

Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson, contender for the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, has been on Probe's radar for over ten years. As Oprah's spiritual advisor and proponent of the New Age "A Course in Miracles," she is a false teacher according to biblical standards.

Here are links to articles that mention her, as well as related articles you may find interesting:

[A Course in Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation](#)

["Is A Course in Miracles Heretical? How Do I Talk to My Friend Who Believes It?"](#)

["Your Article on A Course in Miracles Is Very Disturbing"](#)

[Oprah: America's Beloved False Teacher](#)

[Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique](#)

[The False Teaching of "The Secret" – A Christian Evaluation](#)

The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and

fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of “mana,” or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions. Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all (Isaiah 43:10). He condemns the use of magic, witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

Themes in Animism

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, "does it work?" To achieve their goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or

retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambra, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number “4” in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced “shee” in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is considered very unlucky.[\[1\]](#)

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God’s relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. 1 John 4:16-18 says, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on

the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . .” Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

Gods in Animism

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man’s first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into polytheism.[\[2\]](#) This would concur with Paul’s timeline of man’s rejection of God that he lays out in Romans 1.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship.[\[3\]](#) Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano.

Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.) Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him (Isaiah 43:10). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Spirits and Ancestors

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.[{4}](#)

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan

were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One's happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one's descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is

for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to Hebrews 9:27 upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Basic Practices in Animism

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying "God bless you" after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one's path portending bad luck) may predict one's future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses, and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others. They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are "little people," such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed

regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying “amen” or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person of a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

Overcoming Animism

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of

crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 43:10 states, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. Deuteronomy 18:10 commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. Colossians 2:15 says that He "disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God's hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust'" (Ps. 91:1). When

tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999), 157.
2. Norman Anderson. *The World's Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

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Contemplative Prayer

June 16, 2011

Dear Renea,

I work with a wide variety of Christians in a largely Evangelical area. Some of them are particularly skittish and nervous about the concept of contemplative prayer. Some claim it's nowhere to be found in Scripture.

What would you say to such a person?

Dear V,

This is a great question! I confess, because I've never been uncomfortable with contemplative prayer, I've never really considered the need to make a defense for it. Simply let your Bible fall open at random; the chances of it opening to a psalm about meditating on the Lord or his statues are pretty high.

I would also want to say that there are lots of elements in our contemporary worship habits which are not mentioned in Scripture, that Scripture does not have an explicit list of how we should do church or how we should manage our personal spiritual disciplines. The Bible provides us with broad principles, which gives us a lot of freedom (and a lot of responsibility to apply those principals with integrity).

I would also be tempted to say (though this is often a really tough sell, especially for those already skittish about such things) that as believers, we are in the business of redeeming culture. Every person is made in God's image and has God's law written on his or her heart. A cultural practice such as Eastern/New Age meditation, is certainly a misdirected

spiritual behavior because it isn't directed toward the One True God. It isn't that there is no value in that practice; on the contrary, I believe Western Christianity has quite a lot to learn from Eastern spirituality, especially since our spiritual roots are Middle Eastern. So we have the power (and responsibility) to redirect what is misdirected, to re-orient reality toward the Kingdom of God.

People are often more hard-nosed about Eastern practices because it is so other to us Westerners (and the Southern Hemisphere has yet to have any influence anywhere near what the East has in our society). So, it's scary, unfamiliar. We're afraid of it, so we throw the proverbial baby out on the street and slam the window shut. To be fair however, our generation didn't have to deal with New Ageism when it first became a phenomenon. We haven't had to watch, helplessly, as many of our friends became swept up in its deception. So we want to remember to be gracious toward one another's fears and intolerance.

Keep asking good questions,
Renea

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/06/16/contemplative-prayer/

Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring 'A New Earth' – A Christian Critique

Steve Cable looks at the teaching of Eckhart Tolle and Oprah

Winfrey and finds it far removed from a Christian worldview. From a biblical perspective, their teaching is in line with that addressed by Paul in Colossians where he points to false teachers who are “taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.”

Over 2,000,000 people from 139 countries have participated with Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle in a live Web-based seminar covering each chapter of Tolle’s book entitled, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*[\[1\]](#). Why is this book so popular? Will it lead you deeper in your walk with Christ? Or is it counterfeit spirituality promoting a false view of God? In this article, we will address these questions as we embark on an exploration of Tolle’s “new earth.”

The underlying premise is that all material things (from planets to pebbles to flowers to animals) result from a universal, immaterial life force expressing itself in material form. Humans are a part of that expression. However, we have evolved to the point where we have the potential to become Aware of our oneness with the universal life force. The purpose of all mankind is to become aware that their Being is an expression of the One Life Force.

