totally rich time.

Max's story

(Max is a 20-something American)

I was raised Catholic but I never saw myself as Catholic. I would go to church every single Sunday when I was young, baptism, first communion, reconciliation, the first three or four sacraments – whatever, there were seven I think. And I never considered myself Catholic, in fact on the side my mom... would always tell me about Christian Science and the spiritual truths which seemed so much more logical to me. So even though I would go to the doctor or my dad would say get in the car so we can go to confirmation it was almost hypocritical and ridiculous because after church we would drive somewhere and my dad would pull over in the car and start screaming at someone. I always had a lot of questions for my dad that he could never adequately answer. I never felt like the ideas presented in my catholic education – it was almost like Catholicism was for the people who didn't want to grow. So content with going to church on Sunday and never think about it again. That was disconcerting for me ...I wanted to know about God, not about ceremonies, about love and truth and life, and not about when to sit up and when to sit down in the middle of a church service. That was irrelevant to me.

From the start, I always knew I was not Catholic and would not be, even though the ceremony was appealing and it was a lot easier to think you could get to heaven that way. But I think it wasn't till I was older that I could stand up for myself and say this is what I believe and nothing is going to change it. And that didn't happen until I was about 18.

I would definitely say I'm on a spiritual journey. In fact all of my life I've felt like that, and I've always felt I'm here to do something. So right from the start I felt I was on a mission, and part of that is a spiritual journey though it feels like there will be a lot of human steps in that. But hopefully those steps will help others. I've had these thoughts involving making peace between large nations, reconciling cultures and the conflicts they experience .. but more than that an overarching purpose that can't really be expressed in specific actions but hopefully down the road I can look back and say my whole life was to achieve that – just loving and reconciling – pretty general words but they resonate so strongly with me that in many ways I feel that is my purpose, to love and reconcile. So along the way, I guess the whole thing is a journey but these things constantly crop up and I have experiences that enable me to do that. So I guess journey and purpose are one and the same. But I can't explain how I've felt that way, I just know I've felt like I'm on a journey and I have a purpose.

When you find your passion it resonates with you to such an extent that you're able to demonstrate that passion to so many other people and when you do that you can't help but uplift people and help people. It's like how can we help others until we can help ourselves first.

When I look at my own life I see how many perspectives I've had. I've had a lot of international friends and I've travelled a lot, and all these experiences have helped me realise there is a bigger picture. What really gets me, I feel this inward push. I guess this is similar to an inward journey, almost like being compelled to

do something. I've felt directed every step of the way from high school, to going out with people, to making the decision to stand on my own and go to Principia [*a Christian Science college – his father refused to help him*], to taking a year off before grad school. All of these have pretty much been set for me well in advance. I've been very clear well in advance and even if I didn't know the details it didn't bother me. For the first time graduating I feel a little less sure of that. I guess I need to trust more.

...We need to live our vision. There's nothing great about trying to be small.

The inward journey is about discovering your dream, discovering who you are, and where you're going. What could be more exciting than that? All the answers point to something far greater than ourselves.

Susanne's story

(Susanne is a 50-something New Zealander)

I was brought up in my early years in the open brethren church in New Zealand which didn't have a lot of ritual or structure to it....It didn't have repetitive things, it was very spontaneous, wonderful hymns, a wonderful communion. I really remember those early years going to church and Sunday School. It made me aware of God and a spiritual dimension. I don't know what it would be like to be brought up without that but to me it's been very significant. Then I went to the Baptist church early teens on, which was freer really and a good young people's side. About the time I was 17 or 18 there was a split off into the Assembly of God...very emotionally hyped. A lot of pressure to do things according to their views so again they've created another institution. I went for some years particularly after my mother died. Those early years were really important to me and I got really inspired by what I began to learn through the church....then I began to feel – I got involved in a small house group and there was incredible pressure put on – that was the beginning of the end – pushing everyone into the same – however well intentioned... and I think then I just gradually began to stop going and faded out.

I think for me I've always...early teenage years I had a very clear, out of the blue awareness,...I became very aware of my eternal nature....but the real beginning of my spiritual journey would have to be two years after my mother's death when I was in a total zombie state and had lost everything – career, house, parents, partner I thought I was going to marry. Had no idea what I was doing. So for me that was like rock bottom and it was when I heard a voice in my head that said very clearly 'you're going overseas and you're going alone.' That was probably the first time ever I've had clear inner guidance. It was a voice, not just a hunch or a thought. I chose to follow it. I was 28 at the time. It was the start of a physical journey and also my spiritual journey. Because I was in such a low state mentally and emotionally I kind of just automatically asked for help all the time, for very practical things. And I was given very clear help one step at a time. I knew who to contact, where to go...and that probably went on until I got myself reasonably settled in England. And then what happened in England was that immediately the first people I met had a lot of metaphysical knowledge. They knew all about

reincarnation and healing. So they started talking about all of that to me, and then I met a healer called Bruce McManaway who put real substance into what had been till then quite vague ideas. I found it incredibly easy to absorb, not a struggle at all. So I kind of jumped in the deep end with meeting people who were really living this kind of life and really using spiritual energy in their lives. A lot of it might have been more on the psychic level than what I would call the spiritual but it was still a real introduction. So a lot of my 21 years in England was meeting these people and being involved with them. I think my studying homeopathy was part of my spiritual journey and opened that whole philosophy around what health is. Just generally the spiritual journey for me in those 21 years was about learning metaphysical stuff. A lot of head knowledge really that I didn't know about.

After 21 years in England my spiritual journey started off again in as much as I had a real inner inkling that it was time to come back to New Zealand, and asking for some kind of confirmation of that. I can see now in the last two years how this spiritual journey has taken off on another whole new cycle....So this faze of the journey has been about going out of the head and into the heart and into the body and into actually experience of things rather than just knowledge of things ...The last 18 months have definitely been the beginning of experiencing what love means. 21 years of being in the head...incredibly useful head stuff...now into the experience of the heart....Being back here was to do with love and the divine feminine and the everydayness of spirituality really became very strong for me.... heart opening seems to happen not because of what you know but ...I physically felt it in my body, I physically felt my heart open. I physically felt that love coming through me and it wasn't anything to do with knowing about love or any concepts of love. It was an actual feeling, an emotion, a physical feeling in the body. It affects your mind, the way you think. I also felt the thoughts in my mind that had been undermining me just melt away so there's also that sense of an incredible feeling of peace....The divine feminine really meant to me the embodiment of my spirituality...in some sense like all those thoughts in my head now included the body and emotions as well. So then I became aware that spirituality as such was not set apart from the ordinary work. It was part of what you did with your hands, what you did with your mouth, where you put your feet. It wasn't just some concept and it certainly wasn't something you just tapped into on Sundays. It was very much to do with all of me – my heart, my body and my mind – all of me was involved. I remember thinking whatever I do from now on has to be all of me. It can't be just my heart or just my head. Not some waffley lovely idea but everyday living. Everything is sacred and spiritual. But it came not through reading a book about it but through actual experience in the body.

I had no concept of the divine feminine, the goddess before that though. Then I picked up Marianne Williamson's book 'A Woman's Worth' which explained some of this. I'd always thought of God as God. *Is the Goddess something different?* No, the God and the Goddess are the male female energy but I could see my life was very much in the male energy up to that point – it was head knowledge, learning. The feminine energy which we like to call the Goddess – thought it's really irrelevant what you call it – is what you'd loosely call love. It's what motivates what you do with the head knowledge....That's what the feminine is all about to me. What we believe has got to make a difference to us and the

world. What I've discovered has made a huge difference to me but also that energy has affected other people. I think this is a phase we're coming into now of balancing more. There is a real danger I can see in people going right over to the feminine as a reaction to the male. Can be taken on all sorts of levels and to me that's not what it's all about. To me it's about fully embracing them both – the whole being. It's made a huge difference to how I connect with people. Now I can connect from the heart and from the body. A conversation is not now just about two heads yabbering on – it's a kind of real detached compassion.

The spiritual journey is like this inner longing, inner motivation that I have to keep finding out what that means. Inevitable onward going kind of direction within to keep on. It's what really inspires me. I've never been moved or inspired to achieve things like getting qualifications or getting somewhere in the world, but really moving into more and more spiritual awareness really does inspire me. I guess this is my passion. And it never lets me go. I've often said 'I wish you'd leave me alone and let me sit in my garden and smell the flowers .. with my animals.'... There's something that happens or something occurs that draws me back into that journey. It's kind of like an inevitable onward journey. Where I am now I really invite that. That's where I want to be. But there have been times when I've just wanted to step off and be content in the world. But it never works for me.

Mike's story

(Mike is a 40-something American)

I sang in the choir and was baptised. Congregational church – protestant. [I quit] when I first took the Lord's name in vain and my mom said I'd be condemned to hell and damnation. I was 13 years old.... You couldn't get away with anything. My mom she said he's there, there's nowhere you can go and hide... she's a fundamentalist.... So then I thought of becoming a Catholic because I knew you could go to the priest and get it cleared up. And then I thought, oh come on now, and I thought maybe he's busy and didn't hear what I said, and that got me thinking....

I can't believe if there was a creator, he sets in motion mankind who is susceptible to all these vices of the flesh and the mind. And then he sits back there and the son-of-a-bitch sits up there with a score-card and every time you screw up he says, got you there. I mean this is bullshit.. I said it doesn't work, it isn't going to go. How can a guy set in motion something that is predictable, contagious, it's all out there... and then sit up there and keep score. It doesn't work. So I got rid of that....

....someone said on TV the other night religion makes life so easy because you've pushed that responsibility onto something else, something external. It gives you parameters and I don't have to go beyond this because it's been taken care of. And there's nothing wrong with that little Italian lady I see going to church everyday in Lakeville with the grey hair in a bun and the mole and the gold tooth. She's there every day. She's quite content and I wouldn't want to take that away from her....

So what do I think this god thing is, if it is? I don't know. It's an energy, that's it.....I find it exciting because I see the next years...I'm looking forward...Love is god.

Mary's story

(Mary is a 50-something New Zealander)

In my childhood I was sent to the catholic church, brought up in a catholic school, went to a convent boarding school, so was indoctrinated with the catholic faith, but my parents did not pay honor to that. They sent me and my brother, and they didn't go at all. So it was a double standard. My father had grown up catholic but my mother had grown up Anglican....But they were both alcoholics and were both avoiding all of their issues....I grew up thinking I was bad, not good enough and being quite convinced I was a sinner and I had nailed Christ to the cross. It was my fault. That's what I got from the church and its teachings. I don't think it was actually said as clearly as that. But I was never commended for anything I was good at. I was never validated about anything, particularly my enthusiasm. I was born enthusiastic and joyous...but this was a bad thing...

I eventually married and had children and brought up my children, certainly not in the catholic tradition because I was actually very peeved with the catholic church by the time I was about 15. I brought the children up the best I could and it wasn't until I was about 28 when I really started to think. I was probably about 25 when I really started to think about sex and started to read about it. When I was 28 I learned how to meditate. The first part of my spiritual journey was when I started to meditate

I had my first child at 16 and it was adopted. I then had a child at 19 that was out of wedlock. I got married at 21 and I had another child and took on the child of my first husband John. His child was of an age of two weeks of the child I had when I was 16. And there was no question of keeping that child –the laws of the time did not permit it, so that child was adopted. I conceived another child when I was 19 which I kept, that's my daughter. She was the first being I communicated with on this planet. The first person I remember communicating with. I had had no close friends.

When you married your husband then was that a communicating relationship? It was for 10 years. It was a good relationship but he was a little bit like a father. He was 14 years older than me and he was very supportive and helped me to grow. But then he kind of withdrew very much into himself.

Until the age of 25, when I started reading about sex, there were no other points of view other than the catholic one. I wasn't educated to read. I left school at 14.....I had three children at the age of 22 which was a piece of cake. I was happy in that role. I had 10 years bringing up children that was reasonably happy, and I did a lot of other things then that were me.

At 28 I started to read eastern philosophy and I started to read all sorts of other philosophical points of view, which really opened my mind and made me think

about many other things. And it really raced away from there. One of the things that happened to me spiritually was that I got involved in that organisation, TM [transcendental meditation] and it really just replaced the catholic church. I believed in the catholic church when I was growing up. I believed in all the stuff they put to me, until there were no answers and no one would answer....in my mid teens, when I started to get into pain. When life gets painful you start to ask questions, and there weren't any answers.

I got involved in the TM organisation and I went along with that for about 12 years, and then there were no answers. And the same thing happened with the Rotary organisation in a much more minor way. I then had learned to make my way, learned my skills, learned to deal with the world on a financial basis, learned to become independent, have access to money and things which allowed me to learn, to question and explore. And when I explored I found there were many different points of view and I found it difficult to formulate my own opinions. But my own opinion was formulating even if I didn't know that at the time. What happened was I kept getting sucked into someone else's point of view. This was going to be the answer, then that was, and that was. In more recent years I have realised I am actually okay. That I am capable of thinking independent thoughts and I am able to create my own life and I have a communication with God whoever it might be. And I do not need someone else's structure to do that in....I see a lot of other people who are quite happy with pre-masticated formulas – they're not necessarily on a spiritual journey, not everyone is. I think people are born in different levels of consciousness while their spirit has equal capacity according to what journey they are on.

I think since I turned 40 it's been a constant developmental thing. You get the hang of something and then it changes and you just think you've got the hang of that and it changes and... What I'm beginning to see now is that it's your ability to change that is the constant. The ability to not need to know, the ability to not need to have knowledge, to not have to have status, to have money. Money helps because it gives you access to things that help you find answers. But you don't even have to have that.

I was unhappy in my first marriage for five years prior to leaving. The unhappiness came from my husband not being interested in me. I was only just learning who I was. And I really felt I wasn't valued for who I was and the talents I had, and the perception I had, the mind I have. And it was like, being with a piece of concrete and yet there was this kind of golden light ahead of me and I wanted to be in it and I couldn't get it. Anyway life offered me some opportunities, work, and I left my home, I left my children, I left my husband and I left my business all in one go. *What about past friends, did they understand what you were doing?* No. I had to start completely over but I didn't have difficulty making friends then. It was like I died and I had a new person inside of me.

.....at the age of 40 it was like a knife came in and chopped off one life and another started. At that time I became clairvoyant. I started to get visions, I started to enquire about life on my own terms. I stopped blaming other people. I started to take on the responsibility of my own journey, and I then got a huge amount of

support. It was like I was caught in a web where I lived before and it's like when I got out I became who I was.....

I used to know terrible despair. I had no other pointers other than what made me feel good. Feeling, and does the feeling stay? Did the feeling connect me with God? Did the experience, the point of view, connect me with God? The connection with God is unmistakable. A God-connection is unmistakable. You cannot buy it in a shop. You can't borrow it from someone else. You can only have it yourself.

David's story

(David is a 50-something American)

Tell me about your spiritual journey, whatever bits are necessary, particular landmarks in your journey, religious background – whatever is important to explain why you've got where you've got. Well, I was raised as a Christian Scientist and that's been extremely important to me. As a teenager I became pretty serious about religion, about my practice of Christian Science, and as a young adult I began to read outside my religious faith and that has increased quite significantly in the last few years. My reading has become very broad and I have gone to workshops and conferences that were sponsored by non Christian religious groups. I've found them very inspiring and informative and its helped me too in some ways practice my Christian Science better and to understand it better. Some of these other traditions have a clear vision... for example Buddhists about what being non judgmental is, Sufis about what love is. I've found this immensely helpful because these are concepts that in Christianity, in Christian Science, are not emphasized with the same clarity and with the same degree of importance as you find in those other traditions. More and more I am convinced there is not just one religion that there's the true path; that all religions perhaps have significant aspects or facets of truth in them. Being more eclectic and inclusive is for me what is most satisfying. I rebel increasingly that religions should keep someone out; that they're exclusive to a certain group of people with a certain standard. As we've become more inclusive and non judgmental and respectful of other ways of doing spirituality and each other that means we're becoming more loving which to me should be the essence of all spiritual growth and the essence of all religion. If becoming more eclectic does that then to me that's growing spiritually and it's a very exciting adventure. There seems no end of things to explore and possibilities for self realization and getting closer to God.

Cheryl's story

(Cheryl is a 30-something New Zealander)

Tell me about your spiritual journey. It's a long long journey. I was born as a puhi. This is something I've only learned fairly recently. Puhi in Maori means literally perhaps something like a princess but it's more to do with a child that is chosen at birth, possibly before birth, to receive particular knowledge for the good of the collective. I believe I was chosen to be a healer. That is one of the roles I have. And I was raised by my grandparents for the first six years basically. My

mother wasn't there at all for the first three and then she was but I was still with my grandparents and was taken by them to all sorts of different things and loved and taught. The process was interrupted by abuse and also my grandmother died when I was six which left a very big hole. She was kind of like the matriarch of the family so once she went things fell apart. I still had my grandfather till I was 14 but the learning, the traditional learning process if you like, was very much interrupted.

So there were a lot of things that happened from that time until 30 or so. A lot of very sad and damaging things but when I look back at it now I can see that it was still part of my learning process and part of the path I had to walk. I had to have those experiences and then learn to deal with them and come out the other end in order to be who I am now. I would think that would be a common thing for a lot of people.

I've always had spiritual experiences throughout that time, always, but during that time I had no one to guide me, so I thought I was weird, strange and crazy because there was no one there. *Did you try and push it away or did you accept it?* I just accepted it and felt weird. Didn't talk about it.

From 26 I started going to counselling to deal with the abuse and then around 29 I started to meet these spiritual people and started to do a lot of reading on new age things. And within that there were always these things, these truths if you like, that I would pick and say, that really makes sense. And the ones that didn't make sense I just threw away. And once I started to learn more about Maori culture, the things I picked up resonated with Maori beliefs.

The thing that really caught my attention was the idea of self love. That you have to begin with yourself and from there it extends out to other people. So I had to undergo my own healing process before I could really begin to love other people and to help other people.....Everything to do with my life is part of the spiritual journey. Everything...

This is a really hard path. Think carefully before you commit yourself too it. *But would you go back on it?* Absolutely not. It takes a lot of strength and courage but the rewards are amazing. Like I say, when I say I know joy in every other moment it's not an exaggeration. Not at all.

Craig's story

(Craig is a 50-something American)

I was raised in a Catholic family in California, went to Catholic grade school with nuns. I was an altar boy, I was in the choir. Then I went to Catholic boys high school which messed me up sexually with women because I was segregated from them. Then went to college and did a little experimenting with psychedelics – in the 60's. I had some spiritual experiences on some psychedelics. Once I felt as if heaven opened up – visual – God on the throne and angels and music and white gowns. I felt like I went before God and saw God – it was really powerful and I

felt I couldn't take it all in, it was more than I could handle. Too beautiful, too high.

One of my unique insights when I was on psychedelics – I didn't do a lot – was that my fate was to become a spiritual teacher and so that was always in the back on my mind. I thought it would just happen to me without my having to do anything. So I kept waiting until I'd manifest something.... I had some money I either inherited or was given. It wasn't a lot but it was enough so that I didn't have to work after college so I could just live out of my car and just bum around. So I did that doing yoga and reading books. I stopped practicing Catholicism by the time I was in college and referred to myself as a recovering Catholic.

It's important to me to follow my feelings, to be spontaneous. I was a loner because I didn't work out some childhood issues, so I enjoyed that time in my car for about ten years. I went to France and I was often with relatives but everything I owned was in my car and I was free to leave in a moment's notice. I always had this belief that I would be a spiritual teacher but I didn't quite know how to get there or how it would manifest. I got books on different religions. There was a big gap in my life when I wasn't primarily spiritual but I think it kicked in more before I moved here five years ago. The last two years in Los Angeles I would smoke marijuana once a week for awhile, did it for a few months, then would go inward – it was like a spiritual journey for me. I got a lot of insights. When I smoke marijuana and go inwards it's mostly about my conscience and how to be a better person in relationships and how I should do things differently to show more love and be more generous, my behavior, being more ecologically minded and conserving of energy. So it raises my consciousness more. I am still doing it once a week with a group of people and we sing songs – it's actually my church.

