The New Age Movement is one of the most difficult modern religions to define, because compared to others it is both unique and contentious. Although the movement is relatively new - it only became known in the West in 1970s - it is firmly rooted in some of the world's oldest religions, philosophies and practices, including Hinduism, Wicca, Druidism, the worship of goddesses and nature, spiritism, spiritualism, Gnosticism, humanism, ancient Egyptian and Babylonian religions and astrology. New Age ideologies also contain elements of mainstream religions, including Judaism and Christianity.

New Age

In the broadest sense, the New Age Movement consists of groups, organizations and individuals from all religions, religious convictions and even philosophical ratiocination that share the ideal of establishing a new world order. The proclaimed aim of the new world order is to unite mankind and to ensure that men live together in harmony - not only with each other, but also with the earth (nature) and God. Others say it is a social-spiritual movement aimed at “assisting individuals and society in reaching their full potential”.

However, in spite of these noble-sounding aims, New Age is nothing more than a revival or modern replica of age-old occult religions that had all but disappeared through the ages (see articles: "Neo-Paganism", "Druidism" and "Wicca"). Its true aims are therefore to mislead people in worshipping Satan in any of his many guises, and to lead people away from the love and salvation that God offers through Jesus Christ.

While followers of the New Age Movement state that it is now the beginning of a new era of peace, co-operation and prosperity on earth, many Christians know it as the fulfilment of Biblical prophesies concerning attempts by Satan’s evil forces to mislead mankind under the guise of peace and brotherhood in order to unite them under a single world system (a single government, religion, [cashless] monetary system etc) and rule over them (see article “Christians and the New Age”). Other non-Christian observers describe it as a concealed attempt to establish sole rule over the entire world and still others compare it to the ideologies of Nazi Germany.
Many believe that hopes raised by the dawning of the New Age early in the 21st century are dwindling as nothing spectacular had happened at the turn of the century; others argue that New Age ideology is fast gaining ground worldwide.

**Basic doctrines**

The New Age Movement is not a single organization or group with a visible structure, members or doctrines, but rather a network of groups and organizations with underlying differences, modus operandi and programmes. However, they do share certain doctrines and convictions. Their strongest unifying factor is the belief that a “new age” on earth is coming soon.

"Age of Aquarius"

Most of the supporters of the New Age Movement believe that the world is entering a new period that is connected to the sun’s path through the zodiac. Astrology teaches that the sun, as viewed from the earth, travels through the stars and that the stars in its path are divided into twelve groups (the zodiac). Each of these has a name or star sign (see information box: “Twelve signs of the zodiac). According to astrologers it takes approximately 2 000 years for the sun to make its way through each of the star signs, which means that it takes the sun approximately 24 000 years to complete its entire orbit.

New Age followers believe that, because the “Age of Pisces” came to an end late in the nineteenth century or sometime in the twentieth century, and due to the sun’s movement in a reverse sequence through the zodiac, the sun has therefore moved on to Aquarius. This means that the “Age of Pisces” is over and that the New Age - that of Aquarius - is dawning. The name “New Age” was derived from this belief.
Transformation of society

As the sun and the changing position of the stars introduce the Age of Aquarius, cosmic energy is released that will bring about significant changes in the world. New Age followers believe that this energy will change and renew society to such an extent that an entirely new world order will be established.

This transformation of society is aimed at establishing a single global nation, ruled by a single government, with a single (cashless) monetary system and a single religion. It implies that nationalism will be replaced by universal citizenship and that a strong world leader will rule the world. This new society will bring about an end to war, famine, disease, poverty and pollution. All forms of division and discrimination - based on gender, sexual preference, race and religion - will be eliminated, ensuring that the entire world population will live together in a "Golden Age" of peace, harmony, brotherhood and prosperity.

NEWSFLASH: In September 2005, a survey was undertaken in the United Kingdom where some 17 000 people were asked who they would prefer to become the leader of a future "One World" Government. Results showed South Africa’s Nelson Mandela as the first choice, followed by ex US-president Bill Clinton and the Dalai Lama (see article: "Buddhism").