However, the vast majority of people are unconscious and unaware of the source of their being. Every human being has an illusory self image or ego which is completely conditioned by the past, always wanting and never satisfied. We also have an individual and collective accumulation of old emotional pain Tolle calls the “pain-body.” Our ego and our pain-body are actively trying to keep us away from true awareness. When we identify ourselves with our ego, our thoughts about the past and future, our wants and our hurts, we cannot experience our true Beingness.

In Tolle’s view, this lack of awareness of our true essence and false identification with our egos has the world and the human race on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, the

universal life force is manipulating this crisis to create an opportunity for many people to move from an unconscious state to consciousness. In order to become conscious, we must recognize that we are not our thoughts and/or egos. We must learn to accept and be present in the Now, because the past and the future exist only as thoughts. When most people are operating from their true essence rather than their egos, we will have drastic social and physical upheavals on this earth resulting in a whole new world order—that is, “a new earth.”

If you are thinking this sounds a lot more like Eastern mysticism than a deeper walk with Christ, you are on the right track. So why is this message so popular even among many regular church attendees?

Why Is *A New Earth* a Significant Issue?

Since *A New Earth* is clearly incompatible with Biblical Christianity, why is it being read and recommended by many people who profess to be Christian?

First, the pervasive influence of post-modern tolerance continues to undermine commitment to the truth of the gospel even in evangelical circles. We are constantly assailed with the message that it is hateful and intolerant to believe that Christianity is true and other religions fall short. According to this viewpoint, the loving Christian will accept the validity of all religious traditions encouraging us to partake from the smorgasbord of spiritual guidance available from other religions. Thus many people forsake Paul’s warning in Colossians to not be taken captive by the traditions of men rather than the truth of Christ and thereby open themselves up to false teaching^{[\[2\]](#)}. An immature Christian may say to themselves, “*A New Earth* offers a way to greater personal peace and an escape from unhappiness so why not find a way to glue it onto my Christian tradition.” Tolle and Oprah cleverly encourage them by saying, “How ‘spiritual’ you are has nothing to do with what you believe, but everything to do with your

state of consciousness.”{3}

Second, *A New Earth* contains nuggets of truth about the nature of the body, soul and spirit and some practical ideas which may often prove helpful in dealing with anxiety, anger and other issues people face. Tolle is correct in pointing out that our individual and collective selfish egos introduce a lot of pain and suffering into this world. In addition, we may be filled with anxiety and discontent with our circumstances because our thoughts are preoccupied with past hurts and future hopes/fears. He encourages us to realize that we are not our thoughts or past pains. If we will affirm our intrinsic spiritual value and observe our ego at work, we can reduce anxiety and be able to accept our present circumstances. In some ways this is analogous to the instruction in Colossians to set our minds on the things of Christ not on the things of this earth because our real life is in Christ not in this earth.{4} It also reminds us of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians where he tells us that through the Holy Spirit we can “take every thought captive in obedience to Christ.”{5} So you can see how thinking this way could be helpful. Unfortunately, this is taught as a part of a broader teaching that will leave non-Christians separated from God and misguided Christians not fulfilling their God-given purpose on this earth.

The third reason for its unwitting acceptance among some Christians is that quotes from Jesus and others in the Bible are sprinkled throughout the book in an attempt to show this philosophy is consistent with “true Christianity.” Like so many false teachers, he attempts to make Jesus support his worldview by removing the teaching of Jesus from the clear message of the gospel.

Fourth, and probably most importantly, Tolle found a powerful proponent in Oprah Winfrey whose endorsement catapulted his first book, *The Power of Now*, onto the *NY Times* Best Seller list. Now, Oprah is enthusiastically promoting *A New Earth*

through her web seminar, calling it the most exciting thing she has ever done. Oprah is an evangelist for smorgasbord spirituality. During the first web seminar for *A New Earth*, she was asked how she could reconcile it with her Christian upbringing. Oprah explained that she began to get out of the box of Biblical doctrine in her late twenties when her pastor was preaching on the characteristics of God. When he said that “The Lord thy God is a jealous God,” she decided that she wanted to believe in a God of love not a jealous God. Apparently, rather than doing a study to understand what that Bible passage meant, she decided to make up her own Jesus. As she stated (see [Appendix A](#)),

“And you know, it’s been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we’re all talking about here. Jesus came to say, ‘Look I’m going to live in the body, in the human body and I’m going to show you how it’s done.’ These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn’t come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don’t believe that Jesus came to start Christianity... Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.”[\[6\]](#)

Worldview Comparison

Let’s continue our exploration of Tolle’s new earth by considering some of the fundamental worldview questions. How does the worldview of *A New Earth* line up with a Biblical worldview? (see [Appendix B](#))

God and the Universe

Let’s first look at the origin of the universe and the nature

of God.