I got my degree in psychology but I was just never career orientated. I just never knew what I wanted to do when I grew up. Very talented. Sometimes I feel like a jack of all trades in a way. Very good with my hands. In the last year my spiritual path has advanced to where I know what I want to do when I grow up. I always knew I wanted to be a spiritual teacher but now I know that by following my heart that's the direction I'm going. Yoga is important for me, meditation is important for me, reading spiritual books. They're the things I hang on. And then personal things like being more generous – working on my shadow side.

I don't feel judged about not being married or having a family. Being in California there's a lot of support for being a free spirit, being single, serial monogamy or whatever. It has always been a problem for me, the question 'what do you do.' It always brings up how to answer that in a creative way. Now I feel like answering, 'my life is what I do.' My life is my work. There is no distinction. A lot of people box it into 8 hours but I don't stop working when the 8 hours is over. I'm always working. The fact that I have not been part of the establishment has allowed me to be really creative in how I live and how I deal with time and how I balance my work, and my play and my social time and my independent time alone. The fact that I have been on the fringes of society also gives me a perspective that other people don't have about careers and how people manage their time. Whether

their work is something they love, whether it's coming from their heart or not. Not a lot of people are doing what they love.

I've been lonely, very lonely because I couldn't connect with people because I didn't do some growing up. There were some hang-ups. But I've had a very rich inner life and an ability to be by myself and be content. There's a balancing thing – some people are co-dependent and when a relationship breaks up they'll immediately get into another one. I've developed that other side and it's real comfortable being by myself. No problems doing that. For me now what I've been working on for 10 or 20 years is to socialise myself. I started to go to classes, workshops, therapy. My socialisation has really accelerated in the last year.

I started to dance as a way of being with people – contra dancing, like square dancing – 20 years ago. There's this wonderful thing you do where you hold each other and pivot around each other – it's called the swirl - and you look in people's eyes. I was always able to open up and my love would come out. You see I couldn't verbally be close to people. I could connect with my love non verbally and I always had that ability, so that part of me that was love I knew was a strong part of me. Now when I do yoga and I'm smiling sometimes I look at myself and I look happier than I feel. It's an inner joy and a peace. It's okay to be here and everything is okay now. The growth has really accelerated in this year. It is amazing how much I've grown. I feel different every week. I know how to be the monk in the cave. I did that for the first half of my life. The second half of life to be in balance I need to be really involved with people. I'm learning to be spontaneous with my speech. Everything used to be filtered through my head, saying what I think I was supposed to say or what I needed to say. I guess my heart speaks now, or I just don't censor what I'm feeling.

The messages I get on my journey – it's like I'm a teacher in training. They're all about organizing my life, getting my life straight with people, learning to serve, learning to be generous, showing appreciation. I've sent out appreciation letters to relatives and friends. A lot about behaviour, being the model teacher. *What would you like to teach? What do you want people to learn?* It's more about unlearning. Dismantling the programming we've been given. My teaching is how to help each person become closer to God, or to the God that is within them, or closer to the God that they are, closer to their Christ consciousness. In the past week or so I've been saying things to people and it's like wise teachings coming out of my mouth and they apply to whatever the person said. And I never could have thought of them. It doesn't come from my mind but from my experience and my growth. I love expressing myself through writing but I don't have anything to write about yet. One idea – the Zen of Automobile Driving – the relationships between spirituality and driving including how you maintain your car, your attitude to other drivers, how you drive your car, all these analogies. I also know I have healing hands.

Marysia's story

(Marysia is a 30-something New Zealander)

I grew up in a traditional religious discipline, the Catholic faith, and I sort of toed the line when I was living at home with my parents and trotted off to church. I had moments of feeling uplifted and enlightened through the church but as I matured I felt this niggling feeling that there was something more and as I've moved on I've found two things particularly that have influenced me. One is the emergence of the feminine so I now find my idea of spirituality is far more balanced than what I got through the Catholic church and traditional religion. I have found the movement within which is also mirrored by society more towards the feminine. So it doesn't mean that the feminine aspect of God is taking over but I'm finding that there's a greater balance for me between the masculine and the feminine aspects of my beliefs and of nature and for example in the Catholic faith I found transcendence – that there's a transcendental God up there sitting on a cloud – and now I'm moving more towards the imminent, that there's a spiritual dimension within everything. *Would you still call it a god?* I would call it more a universal energy now and I see that in the oneness I see the duality that for me is really well represented in the Chinese ying and yang symbols, that this is the way I have moved, that I see my spiritual journey more in that sense of finding a balance between the different energies and forces.

I find that when I'm selfish and when I look after my own needs I'm a far better person to my husband and my children. For me I'm doing a few little daily rituals that help me with inner peace so that I see my developing spirituality as through balancing opposing forces, male and female, yin and yang, and by developing inner peace which then allows me to tap into the force of love because basically that's how I see my journey. There's a book by Marianne Williamson called 'A Return to Love' and I've never read it but it's kind of where I see myself heading and it's almost a return to love of my original – what I'm born with – that innocent love that's inside a babe. So I find if I do daily rituals that help me with that peace, the balance, the inner peace, the love, which to me is yoga, 20 minutes meditation, and I follow the cycle of the seasons so I acknowledge what is happening around me and I do little rituals where we're at with the seasons. If I do that every day and I sacrifice spending time with my children or my husband to do these things I thereby have much more energy and love and inner peace to give to myself, to my children and my husband. So I can see everything around me is more harmonious. I'm lucky I'm with a partner who allows me that space to have those couple of hours of solitude.

What am I searching for? I think I've stopped searching to be perfectly honest. My yoga teacher summed it up perfectly. She said yoga is not a destination, it's a journey. Through yoga I'm learning to actually not seek. I've become more of a waiter. I'm now sitting back and letting things sort of develop. No longer frantically searching and scrabbling. Today I was at the library and I thought 6 months ago I would have got all these books out and now I'll get one book and I might have to renew it two or three times. And I think this is because I'm opening myself up more to things coming in rather than me searching. I mean I have these intangible things I'm searching for like inner peace and love and I have a few practical ways to develop those through yoga and meditation but I've become more of an observer. I find that I also draw mandalas and do little things. It's about

intuition I guess. I'm developing my inner voice and my intuition. If I had to say I was searching for something it would have to be to develop the wise voice within.

Instead of looking for the god out there, the god, good, spirituality is within me and that my journey is within and I am now doing little things, rituals that can enhance that inner seeking, which is that still small voice. I find that my intuition is really coming forth loud and clear.

The first thing that happened [on my journey] was I met our greengrocer when I was in a pram, Mr Wong, and for some reason I was absolutely in love with him. All I wanted to do was go to Mr Wong's shop. That was my first feeling that there is more out there – something about the eastern philosophy. I felt like it was a huge transcendental moment when I was with him in his shop. It had such a huge effect on me even though I was so small. *I'm fascinated that as a small child you could remember that sense. Not just a warm sense of a grandfather person?* No, it was a sense of the bigger picture. *But you didn't know that then surely.* No. I have a feeling that comes upon me. It's a funny feeling. My sister-in-law Deirdre calls it a transcendental moment, what Covey calls a paradigm shift – it's this echoey still hollow feeling and I don't think it's a feeling, I think it's a sense of the greater picture but being in the moment. I guess it's what the buddhists experience in moments of bliss. When your world is opened up for a flash and you see something more but itsit's an inner thing. That was the first thing.

The second was when my brother went flatting with Ermie, an Indian girl, and that was a transcendental moment when I first went to their house and met her. My brother became a vegetarian. She was Hindu and read East West journals about macrobiotics and all this different styles of eating and philosophies which I'd never experienced. It wasn't just about food, it was about the philosophy around it. I guess it was that kind of Hari Krishna type of thing that really appealed to me. She grew up in NZ but in a traditional Indian family but was reasonably liberated. Still a strict vegetarian, don't know if she was into any Hindu philosophy. My brother started making his own tofu when you couldn't buy it here and I thought wow – and I knew from that moment on that Catholicism was not going to satisfy me. When I was introduced to this eastern approach I felt much more comfortable, and then I started delving into all the eastern religions but now I'm more interested in the disciplines in those states, more from finding the similarities. I used to think I'm not a Catholic, I'm a Buddhist, but that's still duality. So I was going from one religion to another, so that was seeking through different faiths. It opened up my world and I was heavily into the eastern stuff – yoga and buddhism and meditation from that eastern perspective probably until I moved to Australia and motherhood hit me and I was in shock having babies and for five years I went under cover with any kind of learning. I was on my own in Brisbane, no family. Two boys. In mining towns and things. No libraries, no resources. I just basically survived. I was 28 when I started having children. Up until then I was into the eastern things and we travelled to India and read all the philosophies, all the gurus. When Ben started school two years ago I woke again. Quite a metamorphosis. I realised that I couldn't seek traditions but to seek within. To look for inner balance, and ideas from different philosophies. At the moment I'm reading the I Ching, about Chinese divination. Just looking for ideas.

The following two stories come from a husband and wife and, although recorded separately, are somewhat interwoven.

June's story

(June is a 70-something American)

Tell me about your journey through these years. How you've come to where you are in your philosophy on life. I started off looking very hard at all kinds of religions. I went to all kinds of Sunday Schools with all my friends. And then I decided none of it is worth anything. And I found science. I was terribly shy. I started as a nurse's aid in a little town of 30,000, Great Falls, Montana in 1945. And they didn't have enough registered nurses so I worked as a psychiatric nurse. I think we were the first hospital in the country to do psychodrama. I've always been interested in drama because I'd always been terribly shy and if I got to play someone else it was fine. I then married a Jewish captain in the air corp because he was very aggressive and could do all of these things I couldn't do. I became a battered wife and I realized that's not what I needed after having two children. I then moved to New York with \$99 in the bank, the will to make a living, two children to support – I was 27, I was married when I was 19. I was very fortunate because I did a lot in television in St Louis where I was born and illbred, and there is something truly marvelous about working in the theater or television or drama of any kind because you have to leave a great part of yourself behind if you're going to do it well, and you have to listen andI loved it and I worked for 40 years in New York on the stage, on radio and on television.

My daughter took a class called Silva Mind Control which sounded kind of interesting and I took it. I was fascinated. It was the very first of the power of positive thinking at a meditative level which of course is inordinately powerful. It's a kind of prayer and they call it programming. What fascinated me was that sometimes the programming worked phenomenally, people making pots of money, and other times it didn't. And we found after much inquiry – internal - anytime you ask for something, or program for something, or treat for something, in order to avoid something else, it won't work... There was also a great deal of healing. The emphasis was on healing, on positive thinking, doing good things, helping other people. *Are we talking the 1960's?* Yes, it was love, love, love and it fit perfectly in the 60's. Jim took a class - I'd been teaching this for 10 years - in January of '76. We started working together, because he then became an instructor, andwe have continued for 25 years..... As Jim will tell you he was going to be the essential Methodist minister. I was going to be a nun....

Jim's story

(Jim is a 50-something American)

Your journey? I think journey and searching are inappropriate words for me but when I started they were very appropriate. Unhappy family life. I moved around a

lot which I loved. But growing up in my family I was depressed and I kept going there's got to be something better than this, there's got to be a better way to relate to the world than anger and hostility. *Was it a dysfunctional family or did you just feel out of place?* I would call it dysfunctional. My father was a state trooper and he had the badge and the gun so he could finally have power over other people. Not a nice man. And my mother was a helpless wreck so between the two there was no home, there was no nurturing, there was a whiny needy person – at the age of four I was showing her how to open a can of soup because she was having a nervous breakdown and telling her 'you can do this.' So there was no sense of a nurturing home place for me. But what was nice for me was that we got transferred a lot because they didn't like my father and they would ship him out. I got to see a lot of different things, always in the state of Michigan. Every town had a different way of operating. One thing was we'd go to church and we were expected to go to Sunday School – Methodist, or if there wasn't one, then Presbyterian. What I found interesting was that in one town gambling was a sin but movies were okay. In the next town, church ran bingo to raise money but movies were a sin. I started to see from a very young age how subjective and relative this was, depending on who's in the pulpit and what's happening. So I wasn't raised to believe there was one approach. Still I turned to religion when I had a real crisis in my early teens – no, I turned within religion to faith.

I had this awakening, this moment when Jesus appeared and there was a sense of passion and wonderfulness, but the religion and the order imposed on it had nothing to do with this epiphany. I was 14. So it was like this flood of warmth and loving acceptance and the feeling I'd come home but what I found in the church wasn't that. So I thought 'I want to become a minister and have a church that's more geared to this moment of epiphany.' So I became president of youth activities and I became involved and I would give Sunday sermons as president. And I would go to board meetings and the great religious debate would be does the lady who paid for the organ and can't play a decent song get to play it, or does the really good organist play it and upset the lady who paid for it. And it would go round and round and my sense would be saying we're missing the point. So finally in my senior year we were going to have an end of year celebration with some singing and dancing. And the minister's wife, who was a very uptight minister herself, came into the Sunday School room, and told me Jesus would not like dancing. And I said I wasn't so sure. And she said it was okay at school but not here. So I said if it's okay at school why isn't it okay here. And if he showed up at the door we'd ask him to dance. For me it was a very pure sort of thing but for her it was another symbol. I went ahead and did it and the next morning she came in and took over the class and said 'You Jim Spencer are condemned to hell forever for having danced in the church basement.' And I said, 'Well Alma, I'll see you there'. I got up and walked out, knocking over two gossips at the door who were wanting to hear. And that was sort of the end of my Methodist religious.... I was eighteen or nineteen.

Then I went to college in '67. Lots of things were changing, Vietnam. Long hair, hippies. Michigan State University, 40,000 students, big campus. Fairly traditional but lots of radicals. A time of great change. The sexual revolution – my first year women were allowed to visit the men's dorm Sunday for one hour on

Sundays.... All four feet on the ground, doors open. By the fourth year all changed.

I met my girlfriend, Barbara, who was a Christian Scientist. That opened a door when I saw this wonderful sense..... In the Methodist church I saw suffer now and later you'll get a reward. And bitch and complain along the way. And what I saw these people doing was taking responsibility every moment. It was like that moment of epiphany for me. How close can you be to Jesus right in this moment? How close can you be to that lifestyle? That really touched something within me. I loved it but I couldn't handle the 'body is an illusion.' The hormones were racing...I'm sorry. It just didn't gel. Then I got engaged to another girl who was a very conservative protestant and we laid out our lives and how it would be and when I saw that I said 'thank you I'm out of here.'

Took a senior year Chinese Anthropology course – introduced me to the concepts of yin and yang, dialectical materialism. Within the peak of goodness is the seed of badness if you will, within the peak of badness is the seed of goodness. I was struggling with that concept and that led me to a little exposure to Taoism and so the journey was always looking 'out there' because there was too much turmoil 'in here.' I would have moments of peace in here but then there were conflicts that weren't answered for me. So I kept searching out there for relief from...and I think many people's searches start there.

Then after college, psychology major.....I was with a conservative furniture company in Grand Rapids for nine months. I counselled at the teen crisis center. Grand Rapids has a very strong Dutch Reform – they're very like the Hasidic – on Sundays you don't turn on the lights, you don't cook, you study the Bible, you walk to church. And I would see all these houses on the hill with water running out of their garages – they were washing their cars. First Sunday I looked down from my third floor window and saw a little lady crawling out to garden and I thought the poor lady can't walk. On Monday I saw her walking. But every Sunday she crawled so she wouldn't be seen. So the poor teenagers were raised in this 16th century repressive religion and I was counselling them because they were smoking marijuana laced with draino, anything to get out of this. It was an even worse contradiction than I had inside. So I turned off to a lot of religion. Everyone seemed to say, I have the answer, you must do this, but we don't really address what's going on inside you.

Nine months later I transferred to NY City, scared to death, and realised I was home. What I loved about NY is that you can be anybody. Daytime I'd wear my three-piece designer suit, carrying my briefcase. I'm calling on designers and I'm beginning to see how designers spatially relate to the world. How they're building skyscrapers, or offices or churches or theaters and they're all relating. And it struck me there are many ways of relating to the same space.. There are different ways of relating to the spirit, whatever. After work I would go out and walk the streets of NY and I would see the Hispanics and how they related, and the Hasidic neighborhoods, the gay neighborhoods, and then the upper Eastside, the very wealthy neighborhoods. And I'd go to Central Park and all the different music.

And it opened this thing, it's all part of God's creation. And no one of them is right, and no one of them is wrong.

I pursued more psychology at night and did some yoga and studied design. It was all like everybody's got an angle on it and it's all got validity to it, but none of it is the exclusive thing. It's all here. But I didn't know how to put it into practice. And I started TM and it helped relax a lot of the conflict but then I'd go back to work and create the same headache everyday. And I'd come home and release the headache. I never got beyond creating the headache every day. Then by a strange set of coincidences I heard about June giving a lecture, so I went, and I sat there going 'there's something strange here. I don't like this woman.' Warning bells were going off, and I'm thinking maybe I should take this class but I don't have the time or the money. And I remember pulling open my chequebook and I'm writing out the cheque going 'don't do this, you really don't want to do this.' And I handed her the cheque and she said "I'll see you next week." And it's like this really schizophrenic thing, but I showed up. And two hours into it I started to know what she was going to say before she said it. Which I found very disconcerting – like a foreign film out of synch. Then we started the meditations and immediately in the meditations I would get these insights and it was like coming home. It was like I found a place inside where that turmoil...it's like going further in beneath or beyond the turmoil ..to that peaceful place I'd found in that moment of epiphany. I could touch it and come back out.

This process of meditation that way started the spiritual...not path...solidifying it, giving me a practice, a structure, grounding it. Instead of the great search out there, the search was in here. And now I'm more comfortable in here. It's not as if I have to get somewhere. I just have to open up to relate to everything that's here. And I think that's what it's lead to now. There's nothing to search for – it's all here. There's nowhere to go – it's all here. It's opening to be able to relate to everything to see everything as part of God's creation. And sometimes it looks pretty ugly and sometimes it looks beautiful, and they're both perfectly valid. The balance.

And that's when the sense of inner peace came? – when you started working with June? Before that I didn't trust I had an intuition, I didn't trust I was connected. I was like a victim of the world. And suddenly going inside, getting answers. It was like these voices are here and these insights are here. It's all here for me but I never knew how to listen. And nobody anywhere had really directed me in how to listen. Christian Science had come the closest but I was stumbling over the structures, the rules. The rules got in the way of listening without judgment. Take the judgment off and just listen and then there's nowhere to go, nothing to search for. It's just learning to listen more profoundly. And there's a lot I don't hear. So where I want to go now is to a more open place where I'm already at. Does that make sense?

....After leaving Silva because it was all positive thinking, we studied Buddhism and became ordained ministers. So looking at Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrism, all the religions, the easterns opened up that thing that good and evil coexist and then when you accept it it's not really like good or evil. It's like green is made up of

yellow and blue but when they're green they're no longer just yellow or blue. So it's that thing of seeing the opening to see the merging, the embracing, the oneness. That seems to be the experience and in the east they call that enlightenment which is not something you search for out there, it's being and realizing it's all here and it's all been here. The pain was believing it wasn't here. And that was my sense of separation. I can't see it so I believe I'm out here alone and all lost. And now it's called I believe I am a part of everything except for those moments when I fall back into separation. Now I'm aware enough to know I've chosen separation and I'm fighting something. I've put up the wall and if I've put up the wall I can take it down.

Heather's story

(Heather is a 20-something American)

Growing up I've always had a strong sense of intuition. I was taught to listen to angel thoughts. I've always had some sort of understanding from a very young age. The biggest part of my spiritual journey when I really felt something strong to start searching began when I was 17 and in a major horse accident. We were racing at the Christian Science summer camp I was at and I fell and was kicked in the head several times. I was covered in blood and it was scary. I was taken to the nursing facility there. That night I woke up and my body was numbing from my toes up. I felt like I was leaving something and I became terrified I was dying. An uncle had felt the same thing when he was dying and he stood up and said 'no.' So I did that and the problem disappeared. I fell asleep and when I woke up and I wanted to go to the bathroom I found I couldn't move from my neck down. I remember working with a hymn and trying to understand and asking God what I was to do. I fell back asleep and when I woke up I went to the bathroom and I realised I was okay. I was in a lot of pain still but I realised the strength of healing was the power of choice and there was something I had to choose. The healing came in three days from not being able to sit down. I was on a horse the next day. That was the first experience I made Christian Science my own. It was the first time I really understood my connection to God.

