CHAPTER FOUR

The 1960s Watershed Years

In 1961, Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic *Stranger in a Strange Land* was published and *Black Elk Speaks*, an account of the life of a Lakota medicine man, was reissued in paperback and became "the current youth classic."[1] Both books would have an impact on the generation of men and women who would become Neopagans and New Agers. The first 1960s Neopagan groups looked for ancient and indigenous cultures on which to model their rituals, but they also took ideas from science fiction. New Agers too were attracted to stories of distant worlds and enchanted by the myths and rituals of American Indians. During the 1960s patterns of American religiosity inherited from the nineteenth century were pushed to new imaginative dimensions by the (mostly young) men and women who made up the counterculture. Beginning with several important phenomena of the 1950s, such as social and demographic changes, the UFO craze, and the Beat movement, this chapter charts the forces responsible for the emergence of communities and loosely structured networks of people who by the early 1970s could be identified as New Agers and Neopagans.

Nineteenth-century beliefs and practices such as channeling and reincarnation resurfaced during the late 1950s, surged in the popular imagination during the 1960s, and were shaped by social forces that converged in these two decades. Social and cultural upheavals initiated religious and cultural trends such as the human potential movement, the feminist movement, the rise of ecological awareness, and the turn to nonwestern religions, all of which also influenced New Age and Neopagan spirituality. Personal and planetary healing and self-transformation, defining characteristics of New

Age and Neopagan religions as they developed in the 1970s and 1980s, took on heightened importance during the 1960s and appeared in the writings of important leaders, gurus, and modern-day prophets and the communities they spearheaded. Key figures of the 1960s counterculture and early New Age movement, such as psychedelic guru Timothy Leary and spiritual teacher Ram Dass, as well as important channelers like Helen Schucman developed followings in the '60s and '70s. Beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the twenty-first century, New Age and Neopagan interests coalesced around particular people, books, institutes, retreats, communes, and centers; some of these lasted, others were short-lived. What emerged out of this period was a loosely connected network of individuals and communities that proceeded to grow into a more mainstream movement over the following two decades.

Postwar America and the 1960s Spiritual Boom

After World War II the United States underwent rapid social transformation, unregulated industrial growth, and economic expansion. Following years of war and economic depression, the late 1940s and 1950s were characterized by significant increases in national production and per capita income.[2] Demographic shifts accompanied economic and industrial expansion as masses of people moved from rural areas to urban centers, a trend that had been ongoing for decades but reached its peak in the 1950s. The postwar years were marked by a new prosperity that resulted in an expanding middle class and larger families. By the mid-1950s, 60 percent of all Americans had income at levels considered middle-class, compared to only 31 percent in the 1920s. This shift meant that larger percentages of the U.S. population had cars and discretionary income.[3] At the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s the average age of marriage and motherhood fell, fertility increased, and divorce rates declined for the first time in more than a hundred years.[4] The so-called "baby boomers," a generation that would found and support first the countercultural movement and then New Age and Neopagan communities, were born between 1946 and 1964.

Along with these other changes, Cold War patriotism in the face of atheistic Communists initiated a postwar religious revival. Christianity was established, both formally and informally, as America's civil religion during these years. For instance, no organized opposition spoke out against the 1954 addition of the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. Church building and church attendance were on the rise during the decade or so after the end of World War II. In 1957, for instance, polls showed that 96 percent of Americans gave specific church affiliations. All of this would change by the end of the 1950s as people began to seek new spiritualities.

However, the phrase "the way we never were," the title of Stephanie Coontz's historical look at nostalgia for the "traditional family," could be broadened to denote the entire decade. The 1950s had a shadow side lurking beneath its Christian veneer and the clean and upbeat television programming that symbolized the ideal American culture many people associate with these years. Looking back nostalgically on the '50s has been an American pastime for decades, but "beneath the polished façade of many 'ideal' families, suburban as well as urban, was violence, terror, or simply grinding misery that only occasionally came to light."[5] Youth movements stirred at the edges of the façade, and by the end of the decade, Beat generation poets had made a striking entrance on the literary scene and psychedelic drugs were about to be promoted among young people willing to experiment. These two examples suggest that trouble was brewing because some American youth were not satisfied with the promise of affluence and a future shaped by middle-class Christian values.

The 1960s are seen as watershed years for religious experimentation, but much of what occurred in that decade emerged out of streams of belief and practice already in place on the American religious landscape by the 1950s: channeling, psychic phenomena, Theosophical beliefs, and mental healing, for instance. But most of these practices were not popularized or publicized until a host of other changes that accompanied and facilitated the 1960s birth of many new religious movements, including Neopaganism and New Age. The most significant examples of new events in the 1950s that fed the alternative religions of the 1960s were interest in UFOs, the Beat generation's eclectic Asian religiosity, and early signs of the emergent psychedelic drug culture. These phenomena reveal a different story of the 1950s, characterized by spiritual seeking and discontent with available religious and lifestyle options.