According to Tolle, the material universe is a temporary manifestation of the universal spiritual consciousness. This One Life is impersonal and pervasive, investing itself in all matter not just living things. He states it thus, "Each thing has Beingness, is a temporary form that has its origin within the formless one Life, the source of all things, all bodies, all forms."[\[7\]](#) And "Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying one Life, one Consciousness"[\[8\]](#) Consequently, the being the Bible calls God is really an expression of this impersonal life force. Since everything is of God and is God, all material things must ultimately return to formless, unidentifiable union with the spiritual life force.

This view of God as an impersonal life force living in all things is directly counter to the Biblical revelation of God. According to the Bible, God is the creator of the universe not a part of the universe. God is an identifiable, personal being characterized by holiness, love, grace and compassion. The creator of this universe is a thinking being as God shares through Isaiah, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth...so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."[\[9\]](#) Paul reminds us, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."[\[10\]](#) God is a communicator, choosing to reveal Himself to us through the attributes of creation, through the Scriptures and through Jesus Christ.

Nature of Man

What about the nature and purpose of mankind? According to Tolle, humans are an evolved material manifestation of the spiritual life force. Humans have evolved to the point where we are capable of being overtly conscious of our Beingness; of our oneness with the One Life force. However, our material

manifestation includes the ego (a false sense of identification with our thoughts) and our individual and collective pain bodies which fight our attempts to be conscious of our real identity in the life force. We need to realize that we are not really a unique individual, but rather a material expression on the One Life force. Our purpose for existence is to bring a consciousness of the underlying one Life into this world. He states, "The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world."[\[11\]](#) However, the ultimate end for each human is to return our life energy back into the impersonal life force.

In contrast, the Bible teaches humans were intentionally created by God in His image. We are created with a body, soul and spirit. Our earthly bodies are temporary, but our soul and spirit are immortal. We are, in fact, individuals responsible for our actions with different eternal destinies determined by our relationship with God.

Sin and Evil

In *A New Earth*, the concepts of sin and evil are severely distorted. According to Tolle, original sin is the collective dysfunction which prevents people from recognizing the point of human existence. He suggests that this barrier to true Awareness is built into our DNA. He states, "The collective pain-body is probably encoded within every human's DNA, although we haven't discovered it there yet."[\[12\]](#) In other words, the collective hurts and perceived inadequacies of our parents and previous generations are not only passed on through our interactions with a fallen world, but are actually encoded into our DNA. This, of course, would require our thoughts to be able to modify our DNA so that these experiences are passed on to future generations.

However, since we are not our bodies or our thoughts, we are not responsible for our sins. As he states, "There is only one

perpetrator of evil on the planet: human unconsciousness.... People are not responsible for what they do when possessed by the pain-body.”[{13}](#) In fact, we cannot really distinguish good from evil since they all arise from the same life force. As Tolle puts it, “The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily.”[{14}](#)

In contrast, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and apart from faith in Christ the result will be eternal separation from God.[{15}](#)

Salvation

In Tolle’s worldview, humans are not born spiritually dead, but rather spiritually unconscious. Our real self cannot be separated from God because our real self is a part of God. He states, “You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness that is already within you, and allowing the goodness to emerge. But it can only emerge if something fundamental changes in your state of consciousness.”[{16}](#) We become a new alive person, not through faith in the atoning death and empowering resurrection of Jesus, but rather through a process of becoming aware of our real self which has been masked by our ego. However, when our body dies, we cease to exist as an individual merging back into the universal life force. Tolle states, “the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it ‘eternal life.’”[{17}](#) So, regardless of what we do or believe during our earthly existence we all have the same ultimate destiny.

This view devalues the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Tolle’s view is true, Jesus’ death was unnecessary and His resurrection was an illusion. The Bible clearly states that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is

eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”{18}

Jesus Christ and Christianity

For Tolle, Jesus was an enlightened human. He joined Buddha and a few others in trying to communicate this concept to people and societies who were not ready to receive it. Jesus was no more God than any other human, but he was aware that he was a part of the One Life Force which He identified as God.

With this view of Jesus, Tolle clearly rejects the central gospel message: faith in Jesus’ atoning death on the cross and victorious resurrection is the only way to move from death into spiritual life.

Truth and Religion

According to Tolle, truth cannot be found in thought, doctrines or narratives which are perceived through our egos. He states, “Every ego confuses opinions and viewpoints with facts. It cannot tell the difference between an event and its reaction to that event. Only through awareness—not through thinking—can you differentiate between fact and opinion... Only through awareness can you see the totality of the situation or person instead of adopting one limited perspective.”{19} Thus, the only real Truth with a capital T is in my being. “The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth.”{20} He even claims that this is what Jesus was really trying to tell us when He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Tolle writes:

“All religions are equally false and equally true, depending on how you use them. If you believe only your religion is the Truth, you are using it in the service of the ego.”{21} And, “Many religious people claim to be in sole possession

of the truth in an unconscious attempt to protect their identity. Unless you believe exactly as they do, you are wrong in their eyes, and they may feel justified in killing you for that.”{22}