Since then my views on religion .. and spirituality have changed immensely. From a small child I felt I was being guided towards something but never felt any pressure to need to understand it. I still trust that even though I don't know where it's taking me. The journey is being in the moment all the time, being in each moment, trusting in each moment, that you have all the love there is and as that is all there is, it is about claiming the full reality. To me my journey is about evolution. As I'm searching I gradually understand my relationship to God and to all things, and what life is really for. *Campbell talks about finding your bliss. What do you think about this as part of the journey?* I've been working on finding my bliss. A friend reminds me sometimes that God is enjoying me.the journey is about getting rid of layers until we see our true self and this is about bliss..... Invite the challenges..... We see more beauty and more love..... We're all on different journeys and it has nothing to do with appearances – we can never know about what is going on in someone else's journey.

CHAPTER 3

THE INWARD OR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY:

The 're-visioning' of spirituality

*The inward journey is about discovering your dream,
Discovering who you are, and where you're going.
What could be more exciting than that?
All the answers point to something far greater than ourselves.*
Max (in interview)

Why do I term these stories inward or spiritual journeys? I think it can be seen that they are journeys of discovery to find a way of living, a way of being that is more meaningful, more authentic, more relevant than what has gone before (discussed in the next chapter). I believe they also tell us about how the concept of spirituality is being 're-visioned.'

At first glance it seems that while some people are searching for a satisfying religious denomination or even returning to what is often defined now as religious fundamentalism, others are searching more for a sense of inner well-being, what I call spirituality or the celebration of the human spirit. But in each case, and in the diversity of other 'takes' on spiritual searching, there is a will to discover more about what is beyond the physical boundaries to glimpse something of the metaphysical. As I said in the introduction it can be called "reflexive spirituality, a more deliberate, self-conscious awareness that we must take charge of our inner well-being – our sense of self" (Roof 1999:131). According to some psychologists and anthropologists, the higher the level of such clarity, of 'knowing thyself', the higher one's self-esteem (Baron & Byrne 2000:173, Gellner 1999:435).

Elizabeth Lesser in *The New American Spirituality*, asked two hundred "spiritual leaders" what the word spirituality meant to them, and discovered there was no one answer. "You can walk a wonderful spiritual path," she says "with or without adhering to a religion. All paths are available; none are exclusively right or wrong or even required....search for your own definition of spirituality" (1999:28). She

also states that “One of humankind’s greatest ironies is how throughout history, prophets who have preached genuine, radical experience in place of institutionalised, inflexible dogma become, after death, the central figure in an ‘ism’ they would never have supported” (1999:xvi).

Perhaps this spiritual search is all about seeking one’s own *lived experience*.

I asked participants and others I talked to what spirituality means to them. Some of the responses include:

Mary –

What spirituality means to me is my truth. It has nothing to do with religion. It has to do with me knowing me....being aware of who I am, living my own truth, thinking my own thoughts...

Susanne –

Spirituality to me would be about finding out who I really am, and the truth about life itself...I can see that religion in essence has always been about that but for me personally religion hasn’t got anything to do with it now.

Max -

[Spirituality] is definitely not about religion as such....*You describe yourself as a spiritual person – what does that mean to you?* It’s funny because a lot of spiritual people I’ve met would not consider themselves religious and those people who are most spiritual, the most loving, the most profound, are those who possess the most inner peace. And I think that comes with some sort of higher self-knowledge or self-awareness, or some higher sense that their lives are being guided or directed. And so much of that requires constant openness and a constant searching, a search for understanding.....

June –

A spiritual person is a person who embraces everything and attracts everything and resists nothing. I think spirituality is the realisation,the absolute knowledge and recognition that everything is worth respect, everything is worth embracing, everything is worth including. To embrace everything, and exclude nothing – that to me is spirituality. *And how does that relate to religion? Are they the same?* Not at all! For the plain and simple reason that every religion I have encountered says ‘don’t do that’, ‘don’t do this’, ‘you mustn’t do this.’ ‘This is bad’, ‘this is

wrong'. To me this is totally anti-spiritual. Most religions, at least the way they're taught – I don't think they were that way – I don't think Jesus Christ said, 'don't do that' – I think when he said 'love thy neighbor as thyself' – not as much as you love yourself but as though it were you. Jesus said it, Moses said it, Muhammad said it, Buddha said it, Lao Tsu said it. We are all one. We are different leaves on the same tree. And there are lot of little leaves going out saying 'I'm it, I'm it.'

Cheryl –

What does spirituality mean to you? it's the foundation of my life, what everything else is based on.... Here's the Maori thing. We have three basic parts in our life. You have the spiritual side, the intellectual and the physical. And whatever you base your world on will determine how that world looks. So if you base your world on spirituality, then the physical and intellectual will come into balance and express that. It's fairly basic. If you base your life on the intellectual side of you it's probable that there will be less balance between the three. Often if you follow the intellectual path too far it takes you very far away from spirituality, or if you take the physical path....My spirituality mainly comes from my culture. *It doesn't necessarily have any link to a religion?* No. Religion to me is very different. Religion to me is institutionalised power and control. It's harsh but that's been my experience throughout my life. I'm not saying religions are bad. Just that I think they've gone too far from what was the original intention. You look at the Catholic church and the huge power and even a lot of the belief they give forth, it's about getting people to follow rules, very strict rules, and there's very strict punishment if you don't follow the rules. You go to hell and you're condemned to eternal damnation. So a lot of people follow the tenets of a religion out of fear rather than out of love.

Heather –

What does spirituality mean to you? My relationship to God, not anyone else's, not anyone's interpretation of what God is or what the relationship is. My spirituality is about better understanding my relationship to God and to all things within that....I'm extremely grateful I've been raised a Christian Scientist because of the concept of God that Christian Science teaches: that God is a God of love and that you start from the point of perfection. A lot of what I was taught still holds true about God. I still consider myself a Christian Scientist but I don't base my spirituality on a religion.....Rules and regulations of a specific religion are a human institution which try to explain a spiritual realm, or one way to explain the spiritual realm. One of the things I really struggled with was being part of a human institution and calling that my spirituality. I don't connect the two. For me, spirituality has always been my relationship to God and if God said there's something more than Christian Science I would have trusted it in a heartbeat. I haven't found it yet but it doesn't mean I don't stop looking, and I guess that's why to me it is a journey, a constant evolution of thought, a constant growth within that relationship.

Craig –

What does spirituality mean to you? It means believing in a god, believing in an afterlife, believing in a soul, believing in right and wrong, good and evil. Religions took the teachings of the great spiritual teachers like Buddha and Christ and put them into a political format, an organized format, a business structure and they designed it to keep people captive, they designed it for people to need *it* rather than to be free to find God on their own. Religion is the formalized teaching that has been distorted – it's a club and the leaders want to have followers and they perpetuate dependence. *Is it necessary for this to have happened or could people have followed a spiritual path without that?* O definitely people can find their own spiritual path without religion. Religion is kind of like an historical repository – what was good about one particular leader. It can be a doorway to that person's teachings. *So it's not all bad.* No. You can be a recovering religious person. You can get beyond it. It can be a doorway but it's not a be-all and end-all. All religions are missing something or there'd only be one religion. The only religion is spirituality and that's your relationship with God, your relationship with other human beings, your relationship with nature, in a holy manner.

If there wasn't religion do you think most people would be able to fathom that, figure that out, or do you think the reason there is religion is that for most people they're not going to think it through that much, they're going to need someone to tell them. Some people would find their own spirituality if religion didn't exist but I think on the whole religion is beneficial and it has its place, and it helps many people lead a more spiritual life. But it prevents them from going all the way because each one is so limited, only portraying part of the truth. The churches don't want to set you free because then you'd go off on your own. There are a lot of religions that are financial institutions and they need people to support them.

This perceived division between religion and spirituality that comes out in these stories is consistent also in most of the books I have read. According to Diarmuid O Murchu, in his book *Reclaiming Spirituality*, our spiritual story as a human species is at least 70,000 years old, whereas formal religions have only been in existence for around 4,500 years. Religion, he says, refers to formal institutionalised structures, rituals and beliefs, whereas spirituality concerns an ancient and primal search for meaning that is as old as humanity itself (1999:vii).

The new spirituality...belongs to the world and its peoples and not to some distant God in heaven or to an ultimate state of nirvana. It is a spirituality that transcends what each and all the religions claim to represent. It is a spirituality that engages with the search for meaning as people struggle to inter-relate more authentically in what we progressively consider to be an interdependent world, within an eternally evolving universe. It is a spirituality that invites us to break out of all our anthropocentric enclaves – religious and political – and reclaim the whole of

creation as our one true home.....And this brings us .. to what may well be the most controversial and daunting claim of the new spirituality: religion is a temporary reality that in all probability has outlived its usefulness” (1999:171-173).

A controversial claim indeed, but one which many of my interviewees would readily agree with.

The 14th century Sufi poet and mystic, Hafiz, who is not surprisingly very popular again today, is clear about his view of religion:

The great religions are the ships
Poets are the lifeboats
Every sane person I know has jumped
Overboard.
(Ladinsky. 1999:119)

Huston Smith in his well known book, *The World's Religions*, provides a more objective perspective. The empowering theological and metaphysical truths of the world's religions are, in his opinion, inspired, while religious institutions are not (1991:5). Incorporating as they do the frailties (and strengths of course) of people who are not the original instigators of the truths that they are trying to preserve, inequities (largely social I would suggest) can and do occur - in the extreme: fanaticism, persecution, and ethnic cleansing in the attempt to retain cultural 'purity;' in the less extreme and visible: moralising, judgmentalism and hypocrisy in the attempt to ensure individual 'purity.' And not much of any of this has anything to do with the original insight or vision. It has and still does provide useful social controls. As Susanne notes (in interview):

...people were motivated by fear. That's why they went to church.....I think with my grandparents' generation – that was fear and social conformity. It was part of society that you went to church and there was a strong guilt feeling...if you didn't.

And yet, as Huston Smith observes, without such institutions to preserve them, these insights would have left no mark on history. Perhaps religion, despite its obvious limitations, has not yet 'outlived its usefulness.' Another reason, as will become clear in this thesis, is that most people need community, a sense of belonging, a place to belong, and for many, a place to serve. Individual spiritual

seeking does not provide this unless individuals find likeminded seekers with whom to congregate – and so the cycle continues. Is there a way through this? Can religious institutions disseminate theological and metaphysical inspiration without the need to attach social controls, something that now appears to cause significant alienation? This is discussed further on.

Writing back in 1970 J. Needlewoman in his book *The New Religions* talks of an “inward turn” in modern religion. This term corresponds closely to my use of the term ‘inward journey.’

“Divinity is no longer ‘out there, so to speak, but ‘in here’ .. the cultivation of ‘interiority’ and reflexivity has a more general strategic function: it cushions and nourishes the individual in a time of accelerating socio-cultural change.... A self ‘at ease’ can better manage the contemporary flood of cultural pick-and-mix options and ‘off-the-peg’ lifestyles in which ‘religion’ itself is increasingly just one more ingredient” (1970:227).

I’ll discuss this question of multiple choice lives in more detail in the next chapter, except to note here that in the majority of cultures until this point in time, the issue of where to go for answers to life’s essential dilemmas never arose in the way it does now.

As I said in the Introduction though, such journeys to discover one’s own experience-based spirituality are not new, although certainly, at least in western society, the rapidly increasing numbers of seekers are. Walter Truitt Anderson in his fascinating book *Reality isn’t what it used to be* discusses the distinction between “the two ways of being religious” (1990:212). The exoteric path he says is that of doctrinal religions such as institutionalised Christianity and Islam which explain all reality through written scripture and are capable of serving as a complete system of values and beliefs for society. They usually do not lend themselves to much flexibility of personal opinion. The esoteric path on the other hand is often called the mystical path and includes traditions such as Sufism and Zen Buddhism which support individuals in learning how to reach a higher consciousness but don’t actually tell one what the ultimate truth actually is. This is something one discovers for oneself. It usually doesn’t even have a fixed concept

of what God or the ultimate power might be. Esoteric religion is about the transformation of personal consciousness (1990:217).

According to a Zen saying all of Buddhist doctrine is nothing more than a finger pointing the way. Anderson also notes that many people in the Orient have used esoteric teachings such as Buddhism as a source of guidance in their lives without the need to make the teachings into a religion or to even feel particularly religious, and this, he feels, is what is happening here in the West. Many people are beginning to realize that if you lose your conviction in the absolute truth of any concept or doctrine it does not mean you are headed down the slippery slope. “You can approach this (or any other) body of teaching without feeling that you need either reject it entirely or swallow it whole” (1990:224).

Another important point is that whenever we try to grasp spiritual concepts we’re dealing with something that transcends our intellectual understanding (Drury 1999:29). Perhaps it is that our instincts, our feelings and emotions, our inner knowing, and our own spiritual experiences, convince us of a dimension to life that is beyond the rational. Some of us are happy to be given a theological explanation, others want to figure it out for themselves.

Further responses to the question what does spirituality mean to you:

Matthew –

A ‘definition’ for spirituality might be ‘fundamental belief without authority and without sanction.’ (Matthew Holden, President American Political Science Association)

Chris –

Spirituality is often defined very loosely now. It is often used by people with no interest in religion, but for others it is about their relationship to God or their Creator. For me it really means the deepest search to know one’s individual purpose and identity.

David -

Spirituality means to me living in my true identity. It means being close to God which for me is synonymous with Love, that Love which is not personal but is the Love which is the universal power and substance that pervades the entire universe, every cell of our bodies, part of all creation. Spirituality to me is different from religion. Religion is about a set of rules like in a particular denomination, a certain kind of theology, rituals and practices. Spirituality is a more universal concept that embraces all religions and is about our direct relationship to God – not going through a particular church or priest to find God. *So religion is not necessary to spirituality?* I don't believe it is. It might be an important background for somebody. It could be a foundation for somebody's spirituality and it could be inextricably linked to somebody's spirituality or spiritual path, but, no, I don't think it's necessary. *Can you conceive of getting to where you are spiritually without having had a religious background?* I can conceive of it. I don't know particularly how it would happen to me. I suppose one could do a lot of reading in the area of spirituality. Some of it might come out of a particular religious faith or practice. Some of it might be more general and not connected to any particular religious faith or practice, and one could find one's own relationship to God through doing that but I think there's some value in coming together with other people who are seeking to know God and finding the support and nurturance there that you might not be able to achieve all on your own. That's seems true for most people. Going out on your own away from traditional religion is some act of courage and strength and maybe demonstrates that your spirituality is so rooted and clear to you and is strong enough that you can leave traditional forms of religion and 'practicing spirituality' to doing it on your own and letting the Spirit lead you to where you need to be and be relying more radically on Spirit to reveal to you what your identity is; not having to find it through fellow worshippers in a particular church.

I read somewhere that there could be a potential problem in that now people have a heritage of religious background to base their spiritual searches on. But what happens another generation down when some people don't have a religious foundation. Would this be a problem? It could be ultimately the answer. As we evolve and as we practise our spirituality....spirituality means to me something you strive to practise everyday; religion is something that is compartmentalized (you might go to church on Sunday or some other days). And for some people that is sufficient, but if you're a true spiritual seekers then nothing but an all-consuming, almost obsessive interest in your spiritual growth and in seeing the face of God in yourself and others and all creation – is the important thing that kind of determines how you govern your day.

Neville Drury comments,

At this time in our cultural history and perhaps for the first time on a wide scale within our society, our belief systems and paradigms can be formulated on the basis of what we can *experience*, rather than what we have hoped for, or have been

brought up to believe. In this way our shared knowledge and cumulative experiential wisdom can become the crucial determinants of spiritual authenticity in the years which lie ahead.” (1999:178)

‘Spiritual authenticity based on our own experience’ – perhaps this answers the question, ‘what are we searching for?’

Why are we searching? To answer this, and to perhaps provide some more objective social science material, it will help to look in the next chapter at a brief historical overview up to the 1960’s, and then in the following chapters a more in-depth analysis of what has happened in the development of spirituality since then.

CHAPTER 4

A WORK IN PROGRESS

'there is no movement here, just a work in progress'
(Van Biome 1996:65)

An historical overview

One of the difficulties in thinking about the historical development of spirituality particularly in the western world (and even more particularly in the United States where so much of the spiritual seeking is originating), is of course the need once more to think about how the term 'spirituality' is being used. Are we thinking of it as related to religious belief or more in the sense of 'of the inner spirit?' Or is it more useful to this thesis simply to look at what we know about how concepts such as identity, growing self-awareness have developed? Perhaps the answer is a bit of all of this. After all it might be that we're really talking about aspects of the same thing, changing views of reality.

In so far as we know about our history (much of it has been interpreted from the perspective of the traditional patriarchal Christian church), there is evidence to suggest that Neanderthals practiced ritual burial of their dead which may mean they believed in some sort of afterlife or realm beyond what they could see (Edgar 1999:335). Certainly we know that most peoples, if not all, during the course of history have had some sort of sacred or spiritual belief system that has been so much part of their taken-for-granted core beliefs, their culture, that it was never an 'optional extra' for its people.

We know that in so far as the Western world is concerned Christianity held a strong social, political and religious hold over its people for centuries. The heads of the church were regarded as God's messengers and unquestioning obedience to their dictates was necessary for survival. Perhaps not until the seventeenth century with the rise of science, and increasing recognition of the human fallibility of 'God's messengers,' did people start to gain a more objective perspective.

Individuals started to question. The immense political power of the Christian church lost its footing as the sole source of authority and knowledge.

By the end of the eighteenth century an intellectual movement called The Enlightenment had established itself principally in France, espousing such beliefs as the ability of reason to solve social as well as intellectual and scientific problems, an aggressively critical belief in the adverse influences of tradition and religion, a belief in the virtues of progress, tolerance and free thinking. At the helm on The Enlightenment were people like Kant, Hume, Rousseau, Voltaire (Edgar 1999:125). By the end of the nineteenth century Emile Durkheim was contrasting the mechanical solidarity of pre-industrial societies with the complex division of labor and greater sense of individual identity and separateness found in modern society (Edgar 1999:243).

Turning now to focus explicitly on where so much spiritual seeking is happening, to what seems to be the vanguard of this re-visioning of spirituality, we move to the North American continent and its earliest settlers. An early and important influence in American spiritual development was that of the founding Puritans in New England in the early seventeenth century. Puritanism started back in sixteenth century England to establish a middle road between Catholicism and the ideas of the Protestant reformers and had continued to promote a strong civic and religious moral 'purity' as it colonized the north eastern coasts of the American continent. It remained a dominant religious force there right into the nineteenth century and, interestingly, also introduced to this budding nation some of the earliest principles of democracy (the right of every member to speak at what were called 'town meetings'), as well as beliefs in popular education. Despite its intense commitment to morality and asceticism, perhaps in seeding such egalitarian ideas its influence was far more extensive than could ever have been envisaged. More people were starting to think for themselves, and it would seem they weren't necessarily just thinking in line with their Puritan foundation.

Certainly by the nineteenth century in New England there was growing awareness of a greater sense of individual identity and separateness. The transcendentalists of New England who included Emerson and Thoreau contributed greatly to this:

“Whoso would be a man, must be a non conformist .. What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think....you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion...Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood..... Insist on yourself; never imitate” (Emerson quoted in Haight 1941:123-126).