Aldous Huxley, a writer interested in religious mysticism, experimented with mescaline in the 1950s and published an account of his experiences in a 1954 book, *The Doors of Perception*, in which he wrote,

> The mescaline experience is without any question the most extraordinary and significant experience available to human beings this side of the Beatific Vision. To be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and inner worlds, not as they

> appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to anyone.[6]

It was clear to readers of his book—many men and women who would become involved with the counterculture of the 1960s—that "the inner planes of reality . . . could now be directly known, seen, and experienced on the streets of a new world, in part with the help of magic potions known to the wise."[7] Psychedelics would become one of the main routes by which young people in the 1960s explored their inner selves and envisioned new religious options. Huxley's early descriptions of altered states of consciousness helped to refocus attention on personal experience and his discussions of the parallels between psychedelics and religious experience helped to direct his readers to new religious worlds.

Whereas psychedelics were the tools of inward exploration as an end in itself, Norman Vincent Peale's "positive thinking" program advocated inner growth as a means to external success. Mental healing was reinvigorated in the 1950s by the popularity of his self-improvement techniques. Peale, who had written books on "positive thinking" for over a decade, became wildly successful when he published *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952. Peale's advice for self-improvement emphasized the power of the mind: "A primary method for gaining a mind full of peace is to practice emptying the mind. . . . I mention it now to underscore the importance of a frequent mental catharsis. . . . The formula is: (1) PRAYERIZE, (2) PICTURIZE, (3) ACTUALIZE."[8] Peale's optimism legitimated the desire of middle-class Americans in the 1950s for increasing affluence and emotional comfort. His program built on that stream of harmonial religion in the nineteenth century that taught people they could achieve health and happiness by following the proper techniques. Certainly the ethic of self-reliance in Peale's writings carried over into the 1960s, but optimism such as his was in sharp decline among many Americans by the end of the '50s. If Peale was at one end of the 1950s spectrum as the prophet of middle-class positive thinking, then the Beat poets were at the other as vocal critics of what that middle class represented. Both were important in the development of the counterculture and thus had an impact on New Agers and Neopagans, who would emerge from a generation of baby boomers looking for religious alternatives.

Beat poems and novels highlighted the spiritual crisis of postwar America and emphasized the quest for self-knowledge. In his social critique of the

1950s published in 1956, cultural critic Paul Goodman identified the Beats as resisters of the status quo: "balked in their normal patriotism and religious tradition, the Beats [sought] pretty far afield for substitutes . . . red Indians or feudal Zen Buddhists."[9] The Beats' response to what they believed was a spiritually impoverished culture was "to heighten experience, and get out of one's usual self."[10] Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1959) was the fullest expression of this quest and detailed the exploits of Kerouac's fictionalized friends and acquaintances, especially Japhy Ryder (a thinly disguised portrayal of Buddhist poet Gary Snyder), a quintessential Beat who meditates, studies Zen Buddhism, and travels to Japan to live in a Buddhist monastery. The narrator, Kerouac's character, accompanies Japhy on a backpacking trip that includes meditation breaks:

> We went over to the promontory where we could see the whole valley and Japhy sat down in full lotus posture cross-legged on a rock and took out his wooden juju prayer beads and prayed. That is, he simply held the beads in his hands, the hands upsidedown with thumbs touching, and stared straight ahead and didn't move a bone. I sat down as best I could on another rock and we both said nothing and meditated. Only I meditated with my eyes closed. The silence was an intense roar. From where we were, the sound of the creek, was blocked off by rocks. . . . When I opened my eyes the pink was more purple all the time. The stars began to flash. I fell into deep meditation, felt that mountains were indeed Buddhas and our friends.[11]

The characters in the novel and the people they were modeled after exemplified a self-determined search for meaning that incorporated personalized interpretations of Buddhism and showed the way for subsequent self-styled truth seekers.

While the dharma bums' search was largely internal, UFO fanatics of the 1950s looked outside the self and beyond the planet for meaning. Widespread fascination with UFOs dates to the summer of 1947 when Kenneth Arnold, a U.S. Forest Service employee sent to look for a downed plane in Washington State, saw nine brightly lit, spherically shaped flying objects near Mount Rainier. Reports of unidentified flying objects existed in earlier decades, but this was the first sighting to gather widespread public support (and to generate considerable controversy). Arnold's story was picked up by the Associated Press and circulated by the national news media. Stories of other sightings appeared in the years following Arnold's experience and were also controversial: "Many contactees emerge with heightened psychic abilities and spiritual awareness, only to face harassment, ridicule and scorn from 'nonbelievers.'"[12] Some people recalled being abducted and abused, while others believed that aliens were benevolent beings come to guide and protect humans, sometimes by delivering messages through human channels. George King, an Englishman who was influenced by Theosophy, founded the first UFO religion, the Aetherius Society, in 1956 in London, then moved it to Los Angeles in 1959.[13] *The Urantia Book*, a document channeled through Wilfrid Kellogg (1876–1956), a trance channeler, beginning in the early twentieth century, provided evidence for other inhabited worlds; it was published in 1955.[14] The popularity of UFOs in the 1950s marked the beginning of widespread interest in other worlds in America's alternative or occult tradition.