Like many people, Tolle confuses our inability to fully understand the truth with the lack of truth. As R.C. Sproul said, “Real truth is reality as seen from God’s perspective.” Real truth can only be revealed by God and is not about our need for identity or a need to create enemies. Truth is central to the Christian faith. Jesus told Pilate, “For this I was born and for this reason I came into the world, to testify to the *truth*.”{23} As Christians, we are motivated to share the truth God has revealed because of His love for us and His “desire for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the *truth*.”{24}

The Bible

In addressing the Bible, Tolle attempts to play both sides of the street. Although he does not directly state it, he clearly does not believe that the Bible is an accurate revelation of the character of God and the nature of the universe. His worldview is totally contrary to the Bible in most areas, so he clearly does not consider it an authoritative source. But, knowing that much of his audience has a Christian background, he quotes the Bible over 25 times in this book. In most instances, he takes the verse out of context and misinterprets it to align with his viewpoint. One example is when he claims that Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” in order to teach us that we are the Truth. Ignoring the fact that Jesus went on to say, “no one comes to the Father but through me.”{25} Jesus said that if we lived according to His words we would “know the truth”{26}, not “be the truth.”

Conclusion

A New Earth is not so new after all. It is another

presentation of Eastern mysticism with a focus on separating your identity from your ego. Although the mind exercises promoted in the book may provide some temporary help with issues such as anxiety and anger, the overall worldview is directly counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ. By denying the existence of a personal transcendent God, by denying individual responsibility for my sin, by denying an eternal soul, and the need for the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus, Tolle's spiritual teaching will result in eternal separation from God for non-Christians and fruitlessness for Christians taken captive by this unbiblical worldview.

Appendix A: Oprah Winfrey on reconciling *A New Earth* with her Christian background:

"I've reconciled it because I was able to open my mind about the absolute indescribable hugeness of that which we call "God." I took God out of the box because I grew up in the Baptist church and there were, you know, rules and, you know, belief systems indoctrinated. And I happened to be sitting in church in my late 20's...And this great minister was preaching about how great God was and how omniscient and omnipresent, and God is everything. And then he said, and the lord thy god is a jealous god. And I was, you know, caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said "jealous." And something struck me. I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is—and God's also jealous? God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that god is love and that god is in all things. And so that's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me.

"And I love this quote that Eckhart has, this is one of my favorite quotes in chapter one where he says, "Man made god in his own image, the eternal, the infinite, and unnamable was reduced to a mental idol that you had to believe in and worship as my god or our god."

“And you know, it’s been a journey to get to the place where I understand, that what I believe is that Jesus came to show us Christ consciousness. That Jesus came to show us the way of the heart and that what Jesus was saying that to show us the higher consciousness that we’re all talking about here. Jesus came to say, “Look I’m going to live in the body, in the human body and I’m going to show you how it’s done.” These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way. And when I started to recognize that, that Jesus didn’t come in my belief, even as a Christian, I don’t believe that Jesus came to start Christianity. So that was also very helpful to me.

“Well, I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity.”

Appendix B: Comparing A New Earth with Other Worldviews

	Christian Theism	<i>A New Earth</i>	Naturalism (Postmodernism)	Pantheism
God	Personal	Universal life force	Non-existent	Impersonal
World	Creation	Spiritual	Physical	Spiritual
Human Nature	Like God	Is God; corrupted by ego	Like Animals	Is God
Body/Soul	Unity	Spirit is only reality	Body Only	Soul Only
Immortality	Resurrection	Reunite with life force	Annihilation	Reincarnation
Destiny	Glorification	Absorption into grand plan of one life force	Extinction	Absorption
Source of Authority	Divine Revelation	Presence; “I Am Truth”	Culture	Spiritual
Truth	Absolute	Relative and personal	Culturally based	Personal

Jesus Christ	Son of God	Early enlightened being	A product of his/her culture	Enlightened being
Salvation	Redemption	Awareness, consciousness, presence	Whatever is effective	Meditation
Evil	Rebellion	Illusion results from pain-body	Culturally defined	Illusion
Ethics	God-centered	Counter ego	Culturally centered	World-centered
History	Linear	Predestined by the one life force	Culturally defined	Cyclical
Culture	God-ordained / man steward	Unconscious vs. conscious	Language-centered	World-centered

Notes

1. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, Penguin Group, New York, 2006
2. Colossians 2:8
3. Ibid., 18
4. Colossians 3:1-3
5. 2 Corinthians 10:5
6. Oprah Winfrey, transcript of the first *A New Earth* web seminar dated March 3, 2008
7. Tolle., 37
8. Ibid., 4
9. Isaiah 55:9
10. 1 Cor 2:11-12 NASV
11. Tolle., 78
12. Ibid., 143
13. Ibid., 163
14. Ibid., 196
15. Romans 3:23, 6:23
16. Tolle., 13
17. Ibid., 81

18. Romans 6:23
19. Tolle., 69
20. Ibid., 71
21. Ibid., 70
22. Ibid., 17
23. John 18:37
24. I Tim 2:3
25. John 14:6
26. John 8:31-32

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“On What Authority Do You Call New Age Thought Demonic?”