Also in New England new religious ideas that were radically different from traditional Christian thought were appearing. For instance, in line with the growing egalitarianism there, a woman, Mary Baker Eddy, introduced the teachings of Christian Science. I am referring in some detail to this particular religion partly because of my own (and some of my participants’) foundation in it, but also because I believe its influence (though not necessarily acknowledged) on other spiritual teachings is significant. At a time when medical science was in its very early stages, Eddy’s teachings about how anyone could heal as Jesus had gained rapid popularity worldwide, despite the vigorous opposition from most of traditional Christianity which still believed that it was heresy to even say that anyone other than Jesus and his disciples could heal. But her teachings did heal consistently and gradually this opposition declined until today most of these churches embrace some form of healing practice. So not only did Christian Science introduce metaphysical healing as a proven alternative to medical care, it insisted on equality of the sexes. It talked about God as Father-Mother, as the power of infinite harmony, as eternal Love, rather than as a sometimes kind, sometimes wrathful and even vengeful God Father . It disposed of the ideas of a devil and an actual place called hell, and introduced the notion that heaven and hell (and everything else) were states of consciousness.

“Everything is as real as you make it, and no more so. What you see, hear, feel, is a mode of consciousness, and can have no other reality than the sense you entertain of it” (Eddy 1887:8).

This is regarded as almost common knowledge amongst spiritual seekers now. Although the numbers attending her church have diminished for the same reasons as other churches (for instance the resistance to the increasing institutionalization of the teachings, politics, elitism, the rules and regulations surrounding what is appropriate behaviour for church members), her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1911) continues to sell consistently and has currently sold over 9 million copies. It is regarded as having been a radical influence on many areas of contemporary spirituality, as well as having produced many more recent variations - for instance Joel Goldsmith's teachings and Ernest Holmes' *Science of Mind* (the Church of Religious Science).

Another significant religious influence originating at the same time, this time in New York, and also founded by a woman, was the Theosophical Society whose aim was to "build a center for the brotherhood of man without consideration of race, color, sex, religious belief, or social position; to support comparative studies of religion, philosophy, and science; and to study unexplained natural laws and latent powers of man" (Barker 1982:354). Reincarnation, karma, nirvana were all ideas that found their place in these teachings, undoubtedly helping to adjust the western Christian mind to the increasing interest in Eastern religious ideas. Again, various offshoots occurred, including Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophy.

So apart from such spiritual teachings, there was also a plethora of different and often revolutionary ideas emerging. As critical theorist, Walter Truitt Anderson outlines in his thought-provoking book *Reality isn't what it used to be*, existential philosophy, very visible in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, searched for a new sense of reality. Sigmund Freud and his followers took that into the human psyche, Marx into the political world, Einstein into the physical world asking us to believe that time and space are not what we ordinarily experience them as, that matter and energy are the same, and up and down merely relative notions.

"It was a tough time for absolutes: every road that appeared to lead to certainty had some genius standing in the middle of it with a 'wrong way' sign" (1990:36).

Anderson goes on to attribute much of the credit for twentieth century scholars' central concern with the questions 'what is reality' and 'to what extent is reality socially constructed' to the participant observation methods of anthropologists who "brought into clear view the remarkable range of realities that exist in a world that, one would have thought, had a single reality" (1990:37). By the early 1930's a new academic sub-discipline called the sociology of knowledge, looking at how societies create and perpetuate structures of reality, social controls, social roles and so on, appeared in Germany, later spreading particularly with Karl Mannheim to England, and later to the United States.

There are numerous other influences on the unfolding story of religion, spirituality, truth-seeking, reality-seeking, expanding self-awareness, the great awakening, but for the purposes of this thesis I want to turn now to what seems to be the most significant focal point, the 1960's, and to what followed.

The 60's onwards

As a number of writers have pointed out many spiritual seekers today object to being labeled or categorized as belonging to some sort of movement, even something as loose as The New Age Movement, let alone any sort of specific New Religious Movement (for instance, Heelas 1996:17; Anderson and Ray 2000). And for those who were part of the 60's counter-culture or who fall in the category of Baby Boomer, some of the associated implications around rebellion and egocentrism seem quite offensive. Despite this, there are aspects of all these cultural entities, if they can be called that, that provide useful insights into 'what is happening out there.' There are some commonalities in motives and attitudes at least that may warrant a loose reference to these terms. In the remainder of this chapter and the next I will look particularly at the contributions of four writers prominent in this field of inquiry: Paul Heelas, Nevill Drury, Wade Clark Roof, and Robert Ellwood.

The 60's counter-culture

The mid to late 60's through the early to mid 70's has been termed the 60's counter-culture and was a time of political and aesthetic protest (Robbins 1988:1). It was also clearly a formative period in the lives of many of my participants. The use of psychedelic drugs as a way to access utopian and mystical insights was well publicized, as was the burgeoning interest in Eastern mystical ideas in the 50's (Robbins 1988:2). This period is well documented as a turning point in awakening consciousness or greater self awareness, and, it could be claimed, was the start of the changing worldview I talk about in chapter 6, and my subjects talk about in chapter 2.

Paul Heelas has written profusely over the last twenty years on the subjects of the 60's counter culture, NRMs and the New Age, and uses the word Self-spirituality (1996:49) to refer to what I call spiritual seeking. He observes that the upsurge in Self-spirituality really began during the 50's with the beatniks (meaning 'beatific') who were intent on pushing the boundaries of consciousness, typically combining eastern and western spiritual beliefs. The 60's counter-culture manifested as an intense criticism of, attack on, rebellion against "organisations and traditions of a 'straight' society," against anything that inhibited the expression of one's authentic nature – capitalism, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions (1996:50). And also religious institutions. Heelas, who was himself part of the counter-culture, notes that many people hadn't any idea what they were actually looking for but they were out looking anyway. In this atmosphere, spirituality remained relatively inchoate through the 60's although there was ever increasing interest in the 'inner realm' and of course self-actualisation centres such as the Esalen Institute in California and communes such as Findhorn in Scotland established during this time. By the mid 70's there were as many as 300 centres and 3000 communes (1996:52). Also during this time the Human Potential Movement, transpersonal psychology, the Growth Movement, took off. With all these outgrowths of the 60's it is debatable how much the focus was on spirituality and how much on psychology. Of course considering the comments of my participants about what spirituality means to them, particularly in chapter three (e.g.

‘spirituality to me would be about finding out who I am,’ ‘spirituality is my truth’), this distinction may not have been very relevant at all.

And yet despite all this proliferation of activity in what was then called the Age of Aquarius (referring to a new age when a significantly better way of life was dawning (1996:15)) – including as well such things as transcendental meditation, the Zen centers, the Inner Peace Movement, Silva Mind Control – by the close of the decade there was nothing like the number of organized activities that abound today. “Many of the ingredients of the contemporary New Age were developed during the 1960s, but their institutionalization largely came later” (Heelas 1996:53). By this he does not mean structured in the sense of New Religious Movements, but in the sense of groups, networks, seminars, centers, monasteries, retreats. In this way while the counter-culture lost momentum in the 70’s with fewer drop-outs, fewer communes, “spirituality” itself gained, and continues to gain, more solid ground (1996:68).

NRM’s - New Religious Movements

But there were New Religious Movements forming as well and some of these Heelas identifies as ‘self-religions’ (for example Kerista, Primal Therapy, The Farm, Rebirthing, est), “.... with their various syntheses of mind cure, psychotherapy, eastern religious ideas, and aspects of the human potential movement and humanistic psychology, combine and highlight major cultural themes: the psychological, the religious, the meaningful, and the perfectibility of man. Participants believe that psychological techniques enhance experiences, provide the basis for authentic social systems or interpersonal relationships, and in general function to fulfill human potentialities” (1982:69). He goes on to note that these self-religions must be distinguished from the earlier counter cultures of the Woodstock generation and also of more totalitarian, fundamentalist movements. They were grounded, he says, in a distinctive way of life exemplified by middle class and increasingly middle aged inhabitants of the bay area of San Francisco.

While the term New Religious Movement (NRM), about which copious material has been written (for example, Robbins 1988, Barker 1982, Beckford 1986, Needleman 1978), may not at first glance appear to have much to do with the individual spiritual seeking about which I am concerned here, one can see that at least with these self-religions there are commonalities. Regardless of the obvious reference to newly established religions which usually occur with a defined group of people in defined locations and with defined beliefs, it is useful to look at the cultural and historic processes that may have given rise to a search for a new way of looking at what life is all about, in other words the quest for meaning. James Beckford suggests that the lowest common denominator in trying to find the commonalities of the widely differing religious movements would be “the shared capacity...to evoke and cultivate concerns with the ultimate significance of human life” (1986:ix). He maintains that even those groups who reject the label ‘religion’ would probably accept this common purpose. And the same would be true for most spiritual seekers. Beckford also suggests that the label ‘religious movement’ necessitates something that is sufficiently distinctive to be a “separate and important thread in the intricate weave of social life” (1986:x). In one sense spiritual seekers are not part of a movement as such and yet they are certainly a distinctive thread in current spiritual life.

I believe the (r)evolution of consciousness that I am talking about in this thesis, regardless of the fact that it is about individual spiritual seeking and not organized religions or social movements of any sort, could also be seen as sufficiently distinctive to be a separate and important thread in the intricate weave of contemporary western culture. Perhaps the term New Spiritual Movement (NSM) needs to be introduced to identify this inward journey, this ever evolving momentum towards greater understanding of the spiritual autonomous self, and the ultimate significance of human life - in other words, movement in the sense of constantly moving rather than in the sense of a particular definable cultural entity.

(The) New Age Movement

With regard to what the New Age Movement is all about, Heelas points out (1996:9) that it is not an NRM although it may contain NRM's. It primarily contains other modes of affiliation as well as a diverse range of values, assumptions and activities that themselves are incorporated into individual and community life in equally diverse ways. This is illustrated in a perusal of the Summer 2001 glossy free quarterly magazine, *Common Ground* (Issue 108) sitting here on my desk. My count indicates over 1000 separate advertisements in a 136 page publication for organizations, seminars, conferences, practitioners, gurus, spiritual practices, and so on in the San Francisco Bay Area alone; everything from 'Recreate your body in love' on the first page to 'Don't miss your appointment with the Goddess' on the last. The New Age label includes such a vast array of beliefs, practices and ways of life from the extreme esoteric and mystical to simple self-improvement practices and mind over matter 'get rich quick' schemes, that many spiritual seekers do not want to be associated with a generalised label that includes ideas with which they do not agree or want to be seen to associate.

According to Heelas the New Age expanded from the counter-culture of the 60's, the Age of Aquarius (1996:1). The term New Age, he says, "has come to be used to designate those who maintain that inner spirituality – embedded within the self and the natural order as a whole – serves as the *key* to moving from all that is wrong with life to all that is right" (1996:16). He also refers to a common 'lingua franca,' to do with the transformation of the human (and planetary) condition, and also a general agreement that it is necessary to shift from 'our contaminated mode of being – what we are by virtue of our socialisation' - to find our authentic selves (1996:2). Explained in these ways, I expect most of my participants would be in agreement, particularly as he goes on to contend that it should not be implied that the New Age is in any sense an organised entity. The diversity ranges from well-organised NRMs and communities such as Findhorn, networks, one-on-one therapies, centers, home gatherings, camps, office retreats, weekend trainings, summer gatherings, schools, and of no less significance "the individual pursuing a relatively solitary spiritual quest (1996:16). I would also include internet related

chat groups, a form of community that is gathering rapid momentum. Heelas concludes, "In short, the term 'movement' simply refers to the assumption that humanity is progressing into a new era," contending that perhaps only 5 to 10% of New Agers belong to particular New Age organizations (1996:16).

One of the main themes of *New Age Movement* Heelas says is that the New Age is 'deeply embedded in aspects of our culture' (1996:115). It is a 'radicalised' rendering of quite familiar cultural values and assumptions, and ranges in degree depending on the individual's particular beliefs – from very New Age to mildly so, mostly psychological or even simply 'prosperity' consciousness - for instance, how to use mind control techniques to make more money. The assumptions and values are those of what Heelas calls 'humanistic expressivism.'

"Humanistic expressivists think in terms of self-development. They are those who concentrate on what it is to be a person rather than dwelling too extensively on the externals of life. They are those who have faith in what the inner, psychological realm has to offer. Attaching significance to self-exploration and seeking to express all that one can be, their values include 'awareness', 'insight', 'empathy', 'creativity', 'autonomy', 'authenticity', 'being loving' and seeking 'fulfillment' (1996:115).

Although these people may not see themselves as New Age, they have much in common with their more 'radical cousins', sharing for instance the fundamental notion that it is possible to influence the quality of one's own life. The expressive self, Heelas notes further on, is

"...a self which values itself. Valuing its *own* authority and agency, power and creativity, its *own* right to decide how to live the good life, it necessarily follows that this self is critical of the tradition-informed" (1996:160).

Heelas also notes that people drawn to New Age philosophies are often people who are unclear about their identities. And also, "as a general rule of thumb, well-educated people who have become disenchanted by, or are reacting to, what the mainstream of society has been able to offer are the most likely to take the New Age seriously" (1996:137). Both these statements would appear to be true of the people I have interviewed. Concerns about environmental degradation, capitalism, economic inequality, as well as personal disempowerment in the face of western

corporatisation, are the sorts of issues that concern these people greatly. As Heelas says, “work is seen as alienating; politicians are taken to be corrupt; consumer culture is taken to be undermining the future of the planet.... There is more to life than identity as a consumer. External goods fail to add up to anything which is intrinsically satisfying (1996:138). Seeking spiritual solutions becomes critical.

At the other end of the spectrum Heelas notes that the New Age is highly unlikely to appeal to people who have a strong sense of tradition, a strong public ‘self’, who look outward not inward for their sense of identity (1996:157).

“Basically, the appeal of the New Age has to do with the culturally stimulated interest in the self, its value, capacities and problems. Whereas traditionalized religiosity, with its hierarchical organization, is well-suited for the community, detraditionalized spirituality is well-suited for the individual. The New Age is ‘of the self in that it facilitates celebration of what it is to be and to become; and ‘for’ the self in that by differing from much of the mainstream, it is positioned to handle identity problems generated by conventional forms of life” (Heelas 1996:173).

Of course there are severe critics of a New Age, seeing it as hedonistic, narcissist, self-indulgent. While Heelas’ treatment of the New Age is sympathetic in this book, *New Age Movement* (1996), he was far less so back in 1982. Writing then he talks about Marin (a county north of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco) culture as “marked by a whole range of activities designed to promote the exploration of experience, especially feelings... Inhabitants retire to their sensory deprivations baths; they take a course... they compete in ‘mellowing-out’ or at displaying their innermost thoughts whilst ‘gestalting’... their language aptly called ‘psychobabble’” (1982:71). He quotes C. Reed as saying:

“Ascetic and aesthetes all, they are also heavily into lentil soup and grande cuisine, second-hand clothes and tennis parties, herbal teas and large Tequila sunrises, getting rid of body toxins and taking cocaine, puffing pot, and a no-smoking zone from Monterey to Cape Cod. This is where, on a bright Saturday morning, you clip your ten-speed Tour de France Special on the MGB’s grid and roar up the hills, where, after some brisk pedalling, you roar back and enthuse about the ‘total physical experience’ and the importance of not ‘destabilising the environment’” (1978:223).

Heelas observes that a sense of well being has become an end in itself, rather than a by-product of striving for the greater communal good. He quotes Rosen:

“These days, fewer seem willing to settle for anything so quaint as ordinary human suffering. Consumer expectations have risen... The idea of being ‘cured’ has been fetishized; mental health is thought of less and less as a capacity to confront, explore, and transmute the sometimes irreducible contradictions of living, and more and more as a total triumph over all that threatens the autonomy of the individual” (1978:204).

It is interesting in light of Heelas’ attack on New Agers back in the late 70’s, that by the mid 90’s this rather caustic accusation of self indulgence had disappeared. Is it because he changed his outlook during the intervening 20 years, or that the New Age has become less focused on such self centered pleasure seeking and more focused on a deepening spirituality? I certainly cannot find the former focus in any of my interviews, but then as I’ve said, I selected participants who said they were on a spiritual journey and maybe this inevitably excludes those whose primary focus is pleasure seeking, or prosperity consciousness. Nevill Drury refers to these superficial elements of the New Age as ‘spiritual materialism,’ noting that “it has not helped that in a consumerist society where anything in demand can be marketed, that assuaging spiritual thirst has itself become a commodity” (1999:95).

Baby Boomers

Wade Clark Roof’s latest book, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (1999a), looks at those people born 1946 to 1964 who grew up in the tumultuous decades of the 60’s and 70’s and who, he maintains, are still at the vanguard of cultural transformations in the US. Controversial as young rebels right through to the crisis of the Clinton presidency, many have been the focus of debate about, amongst many things, changing moral values, the face of religion, and spirituality in general (1999a:3).

Roof’s findings are based on a large scale study he conducted over a decade starting in 1988, and including a follow-up in 1995. It included survey data, in-depth interviews, and field observation of hundreds of Baby Boomers, “trying to understand their worlds and the changes in their life trajectories” (1999a:10). It seems that with some trepidation about the pitfalls in putting labels on people, he created four categories of spiritual identity: born-again Christians (including

Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics) and mainstream believers, metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers, dogmatists (including fundamentalists), and secularists (1999a:178). It is his second category that we are concerned with here.

Roof notes that his category of metaphysical believers and seekers, which includes 14% of his sample, is broader than what usually passes as New Age. This term he says was used more in his survey in the 80's than his latest survey in the mid-90's. Relatively few people by this time wanted to identify with the term. This category then is "an extraordinarily heterogeneous subculture – even in terms of their own self-designations and identities, not to mention the great variety of beliefs, values, and ethical commitments they hold" (1999a:204). Roof goes on to note that there are also boundary problems because many of these people also adhere at least loosely to a particular religious teaching, and apparently as many as 20% of Americans are focused more on spiritual consciousness than on conventional ritual or practice, seeing faith as a deeply private matter. Even as far back as 1978 Gallup polls were reporting that 80% of Americans agreed with the statement that 'an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues' (Roof 1999a:145).

It is not surprising Roof notes that all this spiritual activity is happening at a time when the western world is undergoing massive social and cultural changes. "The emergence of a global world, an influx of new immigrants and cultures, widespread changes in values and beliefs, the immense role of the media and visual imagery in shaping contemporary life, an expanding consumer-orientated culture targeting the self as an arena for marketing, the erosion of many traditional forms of community – all point to major realignments in religion and culture" (1999a:8). And then, as he says, there is also the impact of the discoveries of quantum physics and astronomy leading "scientists to back away from Newtonian notions of a deterministic universe and to speak of awe, holism, and even of 'an observer-created universe'. Old certainties collapse as new mysteries arise. It seems not just coincidental that the metaphor of a spiritual quest takes on

significance just when many of traditional religion's underpinnings of the culture have become more tenuous" (1999a:8).

"Even in its most self-absorbed forms, today's spiritual ferment reflects a deep hunger for a self-transformation that is both genuine and personally satisfying" (1999a:9)

"The deliberate, self-conscious construction of a religious identity drawing from a variety of sources reaches its apex within this subculture: eight out of ten say it is more important to explore religious alternatives than to stick with a particular faith. They are the most fluid in outlook of all the religious subcultures, with little discernable drift into wanting greater fixed religious positions even as they age. In this respect, they defy life-course stereotypes that presume that as people age they either return to the traditions in which they were raised or settle into a firm religious commitment" (1999a:207).

While Roof's book deals just with a particular age range of people as far as statistics are concerned, it is obvious that his comments about the attitudes and beliefs of spiritual seekers extend to a far wider group of people. For instance, in finding prospective interviewees for this thesis I noticed that many of the children of the Baby Boomer generation are also active spiritual seekers. Roof's point of course remains valid, that Baby Boomers are responsible for initiating what I like to see as a changing spiritual worldview.

CHAPTER 5

THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM & GLOBALISATION

The shift to post-modernism is far more likely to be traumatic if you are convinced that there can be no truth without absolutes, no science without objectivity, no morality without rules, no religion without a church.

Anderson 1990:254

Modernism to postmodernism

As I noted in the introduction I believe the concepts of modernism and postmodernism provide the most useful theoretical framework for discussing why there is such a rethinking and reinventing of individual lives at this present point in time. However it is with some trepidation that I use these words because of the over-use, mis-use and confusion surrounding what they actually mean. I keep hoping I'll come up with clearer terminology, but in the meantime, despite their limitations, I resort to these terms for lack of any clearer way of explaining my argument.