Transformation of the individual

In order to bring about the transformation of society, it is necessary that groups and individuals receive cosmic energy in order to be renewed and transformed. Some people even talk about the transformation or evolution of man from homo sapiens to homo universalis - the perfect universal specimen. This energy must then be passed on until every individual has been transformed by it.

Some New Age followers believe that the process of transformation begins with the physical and psychological healing of the individual. Great emphasis is placed on holistic healing practices and therapies, which result in the physical and spiritual healing of a person as well as the cleansing of elements that may hinder the transformation process.

The majority of New Age followers start their own “transformation process” with what they call a “spiritual awakening”, which usually includes a new and radical “holistic” world approach. It basically comprises the nurturing of a “cosmic consciousness”, which means that the individual’s thoughts “become part of the collective consciousness” (God in everyone - see “God or gods”). The person focuses on what is important to the collective consciousness at a specific time (see “Holistic healing and spiritual transformation”). Followers also believe that through this process they can
reach their full potential, which includes obtaining new knowledge and wisdom, as well as physic and healing powers, and living “in touch” with the entire universe.

Reincarnation and sin

New Age followers further believe in the Eastern concept of reincarnation. Reincarnation encompasses the belief that, after death of the body, the soul becomes part of a continuous cycle, waiting to be born again into a new body. This cycle only ends when a person achieves enlightenment - achieving complete “oneness” with the “godhead” (also known as nirvana see article “Hinduism”).

Because the world comprises positive and negative energies, and due to the fact that every individual’s life contains both these energies, the “universal citizen” can only shed his negative energy through personal development and transformation. Through this the process positive energy is increased. The sum total of an individual's positive and negative deeds (energy) is called karma. If an individual has more positive than negative karma at the end of his live, his or her reward is a better life in the next incarnation of incarnations. In the coming New Age every person will have obtained this higher level of positive energy.

The opposite is also true - negative karma will cause an individual to experience hardship in his next life or future lives. People who die young or who experience hardship and pain, for example, are not to be pitied, because they are merely paying their karmic debt for the negative deeds committed during their previous lives. The concept of sin and forgiveness as it appears in most world religions (for example Christianity, Judaism and Islam) is completely rejected by the New Age Movement.

God, gods or goddess

New Agers hold different concepts of who God really is. These can be categorized as follows:

• Monism - the belief that all that exist are “one”. It is, therefore, not a question of a single Supreme Being or “God”, but of all the energy in the universe originating from and forming part of a single source. (See article “Hinduism”.)

• Pantheism - God and the universe are “one”. God is everything and in everything - therefore everything, including man, wind, animals, soil, plants, water, etc, is part of God. According to this line of thought, every individual is also (a part of) God.

• Panentheism - Panentheism is similar to pantheism in that it teaches that everything in the universe is part of God, but goes further by adding that God is not confined to the universe, but is much more than the universe.

When referring to God, the majority of New Age followers may use the term “Supreme Source”, or an impersonal force or energy, which they consider to be present in everyone. They do not
accept an almighty Creator as He appears in monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrism.

There are also groups within the New Age Movement whose religious believes can be described as duodenal or oligarchic. These groups are classified as Neo-Paganisms (see article: "Neo-Paganism"). These groups worship both a god and goddess or other godly or advanced beings.

The female concept of god - in the form of a goddess or energy - is emphasized in New Age doctrine. An example is Gaia - also described as "Mother Earth", or the earth goddess, that is revered through conservation and the acknowledgement of the individual's "oneness" with nature. Another is the Planetary Mother, also referred to as "Our Lady". She has been worshipped in various forms throughout the ages and has been called different names by different cultures. These include Isis (Egyptian sun goddess), Venus (Roman goddess of love) and Ishta or Ishtar (Babylonian heavenly goddess). Some New Age followers regard Mary (the mother of Jesus) as Christianity's Planetary Mother.