On what authority do you call New Age thought demonic? You have a closed mind and are only allowing yourself to grow within the confines of your narrowness.

I call New Age thought demonic on the authority of God’s word. Whenever philosophies and religions differ from what God has revealed to us as truth, particularly when they directly contradict what He says, then either the Bible is lying or the philosophies are lying. They can’t both be right. And since there is an evil spirit who desperately hates God and whose native tongue is lying, I’m going to agree with God instead of the lying spirit.

You are so right—there truly is a narrowness to my perspective. Truth is narrow, but untruth is wide and popular.

I've experienced both, and I choose the narrow truth. One leads to life and peace; the other leads to death. It's been my experience that those who disrespect the Bible have never seriously examined its reliability and truthfulness, but have instead relied on the hearsay evidence of those who want it not to be true and so they easily dismiss it.

By the way, if I'm wrong then I've lost nothing. If I'm right, then you've lost everything. There really is an ultimate truth that cost God greatly to communicate it fully to us.

I pray you'll see the truth one day.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do I Witness About the New Age Movement?”

How do I witness about the New Age movement with firm intelligence but empathy?

There are a number of helpful books available which set forth a Christian response to the New Age Movement. I will recommend a few resources you might want to consider, but the bibliographies in most of these will direct you to many further resources as well.

1. *Embraced by the Darkness: Exposing New Age Theology from the Inside Out* by Brad Scott (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996). Brad spent ten years involved in the New Age religion until converting to Christianity. He teaches at Golden Gate

University.

2. *Confronting the New Age and Unmasking the New Age* by Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity Press). Doug teaches at Denver Seminary.

3. *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview* by John Newport (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). This looks like a comprehensive resource by a distinguished professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

4. *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* by David Clark and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990).

5. *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* by John Ankerberg and John Weldon (Oregon: Harvest House, 1996).

6. I would also recommend checking out Marcia Montenegro's website at www.christiananswersforthenewage.org. Marcia was a former astrologer who was deeply involved in the New Age Movement prior to her conversion to Christianity. She has many helpful articles on her site. CANA stands for Christian Answers for the New Age. Please be sure to check out her site.

Finally, there is a brief [article on the New Age Movement by Kerby Anderson](#) on the Probe website. In addition, there are many other related articles in our ["Cults and World Religions"](#) section on our Web site at www.probe.org.

A careful study of some of these resources, combined with prayer and compassion for those you seek to reach, will be of great benefit to you as you seek to share Christ with those you love.

Best wishes in witnessing for Him,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Reiki: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as “energy medicine”:

Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.[\[1\]](#)

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means “universal,” and *ki* means “life force energy.” But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that “Rei” is more accurately understood to mean “supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self.” Thus,

according to the Center, “it is the God-consciousness called Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we call Reiki.”[\[2\]](#)

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.[\[3\]](#)

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But “Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way.”[\[4\]](#) In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open “subtle mental and physical energy systems” that prepare the recipient “to channel Universal Life Force Energy.”[\[5\]](#) Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let’s look at the evidence.

Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).[\[6\]](#)

Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same. After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be “a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being.”[\[7\]](#) Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person’s aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it’s one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. “Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them.”[\[8\]](#) Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven’t auras been photographed? One author claims, “Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras.”[\[9\]](#) However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now, scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that “the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client’s actual experience.”[{10}](#) In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

What About Reiki’s Success?

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki’s effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain![{11}](#)

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki’s healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex’s pain. “With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful...evidence available to judge medical therapies.”[{12}](#)

This isn’t just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a “hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom.”[{13}](#) Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex’s pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex’s pain.

After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex felt relief. However, it's crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the "placebo effect."

"The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action."[\[14\]](#) A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) "of the improvements found with any therapy."[\[15\]](#) But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why*, the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if, how, and why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.[\[16\]](#) Under circumstances such as these, I suspect that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as "spiritually guided life force energy."[\[17\]](#) After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as "a powerful spiritual experience" that "is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness." What's more, this experience "is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings

who help implement the process.”[{18}](#)

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they’re doing God’s work? After all, doesn’t *all* healing come from God?

Does All Healing Come From God?

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that “Reiki comes from God.”[{19}](#) But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of “God.” This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates “God” with man’s Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the “God” of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exodus 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of

a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."[\[20\]](#) Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

Notes

1. Donald O'Mathuna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 193.
2. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.
3. Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What*

- is Not?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 61.
4. "Reiki FAQ: How Does Reiki Work?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html.
 5. David F. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners: Mastering Natural Healing Techniques* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 41-42.
 6. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 195. I have relied heavily on the chapter on "Energy Medicine," pp. 193-99, in this section.
 7. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
 8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
 9. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
 10. Libby Barnett, Maggie Chambers and Susan Davidson, *Reiki Energy Medicine* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1996), 15.
 11. Ibid., 29.
 12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
 13. Ibid., 116.
 14. Ibid., 118.
 15. Ibid., 124.
 16. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 487.
 17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.
 18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.
 19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html.
 20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html.