Psychic healers like Edgar Cayce, prophets of positive thinking like Peale, faith in otherworldly salvation, experimentation with psychedelics, and disaffected Beats looking East were a few of the many popular movements in the 1950s that coalesced with older alternative religions like Theosophy and spiritualism as well as with 1960s social movements. By the 1960s assumptions about progress and unprecedented growth—"technocratic society," to borrow a phrase from one of the most astute sixties observers, Theodore Roszak—resulted in a pervasive sense of national failure and dislocation. Science and technology seemed frighteningly unbounded to many people, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima demonstrated to all Americans the real possibility of human extinction. Enthusiasm about UFOs and space exploration (the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first space satellite, in 1957) spurred interest in American scientific developments. There was a widespread cultural sense that science was the cure-all, yet events like the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 also underscored its dangers. Many of the material and cultural changes of the 1960s had interesting parallels in the mid-nineteenth century and both eras were above all times of unusual religious creativity. Changes in communications media in the mid-nineteenth century and again in the 1960s made information more accessible and exposed people to new ways of being in the world. Television and photojournalism (*Life* magazine in particular) brought the Vietnam War and unfamiliar Southeast Asian cultures into American living rooms. Photos of Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire and soldiers returning home brought Asian religious worlds to the awareness of many Americans, building on the Asian presence that was already here. The first moon landing in 1969 brought about increased awareness of other planets and a sense of humanity's relative insignificance in the vast universe. Key events like these affected a generation of young people who responded to the times by joining a diverse range of religious movements, including Neopagan and New Age.

The Counterculture and the Personalization of Religion

The context for the 1960s counterculture from which Neopagan and New Age movements emerged can be approached from many perspectives. The following list is just one of many ways to tell the story, beginning with some important dates:

1961: *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *Black Elk Speaks* are published; Esalen Institute is formed; Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) and Timothy Leary experiment with LSD.
1963: President John F. Kennedy is assassinated.
1965: J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* U.S. paperback edition is published; Helen Schucman begins channeling what will become "A Course in Miracles"; Asian immigration quotas lifted; U.S. military involvement in Vietnam officially begins.
1967: Church of All Worlds and Feraferia, two important Neopagan groups, are founded.
1968: Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy are assassinated.
1969: U.S. astronauts land Apollo 11 on the moon.
1970: Student protesters at Kent State are shot and killed by National Guardsmen.

While New Age and Neopagan assumptions about the self emerged most directly out of shifts in American religiosity that took place during the 1960s, in other ways they were continuous with the alternative tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that included spiritualism, psychic readings, Theosophy, and mental healing. Even when world events did not appear so promising, the self remained a source of optimism. The assumption that it could be shaped and changed, key to many nineteenth-century religious and healing movements, was expanded and enriched with a host of new self-improvement technologies like meditation and yoga. New Agers in particular, and Neopagans to a lesser extent, taught that salvation was possible through the discovery of a divine inner self. The youth culture of the baby boomers—the counterculture—came to be "grounded in an intensive examination of the self, of the buried wealth of personal consciousness."[15] Religious seeking in the 1960s was "the quest for personal fulfillment. . . . Everyone had to compose his or her own story; autobiography threatened to displace history as a dominant way of making sense of things."[16] The counterculture celebrated synchronicities and claimed to reject linear time, ordinary reality, and history: "There was attention to signs and omens, the portent of simple actions, the importance of dreams and hallucinations."[17] Some took the divine self to be their goal, while others allowed that the discovery of divinity within helped them connect to other beings and to the greater universe.

Along with other new religions, the New Age movement and Neopaganism emerged during a "radical turn in religion and morals that took place during the 1960s."[18] One aspect of this turn was a cultural shift toward understanding the self as a commodity to be created and presented.[19] Self-expression and "personal autonomy" were central to the 1960s counterculture and resulted in "a progressive democratization of personhood" and a search for individualized religion.[20] Family relationships, diet, fashion, and exercise were all areas in which "good" and "bad" were measured by their effects on self-knowledge and personal growth.

As they created the self anew, Neo-Pagans and New Agers continued to play out the search for personalized religion that was integral to the counterculture. This replaced the importance of a community of others and institutional authorities. The 1960s moral authority for most Americans was increasingly located in the self rather than in family, church, or nation.[21] Involvement in church life was normative until the social revolution of the 1960s resulted in the "third disestablishment" of institutionalized religion,[22] in which secularization and personal religious seeking displaced denominational affiliation and institutional commitment. "If one scans any of the underground weeklies," noted one observer of the period, "one is apt to find their pages swarming with Christ and the prophets, Zen, Sufism, Hinduism, primitive shamanism, theosophy . . . every manner of mystery and fakery, ritual and rite [is] intermingled with marvelous indiscrimination."[23]

During the 1960s, many young people made more personalized religious commitments, rejected the religions of their parents, and looked suspiciously at institutions in general and religious ones in particular. Neopagan festival communities and important organizations like the Church of All Worlds originated in the 1960s counterculture and exemplify changes in the relationship between religion and self-identity that took place during that decade. Historian of religion Robert Ellwood observed that beginning in the 1960s, "external religious authority is widely rejected in favor of one's right to find a religion that meets one's own perceived needs."[24] According to social scientific research, the tumultuous decade influenced many people to take a more eclectic approach to spirituality.[25]