Avatars to lead mankind

Many New Age followers also subscribe to the so-called "law of the avatars". According to this law God sends an avatar or "christs" to earth every 2 000 years to help mankind adapt to a new age. They believe that Siddhartha Gautama or Buddha, Hercules (Greek mythology), Mohammed (see article "Islam"), Jesus Christ, Zoroaster (see article on "Zoroastrism"), Krishna (see article "Hinduism") and many other avatars were "masters of wisdom".

Above: To New Agers Jesus Christ is one of several "avatars" sent to earth to help mankind.

They also believe that Jesus, as depicted in the Christian Bible, was sent to earth to introduce the Age of Pisces, while the new avatar is expected to announce the Age of Aquarius. In the past the arrival of a "new" avatar was announced at regular intervals, but it seems as though the individuals who had been identified as such have not met expectations. In one instance a young Indian called Jiddu Krishnamurti was introduced as an avatar by Annie Bezant (one of the central figures in the launching of the New Age Movement) but later "resigned" from his elevated position.
On April 25, 1982, a full-page advertisement appeared in daily newspapers in more than twenty cities around the globe (including in the Johannesburg Rand Daily Mail), announcing: "The Christ is Now Here!" This advertisement, placed by Benjamin Crème, a British New Age leader, declared that "Lord Maitreya" - also known as the "Christ" of the Christians, the "Imam Mahdi" of the Muslims, the Messiah of the Jews, the "Fifth Buddha" of the Buddhists (see "Mahayana Buddhists" in the article "Buddhism") and the Krishna of the Hindus - has been around since 1977 and was ready to solve the world's problems, including famine, injustice and war.

According to the advertisement, Maitreya would make his first public appearance on the Day of Declaration, which would take place two months after the publication of the announcement. When this failed to happen, Crème and other New Age leaders explained that Maitreya's appearance had not been cancelled, but postponed until the time was right.

A few years later in 1988, according to newspaper-reports (see picture above), Maitreya did appear in Nairobi, Kenia. However, until now, he failed to draw any substantial support or fulfill any of the "prophesies" with regard to solving the world's problems.

A single world religion

Followers of the New Age Movement believe that, because everything is "one" or part of God, every religion is merely a different "spiritual path" (sadhana) to the same ultimate destination. It is sometimes compared to a mountain, which has many paths leading to the summit - some are easier to follow than others, but each one ultimately reaches the summit. No path is more "correct" than another, as it is the privilege of each individual to choose the path that he or she wants to follow.

The movement also promotes greater co-operation and "brotherhood" among the different religious groups worldwide. Followers of every religion are encouraged to join the movement and to subscribe to its aims in order to become part of the New Age. There is an expectation that the arrival of the Age of Aquarius will result in the unification of all religions into a single world religion headed by the new avatar.
People who do not want to be part of this process - for example Christians who believe in the uniqueness of their Gospel - are considered "fundamentalists" and stumbling blocks in the path of the New Age.

**Energy, chakras and auras**

According to the New Age worldview the entire universe and everything in it are made up of energy. Things that are observed using the senses - the physical world that we are aware of - is "congealed" energy. Congealed energy is linked to and part of the universal life force that cannot be observed using the senses, but flows through the universe in the form of bioplasma (also known as prana or chi). The flow, control and channelling of energy play an important role in all New Age rituals dealing with spiritual growth and healing.

**Chakras**

According to this belief, a person's body consists of congealed energy, but there are also life forces that flow through the "chakras" from top to bottom. A chakra ("wheel of light") is a spiral of energy that turns so fast that it reflects a colour frequency that can be observed as either light or sound. The body is divided into seven main chakras. Each has its own function and is arranged in line with the spinal cord.

The chakra at the top is white and controls the other chakras in the body. It is also the portal through which the soul leaves the body during sleep, whether to undertake astral travels or eventually when the body dies. The next chakra is violet (linked to science, art and music), then blue (time and the control thereof), green (control over the astral body or soul), yellow (intellect and spirituality), orange (health and the immune system) and - at the bottom - red (the organs of the body).