A particularly useful text on the issues of modernism and postmodernism is *The 60's Spiritual Awakening* (1994) in which Robert Ellwood argues that that period was a time of transition between these two cultural perspectives. He believes that the crucial current event of the time was not the sieges and the rebellion but the emergence of a wholly different culture based on a new spirituality (1994:7), and that in fact understanding the religious consciousness of that decade provides a useful insight into the changes wrought in society as a whole (1994:10).

In his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-Francois Lyotard describes postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarratives," those overarching stories by which lesser stories can be interpreted. Surely this incredulity would come as there was a transition from one great age of the spirit to another. Two of the great myths or metanarratives of modernism he believed were

that humanity progresses, both through politics and science, towards emancipation, and that there is an expressible universal knowledge that can be explained by rational scientific abstraction and can be implemented through technology (1984:ix). The modern universities, he said, were the epitome of these metanarratives, in effect excluding or marginalizing any learning that did not fit them. They produced an 'elite' class of rational thinkers who, from their privileged positions, were able to interpret history and cultures "of less advanced corners of the globe" according to these theories of progress and scientific rational thought. "From the high conning tower the observer could classify and explain their stumbling struggles toward the truth" (Ellwood 1994:12). A problem occurs, continues Ellwood, talking about Lyotard's ideas, as only a relatively few people, the business and professional classes, can embody these leading values of modernism. The rest are marginalised. The same applied to the gap between the elite European settlers and the indigenous peoples, the elite military and the conscripts, and, I would assert, the elite hierarchy of many of the churches and the congregations. And this, says Ellwood, ultimately caused the incredulity, the skepticism, the disbelief. Modernism had been supposed to provide everyone with freedom and opportunity. Instead the elite focused on their own power and privilege (1994:13). The much vaunted unity and forward movement came to be seen by many as a great hypocrisy. And this happened with an intense and vivid realization in the 60's. Postmodernism arrived.

"A major Sixties theme was the human against the System, or the Establishment. This theme is obviously postmodern in that the System inevitably meant what was created by modern ideals of unity, rationalization, and scientific/technological progress – all of which were now seen, as in Vietnam, as having become a mechanical monster out of control" (Ellwood 1994:29).

And particularly relevant to the issues of self awareness and spiritual seeking, Ellwood contends that:

"Postmodernism has meant the breakdown of all kinds of unities, starting with the self; it has meant the discovery of half-forgotten identities submerged by modernist ways of being.... In the United States, and elsewhere, once marginalised groups, from Native Americans to gays, are seeking equality in a society that no longer has to have a dominant elite on the leading edge of progress. New – and far more intricate – boundaries are being cut"(Ellwood 1994:13).

At last people felt free to find their 'half-forgotten identities,' to identify their incredulity, their disbelief, cynicism even, in the irrelevance of hierarchical religious institutions with their politicking and elitism. Native American spiritual teachings, for instance, took on a fresh relevance as indicative of an almost nostalgic return to the simple and pure. The search for Self became synonymous, for many at least, with the search for one's truth, one's autonomy – synonymous even with spirituality.

I think it is easy to see the challenge that the institutionalized religions faced/face. They were part of modernism in the sense that for each one of the great religions the metanarrative was not about science providing the answer but that the one great universal truth, that each believed they had exclusive access to, would spread progressively, creating ultimate unity (Ellwood 1994:15). Perhaps, suggests the postmodern thinker, there is more than one truth, more than one way to climb the mountain to the answers; perhaps there are multiple truths.

As Ellwood concludes in this book, postmodernism began in the 60's as modernism's rationalism and elitism were accused of being mutually supportive.

“The great modernist institutions, from university to established church and state, were challenged as never wince the Enlightenment onset of modernism, and precisely on the grounds that their claims to be the last word of progress and the holders of the master keys were spurious. In place of those audacious claims was projected precisely those notions most threatening to the modern mindset, the equal validity of the primitive, of the nonrational, and of disunited knowledge.... The emergent postmodern age was now without a broadly accepted worldview that connected technology, politics, and religion. Instead the world witnessed the flourishing of disparate ecological, feminist, and liberationist spiritualities, of mystical, shamanist, and occultist paths, of resurgent fundamentalisms and religious nationalisms”(1994:331).

This pluralism of postmodernity proceeded from, or reacted against, the duality of modernism that maintained the polarities of good and evil, light and dark, new and old, truth and superstition, the right way to dress and the wrong way to dress (for example, in the corporate world a suit and tie was right, colorful ethnic garb was not – some things change slowly). Jean Gebser called postmodernism “a world without opposites” (as quoted in Ellwood 1994:20). I believe this is very apparent

in the literature of spiritual seeking (discussed in chapter 9) and in the interviews I have recorded here. For instance:

Mary –

I think since I turned 40 it's been a constant developmental thing. You get the hang of something and then it changes and you just think you've got the hang of that and it changes and... What I'm beginning to see now is that it's your ability to change that is the constant. The ability to not need to know, the ability to not need to have knowledge, to not have to have status, to have money. Money helps because it gives you access to things that help you find answers. But you don't even have to have that.

Jim –

After work I would go out and walk the streets of NY and I would see the Hispanics and how they related, and the Hasidic neighborhoods, the gay neighborhoods, and then the upper Eastside, the very wealthy neighborhoods. And I'd go to Central Park and all the different music. And it opened this thing, it's all part of God's creation. And no one of them is right, and no one of them is wrong.

Despite Ellwood's persuasive arguments in support of the idea that we have moved from modernism to postmodernism, as I have said there is considerable debate about what the term postmodernism actually means, if in fact it means anything at all. Despite this, I cannot think of a better way of describing at least some of the elements of the debate on what is happening to spirituality at this time in history. I will come back to this again briefly at the end of the chapter. Certainly much of Ellwood's argument above makes sense, at least to me as a spiritual seeker, and yet I have to wonder, is there still not a modernistic appeal to the idea of finding the ultimate truth that is out there somewhere? No doubt, as with most pendulum swings, there is an answer somewhere in the middle – part modernist search for nirvana or heaven, part postmodernist acceptance of 'all that is,' multiple realities. Perhaps that is nirvana/heaven?

Globalisation as postmodernism

We seem to have reached a time in the western world at least where it is impossible to escape major choices about how we live our lives. Even if one lives

within the confines of a strict fundamentalist religious community or as a member of an immigrant group with strong cultural beliefs, each member at least by young adulthood knows there are other ways to live, and therefore at least to some extent is making a choice to follow a path. Of course that choice may be hedged around with all sorts of constraints that make it appear that they have no choice. For instance the pull of peer pressure on a teenager may be enough to make the young person choose to rebel against cultural traditions of parental authority. On the other hand their cultural traditions of parental authority may make adherence to that pressure the only choice. And although most of us are aware that these sorts of choices are very much part of western culture it would also be true to say that there would be very few people left anywhere on the planet who are unaware that there are cultural belief systems other than the ones by which they live. For instance, as I noted in chapter 4, in the majority of cultures until this point in time, no person wondering about the meaning of life and his or her place in it, could choose between Japanese Zen Buddhism, Western Christianity, Iranian Sufism or Native American shamanism to find answers.

This is illustrated as June talks about her religious background:

I was raised Catholic. My mother was Roman Catholic. My father was Jewish, but not a practicing Jew. I didn't do well in Roman Catholicism. After the mystique and pageantry faded there were certain things that will always stay with me. They say 'give me a child until he is seven and I'll have him after that.' In the Roman Catholic church it would have to be a 'he'. There are certain things you're told as a child that even though you question it's hard to say they're not true. For instance, not saying your prayers. It's bad. Well if one lives one's life as a prayer – and I don't mean to ask for things because for most people that's what prayer is ... So I was brought up as an RC and then my mother, bless her heart, decided I should know religion of all kinds. So when I was quite small, certainly under the age of ten, I was sent to Jewish Sunday School. It lasted four weeks – I couldn't do it because the little boy next to me didn't have his nickel to put in the box and the rabbi wasn't very nice to him so I put the nickel in for him and then I didn't have a nickel. So my parents found out about it so I said, not for me thank you. Because again it was full of 'thou shalt not's'. I was baptised and christened in the Episcopal, the Anglican, church in my twenties – what is lovingly called an Off Broadway Catholic. Before that in my teens I'd found Taoism which is not a religion but it's a wonderful philosophy and I have watched nature ever since. When I went back to my mother's funeral Monsignor wouldn't give me communion even though I was high church Episcopalian. *You went to Episcopalian from RC. So you were still looking for a religion?* Yes. And none of it seemed to really work. And then I discovered Buddhism, which is not a religion.

And some of it made such sense. But again I couldn't go...I couldn't sit and chant all the time. People were chanting for a car. And look at Christianity. If someone said, what is your religion? I don't know... I'm a Taoist with a Christian background and a firm belief in the Buddha. There are not that many likeminded people around.

If then there is no longer just one belief system available to us (although of course we, with the help of parents or other influential others, may unwittingly *choose* to believe there is just one – say a fundamental religious belief system), if there is no longer just one absolute set of truths, we reach a time in history where relativism becomes its own belief system. As Anderson says“...once we let go of absolutes, nobody gets to have a position that is anything more than a position....Lacking absolutes, we will have to encounter one another as people with different information, different stories, different visions”(1990:183).

This line of thinking of course brings us back to the discussion earlier in the chapter on what the concept of postmodernism means, at least in terms of understanding what is happening to spirituality. In this context I am drawn to Peter Sedgwick's description in *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*, “...postmodern conceived of in terms of a crisis in our ability to provide an adequate, ‘objective’ account of reality” (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999:295).

As Anderson says,

“A mere couple of centuries ago, most societies recognised a single official reality and dedicated themselves to destroying its opposition. You could get burned at the stake for suggesting that there might be more than one version of reality. Today, in some intellectual circles, you can get into trouble for suggesting there might be only one..... We can see, if we look closely at the ideas and events of the post-modern world, a new sensibility emerging – a way of being that puts the continual creation of reality at the heart of every person's life (1990:xi-xiii).

He goes on to assert that the collapse of belief we have been witnessing through the twentieth century comes with globalisation “which is postmodernism” (1990:231). While I would not agree that globalisation and postmodernism are exactly synonymous, I would agree with his observation that this postmodern collapse of belief is not just an artistic movement or a cultural fad or an intellectual theory but is what happens as people come to see that there are many beliefs and ways of believing. “It is the half-discovered shape of the one unity that transcends

all our differences” (1990:231). This I believe is at the heart of what spiritual seekers feel even if they are not yet articulating it quite in this way. And yet how, asks Anderson do you have an identity in such a world when it seems that so many of the old structures, the ways of saying who you are and what you are for or against, seem to be melting into thin air? And yet, he continues, religion is still a potent definer of reality in many parts of the world, as are class and race, providing ‘more stable markers of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them.’

“It is a world coming together – a global civilisation, the first that has ever existed, emerging into being before our very eyes – but one that seems to be, at the same time, in the process of falling apart. It is doing neither, and both; it is becoming a system that is not organised according to belief as we once knew it” (Anderson 1990:232).

As to why this rethinking is happening at this time in history, Heelas contends that the appeal may be that in a time of loss of certainty it provides solutions to combat the sense of doom and gloom that pervades the Western world (1996:3). The much vaunted promises of modernity – that scientific, economic, social, political progress leads to happiness, that added goods (as I quoted Brzezinski as saying in the introduction) will provide happiness, that there is, as Lyotard has said, a ‘metanarrative’ that can be discovered that will solve all problems – turn to dust. And yet as I just noted, Heelas observes that paradoxically while the New Age is commonly seen as part of the reflexivity and relativity of postmodernism, it is conceivable that it actually provides a sense of certainty (for instance in the return to faith in the ancient shamanic and nature traditions), a sense of hope in progressing towards enlightenment, towards finding a metanarrative of what truth is (1996:3).

There are obvious differences as I believe my interviews show. There is a far broader and more flexible idea surrounding the acceptance of multiple realities – that there is not just one pathway up the mountain to truth; that there are as many perceptions of what this truth might look like as there are people on the planet; that it is not necessary to follow someone else’s (e.g. institutionalized) dictates as to what truth might look like, and yet one might draw on all sorts of traditions while, as Heelas says, ‘bypassing their explicit authoritative doctrines, dogmas and moral codes’ (1996:28).

This is what J Needleman is talking about in chapter 3, 'the contemporary flood of cultural pick-and-mix options and 'off-the-peg' lifestyles that cause many people to seek in this time of accelerating socio-cultural change, safety in the cultivation of 'interiority,' or what I call the inward journey.

It is this whole opening of thought to the possibility that there is not just one 'reality,' that there are multiple realities, that seems to lie at the core of what this search for meaning, this search for 'who I am' and 'what I believe' is all about. Is this a (r)evolution of consciousness as I like to call it, is it a significant trend, is it a changing world-view, even a new metanarrative, or simply a passing phase in history? What is happening out there?

CHAPTER 6

A CHANGING WORLDVIEW – A (R)EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS?

What is happening out there?

*“globalisation creates a world that looks more like a village”
(Roof 1999:74)*

On the subject of what is happening out there, the floor must first go to my participants.

David –

Why do you think so many people out there are on a spiritual search? I think that as the evolution of world consciousness quickens in pace, more people are finding that even with all their material desires satisfied, they're not happy. And they're challenging the notion that there's nothing beyond this experience. They're feeling an emptiness in the things of this world and reaching out to something beyond it. That's why we're seeing such receptivity to spiritual healing, to spiritual service, to a desire to get closer to God, to find meaning in our lives beyond the jobs that identify us, the relationships we're involved with – spouses and children and parents – and the round of work and church life. I think all that is being challenged. That's why the spirituality movement is going to be bigger than all the religions in the world combined at some point. We're all getting out of the box and traditional religions better open up wide if they want to keep up with the advance of spirituality. *Do you think people will just create more boxes?* It's always possible. It seems to be the tendency of the human mind and condition, to want to create boxes and forms and rules and put people in a certain category. We need a label for everything. I think that's the challenge of spirituality, to not have any labels, to have no judgments, to have no limitations, to see no separation, to identify the spark, the whole radiant sunshine of God, in each other. To affirm that, to give each other great encouragement, to find who they are.

Chris –

There is a huge congregation of people making this journey. They have broken out of the barriers of institution, they have a sense of their own completeness and are no longer concerned with what people think of them. They have to go on their own path. Nothing else is possible. It is a mystical path.

Max –

So what do you think is happening with this 'inward journey' – what do you think it happening in the world? I definitely think there's a transformation and it seems like the status quo no longer satisfies people and I'm not sure if it's something that propels them to search for something greater or if it's an inward realisation that nothing material can make them happy. But certainly in this day and age our society is so filled with huge materialism, and I guess you can say it always has been, but it seems to me now more than ever with tremendous wealth and tremendous poverty and the extremes coming to the surface of the world, that people are looking for answers more than ever before....A lot of these people are real idealists in their approach but they're also realistic about what they think they can do which is most interesting to me. I meet people who actually believe they will make a difference and they are making a difference, and that's exciting when you meet people like that.

Susanne –

Why do you think so many people appear to be doing this or do you think it's always been this way? I think there's probably more people doing it. I think a lot of people...just two generations ago people were motivated by fear. That's why people went to church. They were afraid not to. They had a very strong sense of sin. I think like my grandparents generation – that was fear and social conformity. It was part of society that you went to church and there was a strong guilt feeling, even in my early years, if you didn't. *Why is it different now?* I think a lot of people saw through it. I think the 60's had a huge influence on it. People weren't willing to live that way any more. Generally people didn't respect authority in the same way. They kind of saw through it. What are you actually achieving by it? It became really false. So many people went to church just because....my father went only my mother wanted him to. In the end that kind of hypocrisy....the next generation aren't willing to put up with it. There was such huge change in the 60's. Schools changed a lot. People didn't have the same respect for teachers. The church lost it's real standing in society. I don't think the young one's really cared.

I think one of the huge changes has been complementary medicine...most doctors' practices will have complementary therapists attached to them. That's been a huge change in 20 years. And I think that's because people demanded it not because the doctors saw that. When I worked as a chiropractor and in massage I found that was often the beginning of a person's spiritual journey. Their body would go wrong in some way and they would look for an alternative to medicine and drugs. And all the alternatives I would say have a spiritual philosophy behind them. And that might be someone's only connection with spirituality but that has been a huge change. ... where we are now, certainly in recent history we must be more aware of how we're creating our own reality than those people were who were searching through the centuries. I think there are more of us nearer to the truth probably now than they were. There've always been mystics who have found the truth of their being but that's never been in large numbers. Now there are more people getting nearer.

Craig –

Why do you think so many people are searching? Maslow talks about certain needs that have to be fulfilled before you can go onto the next one – survival, love, socialization, God-realisation. Particularly in America where we're blessed with financial abundance survival isn't such an issue so people can go into the higher parts of themselves. My childhood fantasy of why I wanted to be religious was because I wanted to go to nirvana, I wanted to be happy. This is what spirituality/religion promises – you shall be happy. Nirvana – this blissed out place where you're always happy and you never have to cry. Never have to feel any pain. And earth is evolving and as we evolve we're all here agreeing this physical reality exists and it's all in our minds – the real reality is the One, which is timeless, has no physicality, it's just energy. So humans are evolving in this direction to realize their oneness with God. There are more awake people and more awake people makes everyone else more awake. It's our natural lineage as a race to become more and more and more and more – more complete, more whole, and that includes the spiritual part of us.

Diane –

What do you think is happening with spirituality now? I just feel we're going through a period of enormous growth in spirituality everywhere.....there's this huge growth of people who are not connected with religion per se who are entering into the depths of themselves and are finding something, call it what you will or call it nothing at all. It's a wonderful age. What I find is more and more people are quitting their jobs to say I've got to do something more in keeping with where my real values are.

June –

What do you think is happening in the world that so many people are out there searching, or trying to understand a different way? In my opinion if you think once you have a million dollars everything will be wonderful, and then you have a million dollars and it isn't, then you figure that fame and fortune isn't it. The largest level of suicide is with the 'beautiful people.' I think the more people who realize it isn't 'out there' – it must be somewhere else - the more they get to the message, the basis of every religion, that the spirit of heaven is within, there isn't anything to resist.

Mary –

I think we've come through the age of science where it's all mind stuff and knowledge and 'prove it to me' and it's not real if you can't prove it. And we've come to the end of that with quantum mechanics. Once the atom was split we came to the end of that, because what else is there.....So now we're looking to a more spiritual answer. Scientists provided us with machinery that has thrown us into that field, like the curlean camera that photographs auric fields.... Why are people seeking? In the western affluent world there is more money and the money

has been spent on the toys and all the things you can buy and it doesn't actually give us the things we really want which are happiness, joy, peace of mind and all those sorts of things.....The systems of religions no longer do it for us. I think this is one of the big advents that have come out of the communication age. Each religion is really saying the same thing and there's lots of talk about unified religions. It doesn't really matter if you say you're this or the other. What's it really all about? How do I really get happy? And I think there's been permission for us to think way more than we've had in other times. And when we begin to think we begin to explore that which is really real to us as humans, one being our body, the second one being the mind, the third one being the emotions....When we experience our spirit there is absolutely no way of denying it. You can't dispute it, you can't describe it even, but you know, and when you know you have power. And no other power does it any more. The power of government or religion or church or the father or the mother doesn't do it any more. It doesn't hold it over us any more and it's about finding out our own truth and we now have permission to find our own truth. I think that's what this revolution is about.

Survival does tend to take priority. But many times its been proven that Maslow's hierarchy of needs isn't necessarily correct. That you can be lying in the bottom of a ditch you know in a war and somebody is about to kill you and you can actually die from honour. You can put your life forward for the country or for your family or for love. Many are the times people give their life, their most precious thing, for a loved one, and that is way beyond survival. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is actually incorrect, that you would actually put survival before intellectual development and spiritual development, self-realisation. Self-realisation is at the top and survival is at the bottom. But any one of those could go first.