Probably the most insightful outside observer of 1960s countercultural concerns was a young history professor, Theodore Roszak. His book *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969) situated the countercultural movement of the 1960s, and especially its spiritual aspects, in a particular configuration of social and historical forces. Roszak described the many sources from which the counterculture drew inspiration, such as Asian religions, backward-looking European and American romanticism, certain forms of psychiatry, anarchist social theory, the absurdist dada movement in the art world, and American Indian lore.[26] This eclecticism also meant that many men and women shopped around for spiritual paths that worked for them. They consulted psychics and channelers, ate vegetarian meals with the Hare Krishnas, and read Timothy Leary's *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1968) and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

While television increased exposure to new ideas, many young people believed that technological changes were destructive and preached about moving back to nature and simpler lifestyles. Baby boomers had benefited from the economic boom of the 1950s, but they were not sure they wanted to claim that heritage: "the orthodox culture they confront is fatally and contagiously diseased. The prime symptom of that disease is the shadow of thermonuclear annihilation beneath which we cower. The counterculture takes its stand against the background of this absolute evil."[27] Young people were ambivalent about the many technological changes that were under way in the 1960s. Space technology and weapons of mass destruction were in the background of protests against what American society had become because the counterculture rejected the "high gods" of science and technology. Roszak predicted that opposition to the dominant society would continue as long as young people "reject reductive humanism, demanding a far deeper examination of that dark side of the human personality which has for so long been written off by our dominant culture as 'mystical.' "[28]

Many other writers of the time agreed with this assessment of the counterculture's spiritual motivations. Radical activist Abbie Hoffman went by the pseudonym "Free" in his account of the 1960s, *Revolution for the Hell of It*. Free explained that "the myths of America are strong and good but the institutional machine is a trap of death."[29] If technocratic society rejected myth and ritual, he suggested, then of course the counterculture should embrace these elements of human experience, reclaiming ancient shamanism and looking to nonwestern cultures for wisdom and guidance. Sociologist Andrew Greeley, another observer of the '60s counterculture, likewise noted, "the communes, rock music . . . hallucinogenic drugs, the *I Ching*, tarot cards, astrology, witchcraft, the Meher Baba cult, etc., are an attempt to reassert meaningful community in ecstasy in a rationalistic, hyperorganized world which had assumed, in keeping with the tenets of the conventional wisdom, that man could dispense with all these elements."[30] Although many political radicals in the counterculture were atheists who believed that dabbling in astrology had nothing to do with real social and political change, others pointed to the many ways that spirituality and politics worked together to create an alternative culture. Writers and artists of the time advocated blending the two, as in this poem by Julian Beck:

it is 1968
i am a magic realist
i see the adorers of che

i see the black man
forced to accept
violence

i see the pacifists
despair
and accept violence

i see all all all
corrupted
by the vibrations

vibrations of violence of civilization
that are shattering
our only world

we want
to zap them
with holiness

we want
to levitate them
with joy

we want
to open them
with love vessels

we want
to clothe the wretched
with linen and light

we want
to put music and truth
in our underwear

we want
to make the land and its cities glow
with creation

we will make it
irresistible
even to racists

we want to change
the demonic character of our opponents
into productive glory.[31]

This kind of rebellion was not designed to further distance oneself from the enemy, but to transform the enemy as well as the self, through both spiritual revolution and political action. Poet Diane DiPrima explored the same issue in "Revolutionary Letter #7":

but don't get uptight: the guns:
will not win this one, they are
an incidental part of the action
what will win
is mantras
the sustenance we give each other
the energy we plug into
(the fact that we touch
share food)
the buddha nature
of everyone, friend and foe, like a million
earthworms

tunneling under this structure
till it falls[32]

Both poets voice the widespread view that revolutionary social change could be accomplished through spiritual means and changes in consciousness. Countercultural men and women came up with imaginative forms of opposition to social institutions that were drawn from both science fiction and backward-looking medievalism. If the present was bankrupt, then past cultures and future worlds were the best sources of inspiration for new communities. New Agers, and especially Neopagans, looked optimistically to the past as a source for constructing a better future. "The past," observed historian of religion Robert Ellwood in his study of spirituality in the 1960s, "was of help in the counterculture's quest for legitimation and authority," in part because it was seen as the locus of truth. In the 1960s and 1970s, "The theme of nostalgia dominated popular culture: nostalgia for times past, for places either remote or undisfigured by technology, for family, and for the experience of community."[33] Typical of this idealistic quest was "romantic neomedievalism" exemplified by the popularity of Tolkien and of Lerner-Loewe's musical *Camelot*.[34] College students wore buttons proclaiming "Frodo Lives" and put up posters of Middle Earth in their rooms.[35] Also characteristic of the 1960s romantic "backlash" against rationalism was renewed interest in witchcraft and supernaturalism.[36] One example of the popularization of all things occult was the *Dark Shadows* television soap opera, which ran from 1966 to 1971 and depicted a family "involved with everything that made up the sixties spiritual counterculture. They did astrology and tarot cards, witchcraft, the *I Ching*."[37] For many young people, the esoteric and the ancient were attractive and led to Neopagan efforts at reclaiming the witch and the Druid.[38] Astrology and tarot evinced the romanticized past of a simpler, more harmonious world. But most significantly in relation to Neopaganism, the ethos of the past was "thought to be close to the earth and the cycles of nature which Neopagans see as the central metaphor of their cosmology." The elevation of nature as divine presence and the turn to the past as a source of inspiration date at least to the English Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Keats, who looked nostalgically to ancient Greece as an example of humans living in harmony with nature and the gods. Neopaganism is a recent take on a literary tradition characterized by the desire to return to a time when religion was supposedly less dogmatic and institutionalized and more in tune with the natural world.