“Did Jesus’ Travels to the Far East Impact His Adult Teachings?”

Some people are teaching that Jesus traveled to the Far East and adopted some of what he “learned” into his adult ministry. What he “adopted,” of course, was nothing more than New Age concepts in sheep’s clothing. I need some hard facts and good discussion to answer this teaching.

This teaching has been around for quite a while but no scholar really takes this too seriously. The teachings of Jesus and the Eastern religions are contradictory and not compatible. The eastern pantheistic view of God as merely an impersonal energy or force is very different from what Jesus taught us about God as our Abba, personal creator and Father of His children. The doctrine of salvation is very different between the eastern religions and what Jesus taught. On teachings about eternity, Jesus does not teach anything about reincarnation. So on the very basic fundamentals, Jesus’ teachings are incompatible with Eastern theology. Therefore it is highly unlikely he went and studied under Hindu monks in the east during his teen years.

Pat Zukeran
Probe Ministries

Churches That Equip

I STILL REMEMBER THE SINKING FEELING IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH. I was a university student, a young believer, and my faith in Christ seemed like a house of cards that had just crumbled. For awhile, the Christian life that had been so exciting and joyful became a myth. I felt rootless, adrift, and confused.

One of my fraternity brothers had just asked me some questions about Christianity that I couldn't answer. This bothered me deeply until Bob Prall, a pastor and campus Christian worker, answered them for me. "Always remember," he advised as he finished, "just because you don't know the answer, doesn't mean there is no answer."

For the next two years I followed him around, watching as he shared Christ with skeptics, listening to his speeches, and observing how he dealt with non-Christians. Bob's loving, learned example and teaching helped me sink my spiritual roots deeply into God's truth and provided a foundation for three decades of interaction with unbelievers. I shall always be grateful to him for equipping me in this way.

Just as Bob helped me, a number of churches across North America are helping equip their members to answer effectively questions that non-Christians ask. Maybe their stories will encourage you.

Conversation and Cuisine

Dennis McCallum pastors Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio. He is keenly interested in reaching "postmoderns" for Christ, and Xenos members have developed some successful methods of equipping members for outreach. In his book, *The Death of Truth*, McCallum outlines a practical plan using dinner-party discussion groups. "It's not impossible to communicate with postmodern culture," he claims,

“it’s just more difficult.” Just as missionaries need to learn the language and customs and build relationships with those they seek to reach, so we must understand and befriend today’s postmoderns.

Xenos’ “Conversation and Cuisine” gathers Christians in a home with non-Christian friends for food and discussion. Guests are assured it’s not a church service and that all opinions are welcome. Topics include “To judge or not to judge,” “Forgiveness in relationships,” “Views of the afterlife,” and current events.

After dinner the facilitator presents several scenarios for discussion. For instance, in a session on judging, he might describe a situation of racism in the workplace and ask participants to decide “OK” or “bad.” Next the facilitator tells of a mother who chooses to leave her husband and children for another man. The participants also vote. The point is to create a bit of confusion and help participants realize that—in contrast to today’s “tolerate all viewpoints” mindset—they themselves sometimes make judgments that they feel are entirely appropriate.

This dialogue can lead to discussions of, for instance, Hitler’s Germany. Was killing Jews merely a cultural tradition that should be respected?

The aim is not to preach, but gently to lead non-Christians to rethink their presuppositions. Sessions don’t always include a gospel presentation. They may be “pre-evangelistic”—helping unbelievers reconsider their own relativism, appreciate that some universal or absolute truths might be necessary, and realize that Christians may have some answers. Church members can then continue the relationships and share Christ as appropriate. “Once people’s thinking has been thawed—or even shocked—out of their totalistic postmodern pattern,” claims McCallum, “they will have a new receptiveness to the gospel.”

Xenos is also committed to grounding youth in God's Word. Its curriculum uses age-appropriate games, stories, and study to help grade-school through university students understand and explain God's truth. High school home meetings designed for secular audiences involve adult-student team teaching: kids reaching kids. Campus Bible studies reach Ohio State students.

Kellie Carter's New Age background could not save her mom from breast cancer. Disillusioned with God after her mother's death, Kellie sought answers in crystal healing, astrology, and meditation. Then a friend invited her to a Xenos campus Bible study, where she debated Christianity with attendees.

"The amazing thing here was that I was getting answers," Kellie recalls. "These people knew what they believed and why. I wanted that." Scientific and historical evidences for Christianity prompted her to trust Christ as Savior.