Mary's reference to scientific discoveries prompts me to refer at some length to Margaret Wheatley's (*Leadership and the New Science: 1999*) very postmodern explanations of both chaos theory and the discoveries of quantum physics, and how these impact a changing worldview. She observes that if we look at our own lives we can see that the times when we have really moved forward have invariably been preceded by challenges. "When we have personally descended into chaos, we can notice that as it ends, we emerge changed, stronger in some ways, new" (1999:119). Western culture, she says, has tried to deny a necessity for such chaos, believing there are straight lines to the top, and if we focus hard enough on our goals we should be able to get there without ever descending into confusion and despair. But it is only through such challenges that we actually grow. "Only now" she says "as modern life grows ever more turbulent and control slips away, are we willing again to contemplate chaos...whether we explore its dynamics through new science or ancient myths... The destruction created by chaos is necessary for the

creation of something new” (1999:119). Chaos, she says, is “order without predictability” (1999:120).

“In chemistry, Ilya Prigogine won the Nobel Prize in 1977 for work that demonstrates how certain chemical systems reorganize themselves into greater *order* when confronted with changes in the environment. In the older mechanistic models of systems, change and disturbances signaled trouble. These disruptions would only speed up the inevitable decline that was the fate of all systems. But Prigogine’s work offered a new and more promising future. He demonstrated that any open system has the capacity to respond to change and disorder by reorganizing itself at a higher level of organization. Disorder becomes a critical player, an ally that can provoke a system to self-organize into new forms of being.

New understandings of change and disorder have also emerged from chaos theory. Work in this field has led to a new appreciation of the relationship between order and chaos. These two forces are now understood to be mirror images, two states that contain the other. A system can descend into chaos and unpredictability, yet within that state of chaos the system is held within boundaries that are well-ordered and predictable. Without the partnering of these two great forces, no change or progress is possible. Chaos is necessary to new creative ordering. This revelation has been known throughout time to most human cultures; we just needed the science to help us remember it” (1999:12).

Speaking of quantum physics, in a way that I can at least partly understand it, Wheatley, referring to and quoting the world’s leading scientists, continues:

“Although some scientists still conduct a determined search for the basic building blocks of matter, other physicists have abandoned this as a final, futile quest of reductionism. They gave up searching for things finite and discrete because, as they experimented to find elementary particles, they found ‘things’ that changed form and properties as they responded to one another, and to the scientist observing them..... In the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting; to many physicists, they are *all* there is to reality (1999:34)..... If quantum matter develops a relationship with the observer and changes to meet his or her expectation, then how can there be scientific objectivity” (1999:37)?

Discussing the value of these concepts in understanding our individual journeys, Wheatley observes that such unpredictability is not regarded by scientists as a result of inherent disorder, but as a result of “quantum interconnectedness, of a deep and intimate order. There is a constant weaving of relationships, of energies that merge and change... There is so much order that our attempts to separate out discrete events create the appearance of disorder” (1999:22). Computer generated images of the wild gyrations of apparently chaotic systems show that these

gyrations are held within invisible boundaries and eventually form beautiful and intricate patterns of order. So, says Wheatley,

“Throughout the universe, then, order exists within disorder and disorder within order. We have always thought that disorder was the absence of the natural state of order, seen in the word itself: disorder. But do we believe this? Is chaos an irregularity, or is order just a lucky moment grabbed from natural disorder? We’ve been taught to see things as separate states: one needs to be normal, the other exceptional. Yet as we move into this new territory where paradox is a distinguishing feature, we can see that what is happening is a dance – of chaos and order, of change and stability. Just as in the timeless image of yin and yang, we are dealing with complementarities that only look like polarities. Neither one is primary; both are absolutely necessary. When we observe growth, we observe the results of the dance” (1999:23).

So why do we stay locked in our belief that there is just one right way to do something, or one correct view of something, when the universe “demands diversity and thrives on plurality?”

“The more I contemplate these times, when we truly are giving birth to a new world view, the more I realize that our culture is presently journeying through chaos. The old ways are dissolving, and the new has not yet shown itself. If this is true, then we must engage with one another differently, as explorers and discoverers. I believe it will make the passage more fruitful if we can learn how to honor each other in these roles. We can realize that no single person or school of thought has the answer, because what’s required is far beyond isolated answers” (1999:73).

Yes, I think if we can follow this discussion, we have a good idea what the term postmodernism refers to, and we have a clearer idea what is happening out there - why so many thinking people today are re-visioning their reality and re-designing their lives accordingly. As Mathew Fox says:

“The world we think we live in... *is* the world we live in. That is how important our worldviews are. During the Newtonian age we not only thought we lived in a machine, we behaved accordingly. The industrial revolution seized this worldview, and capitalism provided the economic engine to promote it. The shift occurring today is of the same dimension: If we think we live in an interconnected universe, an organism unfolding the one Great Work of a trillion galaxies, all of it in motion and expanding, then we will start living in such a world” (1994:75).

On the subject of ‘what is happening out there’, or to use a term I have coined to describe what I think is happening, the (r)evolution of consciousness, I must refer

extensively to the book referred to in the introduction, *Culture Creatives* (2000). This book bases its findings on 13 years of research by American LIVES Inc. (a survey and research organization run by Paul Ray) on values and lifestyles of over 100,000 Americans.

“When we say that a quarter of all Americans have taken on a whole new worldview, we are pointing to a major development in our civilization. Changing a worldview literally means changing what you think is real. Some closely related changes contribute to and follow from changes in worldview: changes in values, your fundamental life priorities; changes in lifestyle, the way you spend your time and money; and changes in livelihood, how you make that money in the first place. As recently as the early 1960’s, less than 5 percent of the population was engaged in making these momentous changes – too few to measure in surveys. In just over a generation, that proportion grew steadily to 26 percent” (2000:4)

The obvious relevance of this to the concepts of the inward or spiritual journey and a (r)evolution of consciousness is clear throughout the book. They point out that a change in a person’s worldview happens rarely, if at all, in a lifetime because it changes virtually everything in their consciousness. “When you make this shift you change your sense of who you are and who you are related to, what you are willing to see and how you interpret it, your priorities for action and for the way you want to live” (2000:17). “When tens of millions of people make such choices in the space of a few decades, we are witnessing not simply a mass of personal departures but an exodus at the level of culture itself. Again, it is a matter of consciousness: a conscious change of mind and heart, a shift in the collective identity of people” (2000:43). And, yes, as Ray and Anderson have discovered in their research, these people are passionate about the new life they are piecing together for themselves.

Once again I am left with the challenge of dealing with a text that is obviously social science literature and is based on sound investigative technique, supported both by the Institute of Noetic Sciences and the Fetzer Institute, but at the same time is written by ‘insiders.’ Maybe this is just the way it is going to be. After all once it was discovered the world was round, one could hardly expect to find someone to write about it from an unbiased viewpoint.

Returning to the concept of globalisation, Wade Clark Roof observes that:

“Globalisation...de-traditionalizes in the sense of fragmenting unities of experience, truth, and wisdom that took thousands of years to evolve. The binding power of religious traditions in providing meaning and identity is easily eroded: individuals feel less bound to a collective past or a shared present. Trust in others, so essential a foundation for personal identity, faith, and social relationships, becomes problematic. Definitions of the ‘other’ shift as older notions of insiders and outsiders break down... Globalization.. creates a condition of living on the edge in a way that humanity has never lived before, yet at the same time creates possibilities for greater global solidarity. It threatens inherited religious beliefs and customs, yet can produce universal theodicies and religious symbolism. It threatens the survival of the small village, yet creates a world that looks more and more like a village. It uproots tradition, yet in the process provokes powerful yearnings for wisdom from the past. It might be said that globalization creates for people everywhere something of a perpetual liminal state – of being caught between old ways of living and believing and the possibility of a new world in the making” (1999:74).

For all these reasons, Roof says, we are in transition in our response to the sacred. As yet, though, we stand too close to see the big picture of what is happening. We can see the threads. Reflexive spirituality allows us to see that our view is simply that, *our* view, one of many possibilities. “Such awareness is the basis for understanding not just oneself in a deeply personal sense, but encourages a profound sociological imagination, or recognition of one’s own views, values, and identity in relation to others” (1999:75).

Critical theorist, Walter Truitt Anderson says that we are seeing now the birth of a global superculture that is not just a conglomerate of different cultural traditions and beliefs but “a new creation of many layers of belief and unbelief, of living partly in and partly out of socially created realities...generating entirely new ways of being in cultures” (1990:24).

‘Partly in and partly out’ he says. This is the trend I believe is significant enough to be called a (r)evolution of consciousness or a changing world-view. It is affecting how people relate to traditional religious institutions in light of their new ways of being together in society; that while they are gaining greater and greater autonomy and self-awareness, nevertheless they are still part of the socially created realities that make up culture. As Roof says, we still stand too close to see the big picture of what is happening out there but we can see the threads.

Commenting on a particularly significant one of these threads though, Walter Truitt Anderson notes:

“The world’s largest course of constructivist therapy, the women’s movement, has been under way for some decades now and shows no signs of nearing termination. If it ever does finish its work, no civilization in the world will be the same. The women’s movement – I think more than any political effort in our time – is an attempt to change not only laws and power structures, but social constructions of reality... It is hardly surprising that women are deeply involved in every aspect of the postmodern dialogue. As psychologist Maureen O’Hara puts it: ‘When every ‘system of truth’ we’ve ever known, from the oldest myth to modern medical science, has concluded that women are biologically, intellectually and morally inferior, that we are at once dangerous and naturally nurturing, that we are unsuitable for public office and should be protected and subjugated – then you bet feminists have a stake in conversations about ‘truth’ and ‘reality.’(141)...The questions feminists raise go to the very heart of our most commonplace assumptions about human life. Isn’t gender itself another one of our dreamed-up categories, built on doubtful assumptions and maintained by a fuzzy and culturally defined boundary that we try to persuade ourselves is a clear and ‘natural’ one? Don’t different societies have entirely different ideas of what it means to be male or female? (1990:141).

Yes, the postmodern world is certainly transforming some of our deepest, most unconscious myths.

As I have already discussed, in attempting to ground spiritual seeking in cultural theory one must be cautious about resorting to over-analysis and intellectualizing of something that spiritual seekers consider to be experiential rather than theoretical. The temptation, particularly of the academic, is to want to categorise, to put these people in some sort of box such as New Age or Baby Boomer. Even the exercise of suggesting that what they are doing is part of an inevitable cultural process over which they have little conscious control can seem objectionable, especially considering so much of the appeal of spiritual seeking lies in the unique creativity of individual journeying. These people mostly reject the rational head in favour of the heart, relying on intuition or inner wisdom.

Regardless of all of this, all interviewees believe they have become more self-aware, more independent of social conformity – i.e. more able to make lifestyle choices based on their growing autonomous beliefs. And yet how influenced are

they, albeit unconsciously, by those hidden assumptions of cultural belief systems?
The next chapter looks at theorisations regarding identity and self in relation to
spiritual journeys.

CHAPTER 7

THEORETICAL ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND SELF

People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities.

(Holland et al. 1998:3)

Emerging Identity

What is the relationship, or rather, what *may be* the relationship, between this search for greater autonomy, for ‘an authentic self,’ and spiritual seeking? Perhaps that is an unanswerable question in the sense that the answer will be different for each spiritual seeker, but it may be fruitful here to look at least a little at theorisations of identity and self that seem relevant to this discussion.

Walter Truitt Anderson believes that there are considerable changes happening in the way we see ourselves and our reality. He suggests that when we let go of modernism’s idea that progress means everything getting better and espouse a postmodern idea of progress as ever-increasing reflexivity, the individual mind becomes more capable of thinking about its thought. He believes that all of postmodernism is about looking at beliefs, including one’s own. From this, he says, people are developing a different sense of identity and boundaries (for instance between nations, races, classes, cultures, species), boundaries that are “fading in the twilight of a mind-set that structured reality with sharp lines” (1990:256). Plenty of people of course try to maintain the old boundaries – the US government is building a huge moat along the Mexican border, racists still oppose mixing black and white, aristocrats mourn the breakdown of class hierarchies – but reactionary or not, Anderson says, boundary lines are not what they used to be either in thought or in practice.

He goes on to say that for most of us, one-dimensional social identities are not what they used to be either. “They are simply not adequate to our self-concepts or to the situations in which we function. It is hard for the average contemporary person – especially in the West – to understand what a complete and final definer of the self class once was. And for many people even such identifiers as Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Sufi, are no longer relevant. As Diane commented in her story:

My life has been extraordinary. Truly.... I’m still on the journey I think....where my belief structure is at this point, I have no idea...Pastorally I am a pluralist but theologically I am inclusive. And I think that’s where I come out. There is a radical difference there that is yet to be unravelled in my mind. But that’s sometimes. Other times I’m a sort of Zen Christian and say well there’s Buddha in the East and Christ in the West and they both came... I’m more peaceful now than I’ve ever been.

It seems obvious that Diane for one sees her Self and her reality in a very fluid evolving way. There is considerable comfort with this expanding self-awareness despite such fluidity. She no longer seems to need a single clear religious identifier to define herself or by which she can be defined. As Paul Heelas puts it, “what lies within – experienced by way of ‘intuition,’ ‘alignment,’ or an ‘inner voice’ – serves to inform the judgments, decisions and choices required for everyday life” (1996:23).

This supports my belief in a (r)evolution of consciousness that is closely linked to emerging identity, heightened self-awareness. I believe all interviews, as well as much of my reading, also supports this. As the following historical overview of identity theory illustrates, such ideas of self-awareness are relatively recent.

Andrew Edgar provides such an overview in *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999:183). Descartes writing in the 17th century, stated that the only thing he could not doubt was that he existed. This notion of an autonomous subject was dominant also in political thought and psychology and as the grounding assumption of liberal individualism (Descartes. 1968). Scottish philosopher, David Hume, writing in the 18th century questioned this, saying that

the self was simply a bundle of self impressions that kept changing with new experiences or recollection of old ones, but it had no image of the self (Hume 1978:251-268). In the 19th century Emile Durkheim posited that the individual is a product of society (Durkheim. 1984), and in the 20th century George Herbert Mead also challenged the idea of the autonomous individual maintaining that the self and thus self-consciousness rests upon the internalisation of the viewpoint of others; it becomes self-conscious only in so far as it can imagine how it is seen by others (1934:175). Irving Goffman extends this argument suggesting that the self is the product of particular interactions in that behavior changes according as the people around the person change. Alone, he says, a person is not self-conscious and therefore at that moment does not have a self, or is self-conscious to the extent he is aware how he might appear to someone else. The self, he says, therefore has no stability (1959). Psychoanalysis opened up still more questions of identity and the self.

Anthony Cohen's book, *Self Consciousness: an alternative anthropology of identity* (1994) also provides a useful outline of major 20th century anthropological traditions to do with identity and the self. Around these he weaves his contention that anthropology in its preoccupation with the primacy of society has neglected the self. This self is far too complex to categorise and in trying to attach theories and assigning individuals to structures of lineage, caste, kinship, one risks gross misrepresentation (1994:2).

According to Cohen "selfhood finally moved to centre stage in the 1970's and 1980's" with theories of reflexivity and the postmodern preoccupation (1994:3). It got tangled in never ending arguments about how can you know what someone is thinking and/or how can you know they are thinking. The only thing you can know is what you are thinking. "The most potent investigative and interpretive weapons in the anthropologist's armoury" he claims "are his or her own experience and consciousness" (1994:3).

While many people are still uncomfortable with attention to the self, regarding it as self-indulgent, more and more people disagree, as referred to in almost all my

interviews. And these changes in attitudes can be snowballing. In almost all of the self-help, motivational, spirituality, literature, the same message is there – it is all right, essential even, to figure yourself out before you can figure out anyone else.

This is not selfish. Look at these comments from the stories:

It's like how can we help others until we can help ourselves first....

I had to undergo my own healing process before I could really begin to love other people and to help other people....

I find that when I'm selfish and when I look after my own needs I'm a far better person to my husband and my children....I'm developing my inner voice and my intuition....

It is interesting to note the socially conditioned response of being 'selfish' still being used by someone who if questioned on this would tell you she is not being selfish. Her comment here based on her greater self-awareness is that she is actually being 'selfless' in the sense of providing a better environment for her family.

Nigel Rapport comments that "individuals carry with them their own experiential contexts... and human social life is the story of a diversity of individual worlds abutting against one another" (1999:439). This observation on the importance of personal experience as a significant influence in the choices individuals make has arisen many times in my research.

While it would be true that we will always be guided by hidden and unconscious assumptions (Hammond,1998:14) and by rigid and pervasive cultural traditions of which we are largely unaware (Peacock, 1988:4), nevertheless there is a definite and dramatic shift towards what I call a (r)evolution of consciousness.

Naisbitt and Aburdene's latest global trends book, *Megatrends 2000* (1990) provides a useful (if not rigorously academic) insight into how we may choose to view this revolution. They predict that "the most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur not because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human" (p.xxiii). We learn through literature, the arts,

spirituality what life means, not through science and technology. “We are discovering the emotional side of ourselves’ (1990:293).

An ‘expanding concept of what it means to be human’. We are ‘discovering the emotional side of ourselves.’ Yes, my interviewees agree. Thomas Csordas observes that the answer to the question ‘what it means to be human’ is the same as the answer to the question ‘how do we make ourselves human’ (1994:vii). It is, he says an inquiry into self-creativity and this goes back to my comment at the beginning of this thesis that this is a story about the re-designing of lives, about the choices we make.

At the end of the day in the struggle to find one’s way through the maze of theories about self and society, I come back to what I know about who I am and what my participants know about who they are, regardless of whether we are supposed to be able to know that or not. The question “Who am I?” is at the core, the heart of the search for meaning in people’s lives. Take for instance the following comments from participants:

The inward journey is about discovering your dream, discovering who you are, and where you’re going. What could be more exciting than that?....

One thing I want to do before I die is arrive at self-knowledge....

I stopped blaming other people. I started to take on the responsibility of my own journey, and I then got a huge amount of support. It was like I was caught in a web where I lived before and it’s like when I got out I became who I was....

I learn how to love who I am, I learn how to accept who I am, all parts of who I am, and then the next stage of my journey unfolds...

The question “What am I here to do?” elicits a similar sentiment from each person I have asked of it. This search for self is not about self-indulgence but about knowing, and loving, oneself sufficiently to be able to truly know and love others. There is nothing self serving in this and to date I have found every individual I have talked to *without exception* who is on some sort of spiritual or inward journey has a vision for creating a ‘better’, a more peaceful, world, believes people must

work together 'in community,' in harmony, and is convinced there is a worldwide consciousness shift towards these visions. As Max says:

When you find your passion it resonates with you to such an extent that you're able to demonstrate that passion to so many other people and when you do that you can't help but uplift people and help people.

The Social Self

"Identities – if they are alive, if they are being lived – are unfinished and in process...They never arrive in persons or in their immediate social milieux already formed....They happen in social practice" (Holland et al.1998:vii).

According to Andrew Edgar, a central problem in social theory is the relationship between the apparently autonomous actions of individuals and the overarching social order (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999:16). Is it even possible for individuals to be autonomous or are they always in relationship to others? What we have now are millions of spiritual seekers (Anderson and Ray.2000, O Murchu.1999, Fox. 1994, Hubbard.1998) apparently acting as autonomous individuals, at least in their own eyes, seeking their own truth. According to Anderson and Ray they are mostly unaware that there are so many others doing the same thing (2000:39) and yet they are reading the same books, listening to the same speakers, being influenced by the same world events – the same cultural influences or structures. Most of them are influenced to 'create something better' for the same reasons and when they do meet up, as I have discovered, they are excited to share their journeys. So while the focus is on expanding self-awareness or emerging identity I would contend that it is still happening within the overarching influence of community or enculturation.

As discussed earlier, according to Walter Truitt Anderson most people need some sort of public identifier, some anchor to a recognised group. Most of us want to let people know what groups we belong to – are we Buddhist, Christian, or, now more commonly that we are a mix, or that we are a spiritual seeker. "More and more" he says "we find it suitable to identify ourselves with more than one term. Multiple identity becomes a common feature of postmodern life" (1990:257).