Utopia in This and Other Worlds

Science fiction and futurism as well as nostalgic fantasy were popular in the 1960s. Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* would became the basis for one of the first Neopagan religions in the United States, the Church of All Worlds (CAW). One Neopagan fan of the genre argued that "Science fiction/fantasy readers tend to think of things in terms of the galaxy as a whole . . . rather than think in a local or national sense."[39] In 2002 the Church of All Worlds was still going strong and still guided by its original founder. According to its Web site, "The CAW is the first Pagan Church founded in the US. It was incorporated in 1968 by Oberon Zell-Ravenheart and recognized by the IRS in 1970. Zell-Ravenheart read *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert Heinlein and was so inspired by the vision of a Nest—a close-knit group seeking a deep knowing of each other—that he brought his vision alive with the CAW." The church began in 1961 when a group of high school students met to discuss the philosophical novels of self-sufficiency written by Ayn Rand and the work of human potential psychologist Abraham Maslow. A couple of these students formed a smaller group called "Atl" and read Timothy Leary and other authors popular with the counterculture. One of these students was Zell-Ravenheart. From its founding, the CAW was "dedicated to the celebration of Life, the maximal actualization of Human potential, and the realization of ultimate individual freedom and personal responsibility in harmonious eco-psychic relationship with the total Biosphere of Holy Mother Earth."[40] The focus on human potential and personal freedom was from the beginning at the heart of the Neopagan movement. And like many Neopagan groups to come, CAW saw nothing inconsistent with living in harmony with nature on this planet and being fascinated by other worlds. For many young people in the 1960s such literature provided useful models for creating new lifestyles and beliefs at a time when many Americans were desperately seeking alternatives to their parents' religious and lifestyle choices.

Religious seekers in the 1960s also looked within for truth and wisdom. Other techniques to explore consciousness, such as meditation, grew in popularity and earned a permanent place in the New Age and Neopagan movements. Healers and psychics had incorporated hypnosis and visualization in their treatment of patients since the nineteenth century, when mesmerists traveled the countryside. But in the 1960s these older techniques were updated and revised because of contact with Asian religious beliefs and practices. Meditation was incorporated into a wide variety of religious practices. Human potential workshops, witchcraft covens, communal gatherings, Zen retreats, and new movements like Transcendental meditation and Krishna Consciousness that followed Asian teachers all incorporated meditation. Meditation centers and weekend workshops were established, and many communes also made meditation part of their daily routine. Some people practiced alone while others sought out communities or retreats that would encourage and guide them.

The decade of the 1960s was characterized by contradictions; this was particularly clear in the tension between personal autonomy and desire for community. Many spiritual seekers rejected any structured group setting while others looked for guidance from experienced teachers. An important development early in the decade that contributed to the New Age emphasis on healing and self-transformation within group settings was the human potential movement. Psychologists like Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and organizations like the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California (founded in 1961 by Michael Murphy and Richard Price, thirty-year-old Stanford graduates with psychology degrees) encouraged the process of self-actualization that was to become central to the New Age movement—the phrase "do your own thing" was coined at Esalen. It has as its mission "the exploration of what Aldous Huxley called 'the human potential,' the world of unrealized human capacities that lies beyond the imagination."[41] Murphy had lived in an ashram in India, and his spiritual interests were complemented by Price's therapeutic focus. According to Price: "In 1960, the basic model Michael had, after his year at the Aurobindo ashram, was something more spiritual and searching, while my interests are what I call therapeutic and clinical. . . . The two ideas there were a good match: a spiritual model coupled with a place to help people at various levels of emotional difficulties." Esalen workshops often incorporated world religions with various kinds of therapy and bodywork. Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls (1894–1970) was an important figure in the institute's early history and a good example of the focus on self-examination. Perls's Esalen sessions encouraged exploration of inner worlds and asked participants to dramatize personal conflicts by speaking with voices from different parts of the self.

Weekend retreat centers like Esalen were to some extent a withdrawal from the political scene. Communes made this disengagement permanent as men and women moved "back to the land" to live in accordance with their ideals. One of the earliest 1960s communes was Millbrook, in New York, "both ashram and research institute, where Timothy Leary and his family moved in 1963 to further his experiments with psychedelics."[42] The communal "deluge" was well under way by 1967, "the Summer of Love," and continued through the early 1970s.[43] One of the most famous Northern California communes was Morning Star Ranch, which exemplified the blending of spiritualities common in the counterculture. Inhabitants of this Sonoma County ranch practiced Christianity alongside yoga and meditation. Some communes were "Jesus movement" (evangelical Protestant hippies); others, like the Krishna Consciousness community New Vrindaban in West Virginia, were based on Asian religious teachings. Most communal experiments of the 1960s had a religious component, even if it was eclectic and loosely defined. Countercultural men and women envisioned communes as model alternatives to the society they had rejected, and alternative spiritual practices were part of their vision.

The Farm, a commune started in Tennessee by refugees of the Haight-Ashbury counterculture in San Francisco, was one of the longest-lasting examples of a 1960s spiritual community in practice. "It was rooted in prototypical hippie spirituality and religiosity, espousing a unique faith that drew from the deepest insights of all the world's major religious traditions. . . . It was steeped in rural idealism. . . . It had a charismatic leader who was a veritable archetype of the hippie philosopher. . . . Members took vows of voluntary poverty and dedicated themselves to helping the poor of the third world . . . they also unabashedly used marijuana and natural psychedelics and regarded getting high as an essential implement in their spiritual toolbox."[44] The Farm began during the 1960s as a study group in San Francisco organized by Stephen Gaskin, who became the commune's spiritual leader. Gaskin drew from a wide range of world religions and "compared the world's spiritual teachings to a deck of old-fashioned computer punch cards (envelope-sized cards that contained data in the form of holes punched through them). All he was doing, he said, was picking up that pack of cards and holding it up to the light; where the light came through, where all the religions had punched their holes in the same places, were the universal truths."[45] Groups of men and women searching for spiritual alternatives or teachers to guide their meditation practice gathered around charismatic figures like Gaskin.

At the same time that communitarians retreated from the public realm, important social movements emerged that would influence the development of New Age and Neopagan traditions. What is now labeled Second Wave feminism challenged traditional gender roles and pushed men and women to examine internalized sexism and to play with social assumptions about gender. The American Indian Movement and the Black Panthers brought injustices done to American Indians and African American separatism into the awareness of many Americans. They also exposed the general public to their cultural and religious traditions. The popularity of *Black Elk Speaks* is one of many examples of widespread fascination and involvement with American Indian cultures in the 1960s. Many young people looked to American Indian traditions for alternative lifestyles, and this was to shape New Agers' and Neopagans' subsequent turn to and incorporation of indigenous peoples' practices into their own rituals and belief systems. In Ram Dass and Paul Gorman's book, *How Can I Help?* one of the stories included is a memory: "I went as a representative of the hippie community of San Francisco to meet the Hopi Indian elders to arrange a Hopi-Hippie Be-In in Grand Canyon. We wanted to honor their tradition and affirm our common respect for the land. As you can guess, this was during the sixties."[46] The desire to share in native peoples' perceived harmony with nature became a common theme of the 1960s counterculture and in 1970s Neopaganism and New Age communities. However, Indians, then and now, were ambivalent about middle-class white people appropriating their traditions, and indiscriminate borrowing by New Agers and Neopagans continues to be controversial.

One of the religious trends of the 1960s that generated and continues to cause controversy has been New Agers' attraction to places sacred to Indian peoples, especially Mount Shasta in Northern California and Sedona, Arizona. Struggles over sacred sites date to the earliest presence of Europeans on the North American continent, but white people's religiously motivated *attraction* to such places did not become common until the 1960s. People of mostly European descent lost their connection to the land of their ancestors with the immigrant generation and only gradually discovered places of power in their new homes. In part, nostalgia for beliefs of the past and attraction to exotic traditions was a yearning for sacred places now absent. New Agers acted to fill this need by resacralizing the landscape with a combination of indigenous myths and stories of UFOs and ancient lost civilizations like Lemuria. Nineteenth-century dowsing, for instance, resurfaced in New Age interest in ley lines, lines of power crisscrossing the earth.

The turn to places where ancient cultures found power is one of many methods by which the counterculture rejected the suburbs and cities of a society they believed had gone mad. Sedona's importance as a New Age site began as early as the 1950s and then grew in the 1960s, largely because of the energy of Mary Lou Keller, a hatha yoga teacher interested in many New Age practices, who helped other groups get established in Sedona, among them Eckankar, the Rainbow Ray focus group, and her own Sedona Church of Light.[47] A variety of New Age interests converged at this small town, including interaction with American Indian sacred sites through medicine wheels, beliefs in UFOs and extraterrestrials, "hot spots" (especially powerful places where energy lines supposedly converge), myths of ancient civilizations, psychics, and channelers. But both Sedona and Mount Shasta became central in contests over meaning as U.S. Forest Service concerns, American Indian access rights, and New Age desire came into conflict at these sites.

Borrowing from Asian religions has not generated the same level of controversy. New Agers and Neopagans have borrowed indiscriminately from Asian traditions, in part because of the availability of Asian religious texts and the presence in the United States from 1965 on of religious teachers from Asia. Some of these teachers founded their own new religions based on Hindu and Buddhist texts and teachings that overlap considerably with ideas of the New Age movement. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (the founder of the Krishna Consciousness movement, or the Hare Krishnas), Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Swami Muktananda, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (the founder of Transcendental Meditation) are a few of the most famous examples. Concepts of reincarnation and karma, already familiar to Theosophists and Transcendentalists, entered common parlance during the 1960s, even outside the counterculture. An excellent example is Ruth Montgomery's best-selling *Here and Hereafter*, published in 1968. Montgomery was interested in the work of Edgar Cayce, and like him tried to bring together eastern and western teachings, such as meditation practice and Christian prayer. In her foreword Montgomery explains that "the purpose of the book is to emphasize the deep spiritual values to be derived from knowing oneself."[48] The book details several cases of people who recalled past lives, one of them being Edgar Cayce, who believed he had also lived in ancient Egypt.