**Auras**

ABOVE: Photographs “doctored” to create the image of an “aura” surrounding each individual.
According to New Age philosophy, an energy field or aura envelops the body of every living being. This aura is projected by the body, but can also be supplemented by energy from sources outside the body. (Auras have been catalogued by special photography since the 1950s.)

Some "highly evolved" individuals can discern this misty, multi-coloured field or halo that envelops the body. By merely looking at an individual’s aura, a person who has developed the skill can determine the condition of the individual’s physical as well as spiritual health and discern details about his or her character, karma and state of mind.

**Nature Conservation**

Conservation plays an integral part in New Age philosophy, because New Agers believe that God is in everything and everything is in God. The transformation of society includes the transformation of the entire earth (which is sometimes venerated as Gaia, "Mother Earth" or the goddess of the earth) and nature.

![Gaia, goddess of the earth or "Mother Earth".](image)

Pollution and disturbances in nature cause imbalances and blockages that hamper the flow of energy and must be healed before the New Age can arrive.

**Rituals and practices**

The rituals and practices used by followers of the New Age Movement are as diverse as the many groups, individuals and organizations that make up the movement. However, there are some rituals - although in different forms - that are practiced by the majority of New Age followers.
Holistic healing

Because of the New Age Movement’s “holistic” approach - all elements (man, nature, God, etc) in the universe are interlinked and dependent upon each other - great emphasis is placed on healing and health.

Different groups within the organization emphasize the causes of disease. For example, some believe the cause of a disease may be found on a metaphysical level (karma resulting from a previous life); biological level (for example an unhealthy lifestyle or pollution); physiologic level (for example anxiety, stress and feelings of guilt); spiritual level (for example fundamentalism), physiological level (for example as a result of shortsightedness and conservative views) or psychic level (for example as a result of a curse).

Whatever the reason, the individual is always responsible for what happens to him or her. Therefore, diseases are considered to be part of the learning process that the individual has to go through in order for to experience personal growth. The aim of the holistic healing process is not just to treat the disease, but rather to treat the person as a whole - body, mind and soul/spirit.

Examples of holistic healing methods are:

Acupuncture

This age-old Chinese healing method teaches that the body is comprised of a network of energy paths (meridians), which link the different organs. Blockage can lead to a disease, which can be healed by sticking pins into key points in the network to release the flow of energy to the sick or affected areas of the body or organs.
Biofeedback

This relatively new method encompasses the electronic monitoring of an individual’s brainwaves while teaching him to control his brainwaves. The purpose is to help the individual attain an alternative level of consciousness and control involuntary bodily functions such as the heartbeat and control of body temperature. In this manner a headache or high blood pressure, for instance, can be relieved by lowering blood pressure.

Crystals

The use of crystals to bring about healing or to maintain the body’s energy balance is common among New Age followers. They believe that crystals, with their characteristic symmetrical surfaces (ascribed to the orderly geometric pattern in which their molecules are arranged) and unique vibrational levels, have the ability to absorb healing energy from the cosmos and to focus it on someone. The different types of crystals also have unique characteristics that can be used to address specific problems.

Crystals are also used during meditation to bring about an “inner cleansing” because it “gathers” negative energy and releases it. The crystals are washed in salt water and left in the sun- or moonlight to be cleansed and energised for re-use.

Homeopathy

According to this concept, based on the work of nineteenth century German scientist Dr Samuel Hahnemann, matter similar in structure or nature can be used to heal other matter. Diseases are caused by an imbalance in an individual’s life force or vital force. As a result, it is necessary to use natural products, such as herbs and minerals, that are mixed with ingredients found in the body to restore an individual’s vital force.

Iridology

ABOVE: An iridology chart.
Iridology is used to “diagnose” diseases by examining the eye to determine where the problem lies. The iris is seen as the “window” through which the body can be examined and diseases or other health problems diagnosed.

Reflexology

Reflexology is based on the same principles as acupuncture, namely that the entire body’s organs are linked through energy paths through which energy flows. Blockages in this system can cause disease and illness. In reflexology key points on the soles of the feet or hands are massaged to remove blockages and heal organs that are linked to those points.

**Spiritual transformation**

Although holistic healing contributes to the spiritual transformation process of New Age followers, there are certain practices and principles that are used to promote specific spiritual transformations:

Meditation

![Meditation](image)

ABOVE: Meditation is an age-old Hindu practise.

Meditation is probably the most important method a New Age follower can use to develop his or her “cosmic consciousness” and human potential. This age-old Hindu principle teaches that a person can still the mind through self-discipline, concentration and/or the use of a mantra. The aim is to release ‘positive energy’.

During meditation the mind is “cleared” of all thought, while focusing on a specific matter in order to gain new knowledge of or insight into it. In this way the person may shed negative thoughts and energy while developing his cosmic consciousness.
New Age music

Music is commonly used by New Age followers to help them relax and transport them to higher levels of consciousness. New Agers also believe that the vibrations released by some forms of music can promote healing. The most popular music generally used is essentially soft, smoothing sounds with specific vibrational levels. Many New Age followers consider Baroque music as ideal to help them relax and focus.

Visualisation

New Age followers believe that because the universe consists of energy that links everything together, changes in the visible world can be brought about through visualization, as energy is released through this method. Practitioners of visualisation believe that it can be used to heal diseases (for example by visualising how cancer cells are replaced by healthy cells) and also to change an individual’s situation.

Other principles and practices

Channelling

Channelling is basically the same as spiritism, where someone acts as a medium or makes contact with a deceased person. In the New Age context, however, it means making contact with “advanced beings” - usually a soul that has been released from the cycle of reincarnation through nirvana (see "Reincarnation and sin") and therefore exists in an elevated form. These beings are usually called "spirit guides", while some New Age followers also refer to them as angels.

The “spirit guide” channels his consciousness through the medium and also provides information or guidance to the group by using the medium’s voice. In this manner contact may be made with “God” or the "Supreme Source" and hidden information obtained.

Channelling is also used by some Eastern yogis (spiritual teachers) to communicate over long distances, for instance by making use of a medium to teach their disciples without being physically present.

There are many other groups and individuals that are somehow part of the New Age Movement, but practice “ordinary” spiritism. This entails communication with spirits using different methods, for example using the Ouiji board or Tarot cards.

Divination

Divination is closely linked to spiritism and spiritualistic methods are used. Divination is used to obtain information about the future of an individual or group. In the New Age context, contact is
made with the soul of an “enlightened” guide. A variety of techniques such as the I Ching, pendulum and Tarot cards are used.

Astral travel

ABOVE: Astral travelling is an occult practise where the person’s soul is claimed to leave the physical body.

Astral travel is one of many techniques derived from Eastern mysticism and embraced by New Agers. Astral travel teaches that every individual has an immortal astral body or soul that has power over cosmic or vital forces. Practitioners of this technique claim that their souls or astral bodies can leave their physical bodies through the top chakra and visit any place on earth or other spiritual levels or realms.

While the soul travels in this manner, it is linked to the body through a thin silver “cord”, along which it returns at a later stage. Astral travel can occur spontaneously while a person is sleeping, but usually happens during focused meditation.

Astrology

Astrology (which should not be confused with astronomy) is an old occult ritual using the position of the stars to predict the future. Disciples of astrology believe that the orientation of the various star signs (see “The twelve signs of the zodiac”) at the time of an individual’s birth determines that person’s personality and future.

Human Potential Movement

The Human Potential Movement, also known as the Emotional Growth Movement, comprises various groups that form part of the New Age Movement, and aims to promote the spiritual development and transformation of individuals in order to help them achieve their full potential through the use of different spiritual and physical techniques. Examples of such groups and techniques are Gestalt therapy, transcendental meditation, primal scream therapy and yoga.

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