Susanne comments:

I think one of the things in terms of religion and spirituality is that there has been a huge drop off in people going to church but there isn't an alternative place for people to gather and there isn't a belief system that people can take on. It's so varied and wide now. So you don't see people gathering. You don't see them going to another group thing on a large scale because it isn't that kind of thing. *It's kind of invisible.* Yes, it's much more individual now...not so much a group process. *Do you think we are kind of social beings, and therefore we're going to want to do things together and...if so, how are we going to do this? Or do you think people really are becoming individuals?* I think we are going to want to get together and I think that's one of the real sadness's for me...*But doesn't it form a kind of....* Yes it's inevitable. That's possibly one aspect of human beings getting together. You're going to put structures in place.....I can't imagine now for me joining a group that had a certain belief structure that was kind of set.... everyone is so unique so how could you create a structure that says this is how it's got to look. I think actually for human beings this creates quite a quandary because we are social beings and we like the group and the sense of belonging. But this is like without edges so I don't now how you would create a group.

And as David said earlier:

We're all getting out of the box and traditional religions better open up wide if they want to keep up with the advance of spirituality. *Do you think people will just create more boxes?* It's always possible. It seems to be the tendency of the human mind and condition, to want to create boxes and forms and rules and put people in a certain category.

According to many social scientists, says Wade Clark Roof, religion revolves around two main concerns – personal meaning and social belonging. It is the first of these that seems to preoccupy our energies today (1999:7). Social belonging seems almost to be a casualty of spiritual seeking. Roof notes elsewhere in this book that his survey results indicate that the category of 'metaphysical believers and seekers' that he uses to describe what I simply call spiritual seekers exhibits amongst its cohorts "a degree of rootlessness, or perhaps as more favorably viewed, considerable adaptability to a world of shifting social realities. Sixty percent are unable to name an ethnic heritage for their families of origin, and those who can name a heritage tend not to have close attachments" (1999:207). Stable or significant social networks seem less important than being part of the spiritual vanguard of global change, although in this sample group a third say they are "in

support groups where they can share their experiences and receive spiritual support from others like themselves” (1999:205).

“For intensely minded seekers, reflexivity is enhanced by both the fragmented worlds in which they live, and by their preoccupation with experience as self-authenticating. Concerned about not being bound by arbitrary limits, seekers are wary of structured communities and tend to have weak attachments to them. Sixty-one percent say, ‘People have God within them, so churches aren’t really necessary’ ... Their group experiences are limited largely to small support groups and workshops, lectures, the circles of New Age bookstores, festivals, and informal social networks.” (1999:211).

And even in relation to these, Roof goes on to say, people have a somewhat uncommitted attitude to these forms of community, moving from one to another as they feel their needs change.

And yet, he also says, the quest for community is a defining feature of our time and that these small group forms of community have emerged out of the breakdown in traditional support structures caused by the weakening of family, ethnic and religious ties and the effects of a highly mobile society (1999:163).

Neighbourhood interaction is almost non-existent in many places. The downside is often that many find their emotional and support needs going unmet from these sources and are therefore going in search of, or creating for themselves, new forms of community – support networks focused on group sharing, self-expression and nurturance. These are more deliberate and intentional forms of community including those already noted as well as “popular lectures at retreat centers; in house churches, prayer cells, women’s ritual groups...internet chat groups...” (1999:8). The list is endless it seems, including what Heelas calls a ‘seminar spirituality’ (1996:58). It is true that for a huge and growing number of people attending seminars is a major occupation. According to a Californian friend of mine, most people getting to a crossroads with a signpost showing one way to heaven and the other to a seminar on heaven, would choose the seminar. Maybe unfair, maybe not. Some things are safer just talked about.

Approval Seeking

The stories I have recorded confirm my own experience that as social beings almost without exception such identification is our way of seeking approval. We may change the social group from which we seek approval but we are rarely loners, completely autonomous. We seek someone or something to tell us we are 'on track'. This is similar to peer group approval that can cause young people to behave in wildly anti-social ways. So long as the group one wants to belong to approves, gives permission, one can 'proceed', albeit with caution.

Of course the option of choice about belonging or not belonging may not be there if we are not quite considerably self aware. Much of our cultural conditioning is so deeply embedded that we are not even conscious that there are choices that could be made. We simply conform to what society tells us is the right thing to do, the right way to behave. Because of this, as Cohen says, society may use all sorts of devices to keep individuals in line (1994:54). As my stories show, the accusations of selfishness, hedonism, self-indulgence, are quite powerful weapons to remind the straying of their foremost moral obligations to society. Cheryl comments on her difficulty with this:

In my upbringing the deadliest sin was vanity. So this idea of learning to love yourself – vanity was loving yourself – was a bad thing to do. I struggled with that for a long time and even thinking good things about myself.

Heather talks about it this way:

Guilt is something I think about a lot. It's intriguing how guilt makes people think they have to do certain things. To me two of the biggest sins or problems to me *are* guilt and shame before anything else. And judgment. Because I've always felt that way I've never really regretted decisions I've made. I did have to work through guilt for a while because the way I was raised was to feel guilty if I did something out of line. But that only brought me further along in my journey – working through what guilt really was.

As people become more self aware, as in Heather's case here, they may gain greater control over unquestioning social conformity, but I expect only a relatively few people can get beyond the need for approval at least from someone or something. They may make conscious choices to mix with likeminded people and/or belong to groups that support their journey, and thus get their approval that way. Another source of approval may come largely through the vast body of literature on following one's dream or finding one's truth, as illustrated in the next chapter.

Resistance to Social Conformity

So even though the approval we seek may come through perhaps only a few books or people who understand the journey, that may still be enough for the self-aware individual to break away at least to some extent from the tug and pull of social stereotypes.

This breaking away indicates another recurrent theme in these stories, and the supporting literature: a growing resistance to, or even rejection of, the constraints and restrictions of society, religion, family. People are defining their selfhood in relation, or in opposition, to society. Each story shows at least something about an emerging sense of self in relation to their perception of social conformities. Look, for instance, at just a very few of the statements in the stories that illustrate this theme and see how they indicate resistance to conformity, resistance to stereotyping, resistance to religious dictates, resistance to social conditioning and role playing:

I stopped doing things from social obligation...I stopped mindless role playing... I felt I did not have to fit into the socially accepted patterns that had been passed down to me....

I was raised Catholic but never saw myself as Catholic... I wanted to know about God, not about when to sit up and when to sit down in the middle of a church service...

Spirituality means to me my truth... It has nothing to do with religion...

The systems of religion no longer do it for us I think there's been permission for us to think way more than we've done in other times... the power of government or religion or church or father or mother doesn't do it any more....

I kept getting sucked into someone else's point of view. This was going to be the answer, then that was, and that was. In more recent years I have realised I am actually okay. That I am capable of thinking independent thoughts and I am able to create my own life.

And according to Anthony Cohen:

“Wherever we look in the world, people are fighting back in a struggle for identities which they regard as more sensitive to themselves, rejecting self-denying generalisation and subordination to collective categories. People's attachment to collectivities is mediated by their *personal* experience. We know that about ourselves; we have to try to incorporate that knowledge into our understanding of others....It may well be precisely because of their responsiveness to personal experience that during the last twenty-five years people have been reasserting gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, locality, religious persuasion as means or reappropriating their identities or of creating them anew” (1994:177).

And finally on this subject of resistance to social conformity, I quote from Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy*:

“A fifty five year old sociologist described the onset of his freedom: “One Saturday morning in late September 1972 I was walking onto a tennis court to play for the n-to-the-nth-power time. I suddenly asked myself, “What am I doing this for?”....It was a sudden awareness that the world of conventional activities and socially accepted interpretations of reality was shallow and unrewarding. I spent forty-eight years struggling unsuccessfully to find happiness and fulfillment in the social identities bestowed on me and in the pursuit of socially sanctioned goals. I feel that I now have attained freedom just as fully and really as a runaway slave might have in the pre-Civil War period. At one point I became free of fears and guilt associated with my religious upbringing. At another there was a shift when I came to know myself not by my name, status, or role – but as a nameless free being.

Every society, by offering its automatic judgments, limits the vision of its members. From our earliest years we are seduced into a system of beliefs that becomes so inextricably braided into our experience that we cannot tell culture from nature.....The bonds of culture are often invisible, and its walls are glass. We may think we are free. We cannot leave the trap until we know we are in it” (1987:103-5).

“...until we know we are in it.” I believe it is this sense of Self consciousness, this growing Self-awareness, that in the end sets the individual free to follow a path, a dream, that is at least more of their choosing. As the next chapter will illustrate there is a vast literature to help this growth, this journey.

CHAPTER 8

WEBS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Feeling is the language of the soul
(Walsch 1995:3)

Clifford Geertz once said, borrowing from Max Weber, that man is ‘suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun.’ These webs are what we refer to as culture (1973:5). Spiritual seeking creates around itself its own web of support, its own web of culture, albeit in interest groups, meetings, and of course literature. It would be hard to do justice to the subject of this thesis without mentioning the significant impact of this literature on self-help/spiritual/inspirational topics (a quick perusal of bookstores indicates the problem bookstore owners have in agreeing about what section headings to give such books.) According to the Book Industry Study Group, between 1993 and 1998 there has been a 16% growth in sales of books on self help/spirituality compared to 9% in overall sales (quoted in *Publishers Weekly*. Book Industry 1999:53).

Some of this writing is contemporary and of course some dates back hundreds of years. Some is written as autobiography, some as what could be called ‘self-help manuals,’ giving advice and often written by therapists, doctors, psychologists and others working in the field of personal or group counselling. Yet others are written as novels or stories with embedded advice.

This chapter provides a very brief review of some of this vast web of literature that supports spiritual seeking. Presented here as further ethnographic material, it is not intended as a source of academic theory, but simply to throw further light on ‘what is happening out there.’

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s ‘Essay on Self-reliance,’ written back in New England in the mid 1800’s (from which I also quoted in chapter 4) has influenced countless spiritual thinkers. The message of personal authenticity resonates strongly.

“Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it” (Emerson quoted in Haight 1941:142).

The idea that we each have our own destiny or path that no one else can dictate to us is undoubtedly a central theme in this literature and is seen in all the stories I recorded.

This same theme is found in the writings of Joseph Campbell, considered by many to be the world’s foremost authority on mythology, and who has had a profound influence on millions particularly through his famous work, *Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1973) and subsequently through *The Power of Myth*, (1988) the offshoot of a television series with Bill Moyers. Although his academic teachings on mythology had a huge impact, it seems that his wisdom on ‘finding your bliss’ (1988:120) has reached far beyond academic circles. In saying this, as Nevill Drury comments, “he is endorsing the idea that we should all follow a ‘path with heart,’ a path that defines our place in the cosmos and on this earth” (1999:118). It could be said that Campbell has supported the journeys of a great many spiritual thinkers. Almost everyone to whom I have spoken enthuses about Campbell’s ideas.

“If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are – if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time... Go where your body and soul want to go. When you have the feeling, then stay with it, and don’t let anyone throw you off... you begin to meet people who are in the field of your bliss, and they open the doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don’t be afraid, and doors will open where you didn’t know they were going to be” (1988:91,118,120).

Another advocate of the ‘follow your bliss’ admonition comes from New Zealand archaeologist, Barry Brailsford. While his writings are the centre of controversy over the historical validity of some of what he has written, the books nevertheless command a significant following from spiritual seekers in New Zealand and around the world.

“Find your excitement. I say again, find your excitement and follow it. Honour only that which gives you joy and brings energy and purpose to your life. Then you walk the truth of who you are. Then you walk the magic and the dream. You are called to carry the old things forward in a new way, invited to dance this trail with love and laughter and sing the harmonies of the universe. That is your power and the dream” (1996:79).

A book that has a huge readership since it was published originally in 1975 by The Foundation for Inner Peace is *A Course in Miracles*. No authorship is attributed to this book other than the Voice that came to Helen Schueman, a professor of medical psychology at Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. She and fellow professor, William Thetford, self-confessed ‘unspiritual’ and conservative people, made a sudden decision to try to find a way through the very strained relationship they had with each other. This Course, Schueman says, is the way. The content came to her over seven years as a “kind of rapid, inner dictation” whenever she wanted to write. On the following day she would read it aloud to her colleague who would type it out. Only minor changes were ever made. Schueman says:

“It is not intended to become the basis for another cult. Its only purpose is to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their own Internal Teacher” (1992: viii).....Although Christian in statement, the Course deals with universal spiritual themes. It emphasizes that it is but one version of the universal curriculum. There are many others, this one differing from them only in form. They all lead to God in the end (1992: ix).

This idea that we have an internal teacher, or that we have within us all we ever need to know is a theme that appears in many books. Some that I have particularly enjoyed include Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* (1998), Lyn Grabhorn’s *Excuse me, your life is waiting* (1999), Don Miguel Ruiz’ *The Four Agreements* (1997).

“*Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.*” is how *A Course in Miracles* begins. It makes a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal; between knowledge and perception. Knowledge is truth, under one law, the law of love or God. Truth is unalterable, eternal and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized, but it cannot be changed. It applies to everything that God created, and only what He created is real. It is beyond learning because it is beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning and no end. It merely is.

The world of perception, on the other hand, is the world of time, of change, of beginnings and endings. It is based on interpretation, not on facts. It is the world

of birth and death, founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death. It is learned rather than given, selective in its perceptual emphases, unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.

From knowledge and perception respectively, two distinct thought systems arise which are opposite in every respect. In the realm of knowledge no thoughts exist apart from God, because God and His Creation share one Will. The world of perception, however, is made by the belief in opposites and separate wills, in perpetual conflict with each other and with God. What perception sees and hears appears to be real because it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver. This leads to a world of illusions, a world which needs constant defense precisely *because* it is not real. When you have been caught in the world of perception you are caught in a dream” (1992:x).

This concept that we live ‘in a world of illusions’ or even that human life itself is an illusion appeared back in the late 19th century in the writings of Mary Baker Eddy (as discussed in chapter 4), and is another strong theme in spiritual seeking and its supporting literature. The complementary idea that matter is unreal and that reality is in spiritual energy or God energy or Spirit (another foundational truth of Christian Science), is surfacing now in business texts, proceeding as well from the discoveries of quantum physics, as discussed earlier.

Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science* (1999), used widely as an organizational theory training manual for leadership and management courses, is also popular for personal development and spiritual seeking.

“I no longer argue about what is real. We each construct reality (46).... As we mature in life, we search to see a deeper and more coherent purpose behind the events and crises that compose our lives. What shape has my life taken? What is my purpose?... Each of us seeks to discover a meaning to our life that is wholly and uniquely our own (134)....This need to discover for ourselves is unnerving. I keep hoping I’m wrong and that someone, somewhere, really does have the answer. But I know we don’t inhabit that universe any longer. In this new world, you and I have to make it up as we go along, not because we lack expertise or planning skills, but because that is the nature of reality. Reality changes shape and meaning as we’re in it. It is constantly new.... It’s scary work, trying to find the new world” (1999:174).

This line of thinking relates back to what the discussion earlier that ‘reality isn’t what it used to be’ and the postmodern idea of multiple realities, no one fixed pathway.

Wheatley also comments on contemporary ideas around community:

“I believe the fundamental work of this time – work that requires the participation of all of us – is to discover new ways of being together. Our old ways of relating to each other don’t support us any longer, whether it’s at home, in community, at work, or as nation states... We are all pioneers and discoverers of a new world, and we all need one another (xi)... both interdependence and individual autonomy are necessary conditions.... as individuals together reference a chosen, shared identity, a coherent system can emerge” (1999:168).

In terms of the modernism/postmodernism discussion in this thesis, it could be suggested that Wheatley’s ideas fall naturally into the postmodern arena, whereas *A Course in Miracles* falls into modernism’s metanarrative of revealing (as does Christian Science) an ultimate truth and a way to progress towards understanding it.

Also in the world of business is top ranking US lawyer, Joseph Jaworski’s autobiography *Synchronicity: the inner path of leadership*, which details his own spiritual journey. It is a good example of stepping beyond conventional social boundaries. Such autoethnography has a huge impact. Talking of the rich and famous he says:

“I found that most people in my generation who had achieved a great measure of success were feeling just as I was feeling: they had just about everything they wanted in terms of material goods, but they were not really living. They were not truly free. They wanted to step out and make a difference, they wanted to contribute, but they were immobilised by fear and by the need to have more and more material goods. It was the need to ‘have’ instead of to ‘be.’ I discovered that people are not really afraid of dying; they’re afraid of not ever having lived, not ever having deeply considered their life’s purpose, and not ever having stepped into the purpose and at least tried to make a difference in this world” (1998:34).

“Why was I really here?... I knew I had to have the freedom to be myself, my highest self, and that nothing could stand in my way if I really wanted it. This freedom is there for anyone who wants to discover it. The way is to change our level of consciousness, to change the way that we think about ourselves. If we have a taste of it, if we experience it, then we want to keep trying to practice, and eventually we find that unlimited being within” (1998:39).

“Over time I came to see that the boundaries we create in this life are imaginary; they don’t exist, but we create them. Then we feel trapped by them.... Because of early socialisation, we progressively limit our world. We turn from our true nature to embrace boundaries in all sorts of ways” (1998:56).

Here are other common themes of seeking freedom from socialized boundaries, freedom to find one's true selfhood, freedom to follow one's dream, the need to 'be' rather than to 'have'.

A fascinating book from the business world is Dee Hock's *Birth of the Chaordic Age* (1999) 'Chaordic' is a combination of chaos and order, and organizations, he maintains, can blend the two to create harmonious competition and cooperation.

The following comes from the dustjacket:

"He challenges our beliefs about the nature of our world and about transforming leadership, business and society."

"We are at that very point in time when a 400-year-old age is dying and another is struggling to be born – a shifting of culture, science, society, and institutions enormously greater than the world has ever experienced. Ahead, the possibility of regeneration of individuality, liberty, community and ethics such as the world has never known, and a harmony with nature, with one another and with the divine intelligence such as the world has always dreamed."

"These are not the words of a theoretical dreamer but the pragmatic founder and CEO Emeritus of the largest commercial enterprise on earth – VISA International."

According to Naisbitt and Aberdene, corporations in the United States "spend an estimated \$4 billion per year on New Age consultants. A *California Business* survey of 500 companies found that more than fifty percent had used consciousness-raising techniques" (1990:319).

Another series of books that, like *A Course in Miracles* are purported to have been taken down in dictation from a higher Source are Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God* (Book 1, 1995). Sitting on the best seller lists for several years, they are still a common sight in airport bookstores, perhaps indicating their appeal as light, humorous, and yet, spiritually insightful reading.

"This book was not written *by* me, it happened *to* me. And in your reading of it, it will happen to you, for *we are all led to the truth for which we are ready*.... This book addresses most, if not all, of the questions we have ever asked about life and love, purpose and function, people and relationships....sex, power, money...everything....You could say this book is "God's latest word on things," although some people might have a little trouble with that, particularly if they

think that God stopped talking 2,000 years ago....(1995:Introduction)... I decided to write a letter to God. It was a spiteful, passionate letter, full of confusions, contortions, and condemnations. And a *pile* of angry questions.... As I prepared to toss my pen aside, my hand remained poised over the paper, as if held there by some invisible force.... Before I knew it I had begun a conversation...and I was not writing so much as taking dictation. That dictation went on for three years, and at the time I had no idea where it was going (1995:2).

So let's enter the dialogue with a question I had been asking for a very long time: How does God talk, and to whom? When I asked this question, here's the answer I received:

I talk to everyone. All the time. The question is not to whom do I talk, but who listens?...When we try to speak to each other – Me to you, you to Me, we are immediately constricted by the unbelievable limitation of words. For this reason, I do not communicate by words alone. In fact, rarely do I do so. My most common form of communication is through *feeling*. *Feeling is the language of the soul*. If you want to know what's true for you about something, look to how you're feeling about it. Feelings are sometimes difficult to discover – and often even more difficult to acknowledge. Yet hidden in your deepest feelings is your highest truth” (1995:3).