Movement back and forth between India and the United States deeply enriched the alternative tradition in America. Some European Americans made themselves over into teachers of Asian wisdom. They studied and traveled to India to look for and then live with Indian gurus, returning later to the United States to share what they learned. Foremost among these was Baba Ram Dass (born Richard Alpert). Ram Dass's *Be Here Now*, published by the Lama Foundation in 1971, was one of the first of many books to explain techniques for meditation. In it, Ram Dass describes his life as a driven but successful social scientist at Stanford and Harvard who drove elegant sports cars and oversaw a large office staff. At Harvard he directed the Center for Research in Personality; down the hall from his spacious offices was a converted closet that had been given to Timothy Leary. The two colleagues began spending time together; before long, Leary was experimenting with psychedelics and gave

Ram Dass (then still Richard Alpert) psilocybin (a hallucinogenic derived from a fungus). Wanting to share their powerful psychedelic experience and explore its variations, they gave psilocybin and LSD to many other people as well. Over time, however, Alpert found these psychedelic "trips" unsatisfying because they were temporary. As he put it, "it was a terribly frustrating experience, as if you came into the kingdom of heaven and you saw how it all was and you felt these new states of awareness, and then you got cast out again, and after 2 or 300 times of this, began to feel an extraordinary kind of depression set in."[49] In the early 1960s he came across the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and was struck by the similarities between states of mind described in the book and his own psychedelic experiences. Many of his friends, including Leary and Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, had gone to India, so Alpert decided to make that journey as well. He sought out various religious teachers, visited Hindu temples and a Buddhist monastery, began learning yoga postures, and finally met a teacher, with whom he studied before returning to the United States. Underlying Ram Dass's descriptions and other New Age approaches to meditation is the assumption that meditation changes consciousness and that such change can bring about healing and spiritual growth. Meditation may also involve contact or interaction with spiritual entities. As the practice encourages consciousness to separate from the physical body, meditators feel that they move into another plane of existence, sometimes called the "astral." It is on this level of consciousness that individuals access spirits, have visions, and discover psychic skills like clairvoyance, all of which became important to Neopagan and New Age religious practice.

If science fiction expanded imaginative frontiers into space, then the emerging drug culture of the 1960s that Ram Dass dabbled in opened the "doors of perception," to borrow Aldous Huxley's phrase, through which inner worlds could be explored. Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and books on psychedelics published in the 1960s by Timothy Leary and others were tremendously popular within the counterculture. Many accounts of psychedelic experimentation during this era emphasized the extent to which drug experiences were religious and not purely recreational. Because of this focus, psychedelic drugs certainly played a part in the emerging New Age and Neopagan communities, which advocated expanded consciousness and self-knowledge. Inward journeys, central to both religions, were for many people initially facilitated by psychedelic experiences. Most New Agers and Neopagans today do not advocate drug use as part of their practice, but as these traditions developed in the 1960s, drugs opened the way for inner exploration and self-transformation.

Timothy Leary's biography suggests that psychedelics played a tremendous role in shaping an attitude toward consciousness and the self that was to become central to the Neopagan and New Age movements. Leary was the prophet of psychedelics throughout the 1960s and until his death in 1999; even very late in his life, he gave a public talk at a Neopagan festival in New York. Among other influences, experimentation with psychedelics led Leary and others to approach spirituality as a journey inward though a kind of geography of the psyche. After Alpert and Leary lost their Harvard jobs for giving LSD to undergraduates (it was legal at the time and they were running clinical tests, but had been told not to include undergraduates), Leary moved to an estate in New York called Millbrook that was owned by wealthy brothers who were the grandsons of Andrew Mellon and heirs to the Mellon family fortune. Millbrook became a commune of sorts and the heart of a revolution in consciousness brought about by psychedelics. Leary, like Huxley before him, saw the drugs as tools for spiritual growth. In the opening lines of his *The Politics of Ecstasy* published in 1968 Leary reports, "Once upon a time, many years ago, on a sunny afternoon in the garden of a Cuernavaca villa, I ate seven of the so-called sacred mushrooms which had been given to me by a scientist from the University of Mexico. During the next five hours, I was whirled through an experience which could be described in many extravagant metaphors but which was, above all and without question, the deepest religious experience of my life."[50] Like many other writers adopted by the sixties counterculture, Leary described psychedelically induced spiritual experience as an alternative to the dominant culture:

> When you turn on, remember: you are not a naughty boy getting high for kicks. You are a spiritual voyager furthering the most ancient, noble quest of man. When you turn on, you shed the fake-prop TV studio and costume and join the holy dance of the visionaries. You leave LBJ and Bob Hope; you join Lao-tse, Christ, Blake. . . . To turn on, you need a sacrament. . . . A sacrament flips you out of the TV-studio game and harnesses you to the 2-billion-year-old flow inside."[51]

"Turning on" was a commonly used 1960s phrase that referred both to the use of psychedelic drugs and more generally to the opening up of one's consciousness to change.

Opening their minds to new possibilities also made many young people willing to believe in aliens and spirit beings, which relayed messages through human channels in the 1960s just as they had to Edgar Cayce, "the sleeping prophet" of the 1930s. These messages were very different in content than those found in organized churches of the time. They spoke directly to a generation of young people who were disenchanted with institutionalized religion and searching for alternative paths to salvation. Channeling, a feature of the alternative spirituality tradition since nineteenth-century spiritualist demonstrations, surged during the 1960s and became a cornerstone of the New Age movement. One of the most successful, if reluctant, channelers was Helen Schucman (1909–1981), a psychologist and daughter of a Theosophist, who received and recorded about 1,200 pages of channeled material between 1965 and 1973. These messages from Schacman's "inner voice," sometimes designated in the text as Jesus of Nazareth, were published as *A Course in Miracles* by the Foundation for Inner Peace in 1976; it provided a series of lessons that combined Christian and Asian religious beliefs in a program that aimed to teach forgiveness and inner peace.

Channeling requires bodies—either divested of spirits or with a consciousness willing to subordinate itself temporarily—through which spirits can speak. But also significant in the 1960s was the revival of attention to diet and physical healing as methods of self-transformation, reminiscent of the various popular healing techniques of the nineteenth century. New diets that included macrobiotics, vegetarianism, and organic foods, to name just a few, became popular. The 1960s return to the body also included a celebration of sensuality and evoked memories of childhood interactions with nature. Esalen was the first community of the 1960s in which spiritual seeking was accompanied by bodywork of various types, including massage therapy. The sensual experience and freedom of being naked was a feature of Esalen's hot tubs, some communes, and other countercultural gatherings. A relaxed attitude toward nudity carried over into the Neopagan movement and to a lesser extent into New Age communities. Nudity has been optional at most Neopagan festivals (where it is called "skyclad") and required for many small Wiccan rituals. It was a statement of health as well as a social protest against and alternative to the dominant culture's attitudes toward the body.

Sensual experience, nudity, and childlike play were central to the countercultural ethic and extolled by 1960s poets and writers.[52] Performers and announcers at Woodstock, for instance, constantly referred to the audience and themselves as "children." In *The Greening of America*, Charles Reich, a law professor at Yale during the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s, argued that "young people were finding new self-affirmation and a reaffirmation of childhood ideals."[53] Reich understood their widespread use of psychedelics as a method of increasing awareness and sensitivity to the world around them, often resulting in a turn to nature as "the deepest source of consciousness" accompanied by "a desire for innocence, for the ability to be in a state of wonder and awe."[54] The year 1967 (in which early Neopagan communities Feraferia and the Church of All Worlds were founded) marked the height of 1960s optimism and innocence, according to sociologist Todd Gitlin, who claims that "days of rage" followed, with the deaths of concertgoers at Altamont in 1969 and the murders of Kent State students by National Guardsmen in 1970. In his analysis of 1960s writers, Morris Dickstein identifies a pervading belief that individuals can shape reality at will and that the most effective sources for social change are individuals, not institutions.[55] Many commentators on the legacies of the 1960s agree that these goals failed and that disillusionment characterized the late 1960s.

Like the counterculture's "sense of wonder at nature," Neopagan festivals later evoked a similar sense of wonder and enchantment, while both Neopagans and New Agers tended to focus inward, on the inner child as part of the landscape of the self. The partnership of spiritual and physical exploration that was widespread in the 1960s shaped New Age and Neopagan attention to healing and self-transformation.

Interest in American Indians, ancient Egyptian mythology, science fiction and fantasy, Asian religions, past lives, astrology, aliens, yoga, macrobiotics, explorations in consciousness through psychedelics or meditation, and communal living were gradually incorporated into movements that are now recognized as New Age and Neopagan religions. Neopaganism can be dated to the founding of the Church of All Worlds and Feraferia in 1967, although it has roots in Victorian magical groups like the Golden Dawn and Gerald Gardner's books on witchcraft. Rosemary and Raymond Buckland brought Gardnerian witchcraft to the United States from England, founding their coven here in 1964. The New Age movement became publicly aware of itself in the 1970s as a blend of the human potential movement in psychology and the 1960s counterculture's lifestyle of personal exploration. Added to these elements were the "light groups" in England that discussed the prophecies of a new age in the works of Theosophists Blavatsky and Bailey. The important British New Age community of Findhorn grew out of one of these groups. Theosophist and channeler David Spangler spent several years in Findhorn and returned to the United States in 1973 to form a New Age community in Wisconsin. New scientific ideas, best represented by physicist Fritjof Capra's best-selling *The Tao of Physics* (1965), also contributed to the emergence of the New Age movement by combining western scientific theories with eastern religious thought.

During the 1960s and early 1970s the New Age dual emphasis on self-transformation and planetary healing was expressed in the writings of important leaders, gurus, and modern-day prophets as well as in the lives of the communities they spearheaded. They all helped to configure free-floating ideas and practices into a recognizable movement. The teachings of spokesmen for the New Age like David Spangler and Ram Dass were popular in the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s, but were not in the general public's awareness. By 1987 the Harmonic Convergence, promoted by Jose Arguelles, and Shirley MacLaine's televised miniseries *Out on a Limb* further spread New Age ideas in the mainstream of American culture. Key among them was the belief that alternatives to the medical model of healing were available for mind and body, and holistic healing converged with New Age spirituality. Healing became a central focus of many Neopagan rituals and a major source of income for New Age psychics and channelers.

Part Two