Kellie later invited Jeremy ("Germ") Gedert to a Xenos meeting about anger, a problem he recognized he had. Subsequent Bible studies on fulfilled prophecy pointed Germ to faith in Christ. Now Germ claims God has given him "great relationships, controlled temper, and a real vision for my life with Christ" plus "an awesome wife (named Kellie Gedert)." Equipped students are reaching students.

Xenos offers courses, conferences, papers, and books to help Christians understand and communicate the gospel in modern culture. For information visit their web site at www.xenos.org.

Spreading the Passion

When George Haraksin became a Christian while studying at California State University Fullerton, he switched his major to comparative religions so he could investigate Christianity's truth claims. Through his involvement in New Song Church in nearby San Dimas, he found his biblical and

apologetic knowledge strengthened and was able to teach classes on New Age thinking. Study in philosophy and ethics at Talbot Seminary fanned his passion for communicating biblical truth, which Haraksin now spreads as New Song's Pastor of Teaching and Equipping.

"Ephesians tells us to equip the church," he notes. "People learn on three levels: a classroom level, a relational level, and at home." He and his co-workers seek to use all three levels to help prepare members to be ready to answer questions non-Christians ask.

New Song's leaders integrate equipping the saints into their regular gatherings. Some sermons handle apologetic themes. Weeknight classes cover such topics as "Evangelism and the Postmodern Mindset." Monthly men's breakfasts may deal with "Evidences for the Resurrection" or "Is Jesus the Only Way?" New Song has also invited faculty from the International School of Theology to teach courses on "Developing a Christian World View" and other theological topics.

"I'm trying to find people within the church who have that sort of passion (for apologetics) and gifts for teaching," Haraksin explains. "As I identify them, I'm trying to come alongside them, develop that passion, and develop them as leaders."

If people have questions about science and Christianity, he wants to be able to refer them to a member with that specialty who can help them. He's setting up an apologetics network at the local church level.

New Song member Jeff Lampman received a phone call and letter from a cousin with unusual perspectives on the Bible. "I had no idea how to respond to him," Jeff recalls. He showed the letter to Haraksin, who recognized Jehovah's Witness doctrines. When two Jehovah's Witness members showed up at Jeff's door, he invited them to meet with him and Haraksin. "I

was very uncomfortable at first,” Jeff explains, but he grew in his knowledge of the Bible as he watched Haraksin in action over the next six months.

The experience “taught me why I believe what I believe,” Jeff remembers. “Before, if somebody asked me why I believe what I do, I wouldn’t have a clue as to how to respond to them. Now I do. George [Haraksin] was a tremendous help. I feel a lot more confident now and know where to go to get resources to defend the faith effectively.” He continues to apply what he’s learned as he interacts with skeptical co-workers and helps equip and encourage other Christians to learn.

Not everyone at New Song is interested in apologetics. Haraksin estimates that about 10 to 20 percent are thirsty enough to attend weekly meetings if personally encouraged to do so. Others want answers on a more spontaneous basis when they encounter a skeptic. Still others have little or no interest.

“There is still an anti-intellectualism in the church,” Haraksin notes. People want to know “Why can’t I just love God? Why do I need to know all this other stuff?” Society is on information overload, and some “people don’t want to take the time to read and study,” which can be frustrating to a pastor with a burning desire to see people learn.

Haraksin tells of a woman who questioned Jesus’ deity. At another church she had been told not to ask questions but to spend time in personal devotions. Haraksin answered some of her concerns individually and encouraged her to enroll in New Song’s “Jesus Under Fire” class, which she did. She could ask questions without fear of causing offense. Soon she became a solid Christian, committed to the church.

“We’re relational people in a relational culture,” Haraksin notes. We’re still learning.” This product of his own church’s equipping ministry is helping to light some fires.

Issues and Answers

Barry Smith is Pastor of Discipleship Ministries at Kendall Presbyterian Church in Miami. He has a keen desire to see adults and youth understand Christianity's truth. Sunday schools have featured quarters on apologetics and on Christian ethics. The heart of Kendall's apologetics emphasis is "Issues and Answers," monthly dinner discussions relating faith to the secular world.

The meetings arose out of conversations between Smith and hospital chaplain Phil Binie, who had served on the staff of L'Abri in Switzerland and Holland. (L'Abri is a network of Christian study centers founded by the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer.) The core group is composed of Kendall members—both men and women—who are professionals in the community. Leaders include a *Miami Herald* editor, a federal judge, a medical professional, University of Miami professors, an attorney, and a musician.

Core members invite friends and colleagues to join them. Families, including children, gather at a home and enjoy mealtime conversation. After the 45-minute dinner, youth workers spend time with the children while a group member guides an hour-long presentation for the adults. Smith led one on the problem of evil: "If God is good, where did evil come from?"