This idea that ‘feelings’ are the true gauge of our truth, is another central theme of many books, and of spiritual seeking generally, and perhaps flows naturally from the skepticism of postmodernism: that knowledge or ‘head stuff’ tells us what is true (discussed earlier). The question in my mind though as an ‘insider’ is whether postmodernism introduced this idea into spiritual seeking or whether spiritual seeking introduced the idea into postmodern thought. I'm sure most spiritual seekers like myself would opt for the latter answer, arguing that the increasing influence of spirituality is changing the face of all areas of western thought. Or, as I would claim, is creating the (r)evolution of consciousness that has the ability to ultimately create a new worldview.

And finally, a just published book, *Ten poems to change your life*, in which author Roger Housden incorporates many ideas so appealing to spiritual seekers. In the introduction he talks of some poetry as giving ‘voice to spiritual reality’ that is beyond the ‘copyright’ of any religion.

“It voices the longings of the spirit and our deep desires – the desire for meaning, for a life of passion and creativity, for a sense of belonging, for wisdom, and as always, for love” (2001:3).

This seems to me as good a description of what spirituality means to so many contemporary seekers as anything I have so far described in this thesis. And yet it is not just contemporary. He goes on to talk about the 13th century Persian Sufi poet and mystic, Rumi, who he contends now is one of the bestselling poets in America, having a huge international following, particularly in recent years since his writings have been translated with considerable flair by Robert Bly and Coleman Banks. His works, he says, are even read at business conventions. Housden continues:

“Like thousands of others, I was stunned to discover that Rumi.. not only knew my heart, but had laid it bare on the page..... his universality speaks to people of all faiths, and even those with none.
*Be helpless, dumbfounded,
Unable to say yes or no.
Then a stretcher will come from grace
to gather us up* (2001:5).

Housden observes that these words come from mystical experience rather than religious dogma or belief, highlighting again, this perceived separation between religion and spirituality, or more particularly here, between religious belief and mystical experience. This distinction of itself is not new to religion. There is a mystical/individualized path in almost every religious tradition and there have always been mystics, particularly obvious for instance in the mystical arm of Islam called Sufism.

“The fact is there are visionaries writing today, as ever. Their work, too, contains the kind of knowledge that the soul thirsts for. The soul wants heart knowledge, a felt sense of the truth that we register not just with the mind but with the body and feelings – with our whole being (2001:5).

‘Heart knowledge,’ a ‘felt sense’ of truth – yes, these are what so many spiritual seekers identify with.

Housden describes, really almost summarises, much of what I have been saying about inward journeys. Speaking of Mary Oliver’s poem “The Journey:”

“...The Journey speaks to the birth of a new self, one not conditioned by the past. This is the self who slips through the cracks of the ordinary mind when the sentry is looking the other way. If there is one word that can describe its voice, it is the word *authentic*. It will carry your true taste, free of the flavor of any else.... it is on an altogether different frequency and level to the life you have lived so far. You do not have to be struck by lightning ... the reality is more likely to be profoundly simple, though nonetheless shattering. Only you will know the details. Perhaps you are walking through the park near your home, just as you have done a hundred times, when you happen to look up, and you see as you have never seen before sunlight picking the gold from autumn leaves. In that moment, you are caught off guard. For no reason, you come awake to yourself, and from one instant to the next your life feels inexplicably different. Right there, in that park you know so well, you have entered another land, both new and somehow utterly familiar; and you have the strangest feeling: you are utterly, entirely free of everything you were, even though nothing seems to have changed on the outside at all” (2001:19).

Here again is reference to finding the authentic self. Here too is the idea of an epiphanal moment, albeit so simple, or as Susanne says of her journey, a ‘heart opening’ experience. Housden describes Oliver’s poem as “a mirror in which you can see a reflection of your own story” (2001:11). I believe this well explains why spiritual seekers find so much support and validation in the inspirational literature that is available to them at a time when, for many, institutionalized religion fails to speak to our spiritual needs. In light of my own journey described in the first chapter (and those of others in the second chapter), Mary Oliver’s poem deserves to be quoted here to illustrate this point:

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice –
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind-pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do –
determined to save
the only life that you could save.”

Mary Oliver (as quoted in Housden, 2001:9)

If this poem strikes at the core for you, the reader, it is very probably you too are on a spiritual journey, or at least close to the “moment when you dare to take your heart in your hands and walk through an invisible wall into a new life” (Housden, 2001:11). And yes, that is a very biased ‘insider’ comment for those who are not in this place.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*
(T.S. Eliot 1952:145)

June describes here why the end of this exploration might be, as Eliot says, to arrive where we started and to be sufficiently self aware, transformed, as to know it for the first time:

I'm not on the great search. I know whatever I'm looking for is obvious. So to me the path of enlightenment, of self-awareness, of consciousness is simply noticing where you are at the moment. And that for me is a very difficult thing. It is for everyone because either people live in the future or in the past. I'm 75 years old so one would think. They say most people after the age of 70 live in the past. My whole thing has been living in the future more than anything else. What I'm attempting to do is stay in the moment because there is only eternity in now. And I think everybody is going on the great search as though it was some place outside themselves and in my humble belief it isn't. I think one day I will be quiet enough to hear what I've been looking for and find out it's absurd looking for. It's everywhere, every place and people say they're looking for God. Put a pin where God is not.

Although there have always been spiritual seekers, some on very individual paths and some even establishing their own churches, for the most part people have belonged to recognised, culturally acceptable religious traditions. There have been times of turmoil in spiritual thinking, particularly those times when major new religious traditions formed, but for the most part people unquestioningly belonged to something that had passed through generations, providing a *modus operandi* for most aspects of their lives. Decisions about what was right and what was wrong were largely a matter of referring to the teachings of their church or the guidance of a priest or minister. There was a strong and largely sub-conscious sense of social identity, an us versus them dualistic mentality to identify their place as belonging to the right group. People who believed something other than they did

were wrong and probably intellectually and socially inferior because of this. This of course led to a need to convert the infidels, sinners, the heathen, all with the very best intention of saving souls, showing them the only way to heaven, nirvana, paradise, ultimate happiness and freedom.

But of course there were times when social upheaval caused people to rethink these largely unquestioned beliefs, to rethink their hidden cultural assumptions. When for instance early settlers arrived onto the American continent the Puritans largely held to the values and traditions of their past. Other adventurous spirits dreamed of freedom, of establishing new traditions, of escaping the old, of creating utopian societies. The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Wild West rugged individuality, the quest for something better than Britain had offered with its class rigidity, and Europe had offered with its religious rigidity – all these things opened opportunities for new ways of thinking. In the still strict Puritanical climate of 19th century New England, spiritual seekers nevertheless sought out new ways of thinking. Transcendentalism, Christian Science and Theosophy were among many new pathways that quickly influenced thought throughout the western world.

So why was this happening then? Why is it happening now? For the same reasons it would seem: a sense of discomfort with the way things are, a sense of not fitting into the old ways of thinking. Perhaps something as intangible as ‘something missing.’ There must be something better, more meaningful is how so many of the interviewees put it. We can no longer discover new continents to bring hope of something better, but we can discover new thought worlds.

Or is it perhaps that people are seeking a stable sense of identity in an unstable world? When everything around us is in flux, is changing rapidly, the most fundamental questions of being human come up for questioning. Who am I? Where do I belong? How do I fit in? What do I know? What am I here to do? Undoubtedly this is likely to happen in settler societies as a whole new way of living and being is inventing itself, and it is likely to happen at times such as we have now when our whole worldview is changing. Take for instance the real impact of quantum physics’ assertions that matter is more or less non-existent, and

the follow-on idea already discussed that ‘we create our own reality.’ These either have to be ignored, dismissed as craziness or accepted at least tentatively as part of a whole new worldview, as part of a (r)evolution of consciousness. They are far too radical to just be incorporated in the old worldview of a logical scientific predictable physical universe.

Chris Bache, Director of Transformational Learning at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Northern California believes that we are living in a time when the fundamental paradigm of our culture is shifting. Because the fundamental paradigm or root-myth of a culture defines its deepest sense of what is real, such a shift necessitates a major realignment of how that culture sees itself, understands its reason for being even. Various authors have suggested different turning points for shifts of this magnitude in recent history, such as in the birth of reflective consciousness 35,000 years ago, in the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago, and in the scientific-industrial revolution 300 years ago. What they seem to all agree about is that “humanity is currently undergoing a fundamental shift that cuts across all categories, all disciplines, and all aspects of life. The sea of human consciousness is shifting as if it were being moved from some centralized source. A new archetype is struggling to break through into conscious awareness” (2000a).

So it does not seem too surprising then in light of such growing awareness that there should be an upwelling of spiritual seeking, a deep and urgent compulsion to gather up the threads and see the big picture, to understand what is happening out there, to find out how to fit and how to be in this new design.

In *Composing A Life*, anthropologist, Mary Catherine Bateson provides a useful overview of what is happening:

“The landscape through which we move is in constant flux. Children cannot even know the names of the jobs and careers that will be open to them; they must build their fantasies around temporary surrogates. Goals too clearly defined can become blinkers. Just as it is less and less possible to replicate the career of a parent, so it will become less and less possible to go on doing the same thing through a lifetime. In the same way, we will have to change our sense of the transitory and learn to see success in marriages that flourish for a time and then end. Increasingly we will recognise the value in lifetimes of continual redefinition

(6)...Many of society's casualties are men and women who assumed they had chosen a path in life and found that it disappeared in the underbrush... all too often we hold on to the continuity we have, however profoundly it is flawed. (7)
...

In many ways, constancy is an illusion. ... Of any stopping place in life, it is good to ask whether it will be a good place from which to go on as well as a good place to remain (14)...We need to look at multiple lives to test and shape our own. I believe in the need for multiple models, so that it is possible to weave something new from many different threads The recognition that many people lead lives of creative makeshift and improvisation surely has implications for how the next generation is educated and what we tell our sons and daughters (16).

Once you begin to see these lives of multiple commitments and multiple beginnings as an emerging pattern rather than an aberration, it takes no more than a second look to discover the models for that reinvention on every side, to look for the followers of visions that are not fixed but that evolve from day to day. Each such model, like each individual work of art, is a comment about the world outside the frame. Just as change stimulates us to look for more abstract constancies, so the individual effort to compose a life, framed by birth and death and carefully pieced together from disparate elements, becomes a statement on the unity of living. These works of art, still incomplete, are parables in process, the living metaphors with which we describe the world" (1990:2-17).

Redesigning lives, re-inventing the Self, becomes an inevitable preoccupation for those who see what is happening, and understand their need to re-create meaning in their lives. It becomes a grand adventure for such people. In fact it may well evolve into the very postmodern realisation that stability, a stable identity even, is not the end of the search at all; that we can live at ease in a chaordic world, a world where chaos and order are equally acceptable, and equally necessary if we are to let go of past patterns and behaviours that no longer serve us (Hock 1999 – referred to in Chapter 8). I believe a number of my participants already know this:

I asked June, *What have you loved most about your journey to this point in time? What makes you passionate?* Discovery. That to me is the most exciting thing. That's why I can't say I'm on the great search. Because what would happen if I discovered absolutely everything. How boring! That's why I love it. That's why I enjoy being not good enough. I love surprises.....the big change in attitude was losing the fear of what other people thought.

I asked Jim, *Would you perhaps call your journey an awakening?* Yes, that's a good word. It's like we've been sleeping and not seeing. Maybe it's all a process – all about verbs and movement. There is nothing solid, everything is changing. So we have that sense of our process of searching out there and it leads us back to it's all here, it's all awakening. Maybe that can be it. The journey to awakening.

Such enthusiasm, excitement even, appears in many of the interviews (though diminished somewhat in the transcribing). The sense of being explorers in new worlds, pioneers, even creators, is very tangible.

As I've already said, as wary as I am of using terms like modernism and postmodernism, I can find no other concepts that as usefully describe what I see undergirding contemporary spiritual seeking and the search for greater Self understanding. I must resort to defining these terms in whatever ways are useful to this discussion and hope that the reader will discard any other conflicting notions of what they might mean. In a world as confused (in the very best sense of that word) as we have right now, one in such a state of transition, it is not surprising that there can be no clear and unified voice on what is happening. And yet as I say, such fluidity becomes almost a game for those strong enough in their own selfhood to enjoy the adventure, the exploration of these new thought worlds.

In a fascinating address called 'What are we searching for?' Jacob Needleman reinforces this idea, observing that some kind of transition has happening in the world resulting in a search for new meaning that starts with the individual self. All the scripts we have written for ourselves and all the roles we play are coming into question. Why do we do what we do? Life is becoming more of a rehearsal than a performance. He describes the seeker as:

“one who doesn't stop. Others stop – for material goods, for pleasure, even for God – but the seeker goes on.... Woe to the seeker who finds. That is a stop. A new person, a new career, a new idea, a new situation – these create a whole prison of stops. They are symbolized by a kind of wheel in which one goes round and round – physical motion, but a metaphysical stop. It is motion without direction. The seeker is above all a man of direction, of energy. We don't know what he is seeking.... One kind of search requires a clear picture beforehand of what you want. But there's another kind of search that requires you to face the chaos and the uncertainty and not to try to get rid of it. And what we're talking about – the search for meaning – has the second element in it. It begins with facing that whole situation, being in front of it, which is a very active thing. To accept the chaos, to watch it, and not to try to change it is very active. Now when those two things come together, the active facing of that and the passive force that takes you away, I think then you have something that is really meaningful in human life. A new energy appears. I think that the sacred, if there is such a thing, is the meeting of those two things in our lives” (1994:173-184).

Here again is the sense of excitement and adventure in the journey, the sense of accepting the unexpected, living in a chaotic postmodern world. For many people no doubt there will be a need to find some sense of stability in this unstable world, and I expect most will actually move between the uncertainty of postmodernism as I have described it, and the greater certainty of modernism with its promise of progress and ultimate answers.

In similar vein to Needleman, Walter Truitt Anderson notes that it is only in the last few decades that the possibility of even holding the concept of relative truth has emerged. Relativity, at least in the western world, increasingly becomes a taken-for-granted way of thinking. Even so, he says, we have not yet “pursued our liberal tolerance to its logical conclusions, and accepted the enormous uncertainties and vast possibilities of the life it opens up before us” (1990:xii).

“A strange and wonderful new social world is coming into being around us.... “there is much to hope for in this world. Amidst the chaos, there is progress toward a future in which people will live free of belief as we have known it, at home in the symbolic universe. We can see, if we look closely at the ideas and events of the postmodern world, a new sensibility emerging – a way of being that puts the continual creation of reality at the heart of every person’s life, at the heart of politics, and at the heart of human evolution” (xiii)...

“The individual personality born out of the collapse of the medieval monolith must *choose* and keep choosing, whether or not he or she knows it or wants such freedom: must determine who to be, what to believe in, how to live. The individual in search of self-identity becomes a consumer of reality. Some of us go at this with great seriousness, shop in some rather fancy boutiques, fashion our roles and self-images like works of art. The great majority, of course, settle for the ready-to-wear” (1990:xiii-114).

He goes on to observe that we are seeing in our lifetime the collapse of modernism’s objectivist belief that there are certain absolute and unquestioned beliefs and values.

“We honor the search for truth and knowledge and values, but regard what we find as the truth and knowledge and values of people – of people in our time ... We all have a lot of work to do to learn our way into the postmodern worldview, and to create the emergent fiction that is the world we live in; but even as that happens, other and better fictions may emerge, hills beyond hills” (1990:268–269).

So in the midst of such a transformation, there certainly appears to be a growing trend towards spiritual seeking. More and more people are on an inward journey in search of their truth, in search of answers to questions such as who am I, why am I here, what is my dream. There seems to be increasing autonomy and Self awareness. As I said earlier, *Cultural Creatives* (Anderson and Ray 1999) postulates that around 13% of Americans are spiritual seekers, and of course these people will range from mildly to intensely so. Perhaps this percentage does not seem particularly high to warrant the claim of a (r)evolution of consciousness or changing worldview, and of course there will be a large proportion of people who have never even thought about these ideas, but there seems plenty of evidence, as I hope this thesis shows, to suggest that the growing social and cultural impact is starting to be tangibly felt.

In my research I have constantly had my own preliminary intuitions that there is a growing trend towards spiritual seeking confirmed, ensuring that what started out as an academic and intellectual pursuit in search of further knowledge became in itself a delightful journey of discovery, an adventure into the world of postmodern fluidity and constant inconstancy. I discovered that I was not alone in feeling compelled to re-design my life. I discovered that there was a whole new world being colonised, a thought world in rebellion against the old order of fixed facts, scientific objectivity, and rigidity. This was a new world of improvisation, flexibility, and creativity, a world in search of greater Self awareness and autonomy as well as of meaningful community, of greater caring and accountability, of tolerance and openness.

I am sure this is the world David sees also. I asked him some final questions:

What do you really think you're searching for? Why do you keep searching? What is it all for? I guess I feel like I need to realize in my heart more of what I think I know in my head about what spirituality is. I want to come into the space where I'm really feeling my closeness to God, really feeling the presence and power of Love and peace just as I go about my day. So every day becomes a revelation instead of a struggle. In the end the answer is that it is all within us, the entire cosmos of creation is within us, just as Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is within you. That's literally true, it's all consciousness... being present in the now... it's the only place where love exists.

It seems with the various interviews about spiritual seeking I do that there are two different stands. One is to understand one's relationship to God and what spirituality means in that sense. And the other is to do with finding one's own self, the sense of selfhood, identity. Do you see yourself doing both or more focused on one or the other – or are they the same thing? Well, I think we're designed to end up in the same place – to wake up to the fact that we are God, and as we do that we have found ourselves and we have found God at the same time. So at some point we get to realize that's the case – we've not really pursuing one strand or the other. We're seeing it's all one path. The path is something in the temporal realm of space and time – there's really no path, just an ascent or awakening to what is already fully present and manifest – just that we are God now in full expression and radiance without conditions or qualifications or limitations. We resist this so much, we create this whole world around us of limitation and separation and temporality when it's all infinite and present and we're all one even as we look at each other. There's no separation at all. There's no space, no time, no gaps, no divisions. *Are you saying we're creating this world around us?* Yes. A limited idea of spirituality is manifesting itself as form and we're all contributing to the consciousness that seems to maintain that. If we could individually, collectively change our consciousness of what's really there, awake to what the truth is, everything would be instantly changed. We'd come into the fullness of our individuality and our identity.

Is this just a utopian dream in the midst of a 'real' world that appears to be falling apart fast? Maybe. Maybe not. I hope this thesis goes some way to pointing a way through the present world chaos, to show what is possible with a change of worldview, a change of worldview that originates in a change of individual consciousness. While the postmodern view is that there is no one answer, no ultimate solution towards which we can all progress, I believe this thesis makes the case that each individual can find their sense of truth within.

My research shows that the motivation or impetus for so many of these individual spiritual or inward journeys can be found in the 60's counter-culture, in the move from modernism to postmodernism, in the effects of globalisation, and that at least some of this journeying finds a place in New Age thinking and New Religious or Spiritual Movements. As I said in the introduction, spiritual seekers undoubtedly share something cultural, a common spiritual inclination, even though it may be manifested in a multitude of expressions. Regardless of these social or cultural influences though, I find in my research that the burgeoning will to find greater Self awareness, greater autonomy, to follow the heart instead of the head, to find

one's authentic Self, to follow one's dream, shouts loudly. It is what I call the art of re-designing lives. As I said at the start, this research is intended to provide a discourse on something that is capturing the attention of a great many people and whether one agrees that this something is significant enough to be called a (r)evolution of consciousness or a changing worldview, it still must be recognised as a significant social and cultural influence or trend in changing western, and probably world, thought.

Like David, and many of the other collaborators in this thesis, I have a clear vision of where and of how I am heading on my journey, although I have no idea of the destination. No, the journeys are not the same. The inner truths may differ markedly, but we all know that it is the journey that counts.

The destination? Is there one?

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