Journalistic ethics dominated another discussion. A judge handled the separation of church and state. An English professor covered "deconstructionism" and literary analysis as they apply to the Bible, a somewhat perplexing but highly relevant theme. (Deconstructionism includes a tendency to seek a text's meaning not in what the original author likely intended, but in what readers today want it to say.)

Smith says that at least one person has professed faith in Christ through a personal search that attending the group

prompted. All of the non-clergy members at first felt uncomfortable sharing their faith outside the church; now all feel more at ease. Smith especially notes one couple (a psychology professor and an attorney) who began the program as young Christians and have experienced dramatic growth as they have understood how Christianity makes sense in their work settings.

Smith emphasizes that the "Issues and Answers" format is easy to replicate and need not involve professional clergy leadership. It started informally and at first was not even an official church ministry. "The idea," he explains, "was simply to find people trying to contextualize their Christianity in the marketplace who could share with us how they do that."

Scheduling seems the biggest obstacle; professionals' crowded calendars can be hard to mesh. But Smith is encouraged by what the program has accomplished in its two years. He sees a revival of interest in the works of Francis Schaeffer and enthusiastically recommends them to both believers and seekers.

The apostle Peter told believers, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote that God gives spiritual leaders to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12). Xenos, New Song, and Kendall churches are taking those admonitions seriously and are seeing fruit for God's kingdom.

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“You Are Gods”?

I have heard New Agers claim that even the Bible makes the claim that we (people) are gods. They use the words of Jesus in John 10:34. This verse has always puzzled me. What did Jesus mean when he quoted this scripture?

Thank you for your question. Let me see if I can shed a little light on it.

The contexts in both John 10 and the Old Testament Psalm which Jesus quoted (Psalm 82:6) are very important in understanding our Lord's answer to the Jews which were about to stone Him. As they pick up stones, Jesus says, “I've shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning me?” They say, “For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.” (John 10:32-33).

Then Jesus refers to Psalm 82:6 and says, “Hasn't it been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say to Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming’; because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe Me...” (John 10:34-37)

Now let us look at Psalm 82 to determine its context and the theme/purpose of the Psalm. The entire psalm is a scathing rebuke aimed at unjust judges in contrast to the just Judge of all the earth. In reality, Asaph, the author of the psalm, is crying out for God to do something about the corrupt judges of his day; they show partiality, they neglect caring for the downtrodden, the weak, the afflicted, etc. Then in verse 6, God Himself speaks, and says:

*"I said, 'You are gods (Elohim),
And all of you are the sons of the Most High.'"*

Some observations:

1. The words, "Elohim" (God)," and "Yahweh" (Lord), are the two major names of God in the Old Testament. It is Elohim that is used here in verse 6.

2. Its meaning in Psalm 82:6 does not imply that men are gods. It rather refers specifically to the fact that God has appointed judges to act in a dignified, God-like manner in the discharge of their God-appointed responsibilities.

3. Actually, the word "Elohim" is also used in verse 1 of both God and men:

"Elohim (God) takes His stand in His own congregation; He (God) judges in the midst of the Elohim (corrupt judges who are acting like Gods—said in sarcasm)."

Notice in John 10 that Jesus reminds these accusers from the first half of Psalm 82:6 that God is the one who appoints the human judges with their awesome responsibility: "Ye are gods." He goes on in the second half of the verse to remind them that sons are supposed to resemble their Fathers: "And all of you are the sons of the Most High." Neither the judges in the psalm nor the Jewish leaders confront Him were reflecting this.

4. In jurisprudence there are two types of authority: *de facto* and *de jure*. The Most High God (Elohim Himself) has *de facto* authority. It is an un-derived authority. He has it because He is God. *De jure* authority, on the other hand, is derived, or delegated authority. And delegated authority makes one responsible to the one who did the delegating! The second half of verse 6 is a solemn reminder that these judges are called "Sons" of God, because they are to represent faithfully a

justice which reflects their “Father,” the Judge of all the earth.

5. Now the words of Jesus in John 10 make a lot more sense. If you or I had come to earth as the Messiah, we would probably have been moving about and taking every opportunity possible with people to verbally emphasize who we really were: Elohim. But Jesus didn’t do that. He chose rather to imply His identity through the miracles, through the Parables, through His actions. It was as if He was careful that a person came to the conclusion that He was Elohim solely of their own accord, and with no pressure or persuasion on His part, though He was eager for them to come to this very conclusion.

6. Notice that in the dialogue in John 10 with these angry Jews, Jesus could have taken the “bait” and said, “I am Elohim!” But He doesn’t. He claims identity with the second half of Psalm 82:6, the one that models a relationship to His Father exactly like what God is desiring from the judges in Psalm 82. Even though Christ is Elohim, He functions during the Incarnation in a *de jure* capacity to the Father and faithfully carries forth His responsibilities to His Father: accomplishing His mission to redeem the human race (John 3:16).

I hope this answers your question.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries