

Feature Article: JAM111

FROM NEW AGE "CHRIST" TO BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN: HOW SEARCHING FOR TRUTH CAN BE STRANGER THAN FICTION

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Was I a New Ager? Technically speaking, the answer is No, since I became a Christian in 1970, and, as I explained in my article "What Is the New Age Movement?" (*Forward*, Summer 1985), the "New Age movement" did not take form until the mid 1970s when several distinct movements converged.

On the other hand, as I also pointed out in that article, one of those forerunning movements was the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s, and I was intensely (though briefly) involved with the New Age aspect of *that*. So I do believe that I understand today's New Age movement from the inside out, and feel that in many ways my own experience typifies that of a generation. Perhaps you will agree after I share my story with you.

"BLESS ME FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED"

Until the age of seven I attended Sunday School in my Baptist grandparents' church, and I remember having a warm feeling toward Jesus when I said my nightly prayers. Then my Catholic mother repented of her backslidden ways, insisted that the entire family attend Mass on Sundays, and enrolled me in Catholic School.

I believed what I was taught there, but amid the pre-Vatican II Latin liturgy, the perpetual standing and kneeling, and the stern glances of somber nuns, my heart turned cold.

"Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last Confession. Since that time I have had impure thoughts six times." As I reached the age of puberty such reports to the parish priests (the Catholic sacrament of "Confession") became increasingly provocative, and therefore difficult to make. At last I lost all hope of piety, and resigned myself to eternal damnation.

The week before I started eighth grade I convinced my parents to let me return to public school, and in my science class that year I was first exposed to the theory of evolution. Like a "domino effect," the following conclusions fell upon my mind in their turn: No Adam and Eve. No infallible Bible. No God. No hell. Freedom!

In the years that followed pleasure became my god, and I lost all sense of guilt about it. I realized that I could not prove or disprove anything positively, but there was positively no God in the universe as I experienced it.

Because I had been profoundly influenced by the anti-establishment lyrics of mid-60s "protest songs," when the "hippies" first received national publicity in early 1967, I found myself identifying with them. My handful of friends and I, who had not fit in with any of the preexisting social groupings in our Long Beach, California high school, derived a new and exciting sense of belonging by joining a group of hippies that emerged during our junior year (1967-68).

I followed the crowd in smoking marijuana, “hanging out” on the streets of Hollywood and nearby Huntington Beach, and even participating in a high school branch of the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). But toward the end of the spring semester the thrill was gone. I could see that we hippies were no less “plastic” (phony) and conformist than the “straights” we disdained. I withdrew, seeking to establish my own independent identity and life direction.

COSMIC TORTURE

During my senior year I would sit alone during lunch hour reflecting on every aspect of life. Little questions led to big questions until I found myself wrestling with the ultimate issues.

As I thought about death I realized that my youth was only an illusory barrier against its reach. Just as surely as my once-distant 18th birthday was now arriving, so, one day, would death. This realization incited a new urgency within me to find some meaning in life.

In my first year of college I looked to the philosophers for answers only to find that each successive school of philosophy was refuted by the one which followed it. If truth was that difficult to discern, how could one ever know if he was right? Could there even be any real purpose in a randomly evolving universe?

As these thoughts weighed heavily upon me I would lay awake at night tortured by the insanity of being a purpose-seeking creature in a universe which either lacked purpose, or whose purpose was beyond finding out.

Out of this torment a deep hunger for truth and meaning grew within me, taking precedence over the hedonism that had governed me before. My search for an independent identity was evolving into a quest for the truth, but first I needed encouragement that truth could be found. Surprisingly, this would come through drugs.

DOORS OF PERCEPTION?

After I broke away from my hippie peer group, I adopted the view that drug use was stupid and dangerous. I was therefore disappointed when a friend who had shared this view began to experiment with “psychedelic” (mind manifesting) drugs like mescaline and LSD. For nine months I refused Scott’s persistent beckonings to jump into this river of unfamiliar experience. However, in the fall of 1969 he enticed me to read Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Koolaid Acid Test*, which told the story of the original San Francisco hippies. Wolfe’s intriguing description of their surrealistic drug experiences and a quote from Aldous Huxley gave me hope that the psychedelic might open “doors of perception” that would enable me to penetrate the mysteries of life.

In his family’s mountain cabin, Scott guided me through my first mescaline “trip.” After some initial pleasantries, like a “mind blowing” walk underneath a blanket of stars, my “good trip” became a “bummer” as my awareness turned to myself. I was faced with what might best be called my own wretchedness (insecurities, hypocrisy, insignificance) in ways I’d never allowed myself to be before, and I couldn’t turn the picture off. Weeping and unable to speak, I wrote on a piece of paper: “I will never do this again.”

Two weeks later I was doing it again. Having seen these disturbing truths about myself, I couldn’t just “sweep them under the rug.” I decided the best way to change myself was to confront these areas of my psyche head-on. As I began to work on myself subsequent mescaline experiences were more positive, leaving me with a taste for more. Before I knew it I was smoking marijuana (which is mildly psychedelic) on a daily basis and taking mescaline about every two weeks (I never approved of the nonpsychedelic drugs like cocaine).

In altered states of consciousness my continuing philosophical inquiry took some radical turns. Habitual patterns of thought were interrupted, enabling me to see things in new ways. Like a tyrannical king whose claim to the throne is suddenly found to be spurious, some of my most fundamental and

unwanted perceptions and beliefs lost their power as truisms in my mind. I began to challenge everything I had once taken for granted, especially the “sacred cows” of the Establishment.

While sitting “stoned” alongside a river in California’s beautiful Big Sur, the evidence for some kind of intelligence behind creation suddenly came crashing through my evolutionary biases. Without entirely rejecting evolution, I was now once again a believer in God.

This revelation led me on to pantheism (“God is everything”) instead of back to Christianity, though, partly because of a strong naturalistic bias—I could not conceive of anything beyond the universe and so if there was a God He must be the universe.

Also, the drugs themselves led me to pantheism because on them I experienced a loss of ego or self-image boundaries. I began to feel intrinsically connected to the universe as my larger and more real self—an infinite consciousness into which my finite consciousness was merging. Thus, if I was the universe and the universe was God, I was God! With very little outside help I’d seemingly gone through all the classic mystical experiences and come to all the standard pantheistic conclusions.

I began to receive “revelations” from an Inner Voice, which on one occasion I committed to writing. One such revelation was that love was the fundamental principle of the universe. In response to this truth I developed my own unconventional brand of religiosity. For the first time being a good person was an important goal in my life.

It may sound as though out of desperation for answers I threw all judgment to the wind, and was now ready to believe anything. But I must stress that throughout these experiences I reserved a portion of my mind to function as a “critical observer.” It’s just that as a skeptic of the supernatural I had been ill-prepared for two things I encountered in altered states. The first was a very real sensation of *expanding* awareness which made my old skepticisms seem like blind prejudices. The second “proof” was the occurrence of external corroboration in my new-found psychic abilities—telepathy (knowing what people were thinking) and precognition (knowing events before they occurred).

These experiences gradually persuaded even my “critical observer” that something paranormal was going on. Though I was being increasingly attracted to pantheism as the explanation, I remained open to all interpretations that could account for the phenomena. My desire for truth remained strong, and I was optimistic that I would find it. I reasoned that whatever Ultimate Reality was, it was probably loving (since love was the highest expression of being), and would “meet me half way” if I sought It with my whole being.

TUNE IN, TURN ON, DROP OUT

By this time I was involved in what could be called my “genuine hippie phase.” I was not now, as before, *imitating* the life-style of the hippies. I had rather gone through the same inner changes that produced that life-style in the first place. I could no longer relate to the prospects of school, career, and compliant participation in the “System.” Without consciously following the adage of hippie “guru” Timothy Leary, I had “tuned in” and “turned on” and was now ready to “drop out.”

In August of 1970 I hitchhiked up to Portland to attend a “Woodstock”-like festival called “Vortex I.” While there I decided to join a group of people who were forming a commune.

After only a few days of commune experience a lost contact lens forced me to return temporarily to Southern California. While there I maintained contact with the commune by telephone and learned that they had settled outside of Grant’s Pass in Southern Oregon.

I shared my experiences “up north” and plans to move there with my close circle of friends, and with my friend Rick and his wife I also shared the relatively pure LSD I had brought down with me from Oregon.

All of my friends respected me for acting on the values that we all espoused. But under the influence of LSD Rick’s respect turned to a holy dread. As I was reading to him from my private “revelations” he had a “vision” (hallucination): “My God, Elliot, you’ve turned into Christ!”

For several minutes Rick kept insisting that I was the Second Coming of Christ. Laughing I assured him that I was not Christ, though I allowed that I might be a prophet, since I was receiving these revelations.

After a two-week wait my new contact lens was finally ready. This meant I could drive again. To celebrate, I decided to drive to some natural setting and “drop” (ingest) a capsule of organic mescaline that I’d also brought down with me.

As I stood alone in my family’s kitchen formulating this plan, I suddenly received a powerful premonition that in the midst of this drug experience a new truth would be revealed to me. By this time I’d learned from experience that when such “intuitive knowings” came on so strongly, I should pay serious attention to them.

My immediate response was excitement, since I’d devoted my entire life to seeking truth. But then the premonition was expanded—there was a sense of challenge attached to it. What if this new truth could not be followed without my giving up certain things that I held dear? I saw clearly that I could not be consistent with my truth-seeking profession without being willing to make whatever changes truth might require. And so I resolved within myself to “flow with” and not resist whatever truth might be revealed to me that day, or ever.

A STATE OF SUSPENDED IDENTITY

Driving south on Pacific Coast Highway I ended up on a somewhat isolated beach in Laguna Beach, a “hippie haven” in conservative Orange County. By sunset I was all alone, experiencing an exceptionally pleasant “trip.” Feeling as though I was in perfect harmony with the universe, I waited patiently for my new revelation.

After some time my privacy was broken. About fifty feet in front of me a couple my own age were making their way along the rocky shore. I strongly sensed that their appearance was not an accident. They didn’t seem to notice me sitting there in the dark, and so I greeted them. The girl came over and sat in front of me, silently smiling. “Wow, I’m really stoned,” I said—hoping for an understanding response. “Jesus really loves you, brother,” she replied.

My mind reeled. Was *this* the “new truth” that would challenge my commitment to follow truth? For years I had been thoroughly convinced that no one who really understood modern knowledge could believe in a supernatural Jesus. Furthermore, the Christian life-style seemed as unattractive as any I could think of. I was therefore both confounded and shaken by this revelation. How far was I to take it?

Joining us, the girl’s boyfriend expounded the same old evangelistic “pitch” I’d heard many times before from the mouths of “Jesus Freaks”—young converts mostly from the drug culture. In the past I’d been impossible for them to reach. When he asked me to pray with him and receive Jesus into my heart, I remembered my commitment to flow with and not resist whatever happened that day. So I joined him in prayer, and whereas I’d been “peaking” on the drug a few minutes earlier, its effects were now almost imperceptible.

I was still so shaken that when they started to leave me I asked them not to. We talked further as they took me for a drive. They suggested I visit Calvary Chapel, a church in Costa Mesa which was an “epicenter” for the up-and-coming Jesus Movement among the young. Trying to get a grasp on how “straight” I was going to have to become, I asked, “Does anyone at Calvary smoke marijuana?” For whatever reason, the young man responded by asking his friend, “Doesn’t [so-and-so] smoke marijuana?” From this I wrongly gathered that although smoking marijuana was not the most popular practice, it was still tolerated.

After they dropped me off I returned to the beach. Whereas earlier I’d serenely sat there in the yogic “full lotus” position, I was now on my knees, beseeching God to reveal to me the significance of the evening’s events.

In the days that followed my thinking was a confused mixture of Christian and New Age notions. This reflected a state of suspended identity; was I now a Jesus Freak or some kind of “cosmic Christian”? The answer, of which I was painfully unsure, all depended on whether the revelation on the beach was compatible with the spirituality I had previously developed in altered states.

I tried reading our gigantic family Bible, but didn't make it past the genealogies in Genesis chapter five. I couldn't remember where the couple said Calvary Chapel was. Because I had not been flatly told to abstain from drugs, I continued using them, but I now had an uneasy conscience about it.

While visiting Bob, an outwardly straight "pothead" who enjoyed getting stoned with me, I recounted what happened in Laguna, expressing my uncertainty as to its significance. He straightforwardly replied that its significance was very clear: just as Jesus had gone out into the desert and there realized he was the Son of God, so I had gone down to the beach and there realized I was the Son of God—the Second Coming of Christ! I laughed, informing him that Rick had suggested the same preposterous thing. "Out of billions of people you're telling me *I'm* going to play that role? Come on!"

Afterwards I drove to another friend's home and waited for him to return in my car. While sitting there Bob's words came back into my mind. This time I sensed a great power in this suggestion, sucking me into itself. "You *are* the Son of God. You *are* the Son of God," a voice repeated ever-louder in my mind. I felt some kind of spiritual presence pressing in heavily upon me. Fearing that I might go "off the deep end" I grabbed hold of myself and fought this delusion off.

In early October two other friends dropped me off at a freeway entrance for my return trip to Oregon. Already hitchhiking at that spot were a couple of "Jesus Freaks" who lived in a commune in Berkeley associated with the Christian World Liberation Front. They invited me to spend a night there when I passed through, and it turned out I was able to take them up on their offer.

Because of my experience on the beach I identified myself as a Christian, and so I was accepted as such and not evangelized by the commune members. Things went smoothly enough until the next morning when a Christian sister brought my inner conflict to the surface by making an unfavorable reference to drugs. I argued in reply that drugs could make one more conscious of God, and pressed her to tell me exactly what was wrong with them. "We don't need drugs," she responded, "Jesus makes us high."

This pat reply was intellectually unsatisfying, and so I refused to give up drugs on the basis of it. Nonetheless, her disapproval intensified the "illogical" (as I told myself then) pangs of conscience I was already experiencing.

After several days and adventures on the road, I finally tracked down the commune only to find that it had deteriorated into two small groups of no more than six people each. What was worse, all of the remaining people were individuals I had previously discerned to be mystically "unaware." (Most hippies were not nearly as spiritually inclined as I now was).

Before the full weight of my disappointing discovery could sink in, some hippies from another commune in Cave Junction (about a half hour away) drove up in a truck, "turned us on" to some mescaline, and took me with them to spend the night at their place.

"THERE IS NO CONFLICT"

When we arrived I thought I had finally made it to Paradise—it was everything I'd hoped to find in Oregon. There were over 40 people residing on a large acreage in the woods. Not your stereotypically lazy hippies, they were industriously striving to forge an alternative culture to that of the straight society.

Evening fell. I sat on the floor in a large cabin coming on heavily to the mescaline. Several men were sitting around a table discussing spiritual things. I could tell that for the first time I'd found a *group* of people who were actively pursuing the same kind of spirituality I had been. They were literally talking my language—using terms to describe spiritual concepts and experiences I had previously either thought of on my own or received from my Inner Voice. This proved to me that what I'd been going through was not my own private creation, but a universal spiritual experience, presumably grounded in an Ultimate Reality. The force of this realization was electrifying.

In spite of this seeming confirmation for my drug experiences, the unanswered questions raised in Laguna refused to leave me alone. Finally I got up and joined them at the table. "I can really relate to what you guys are talking about," I began, "but I'm going through a conflict." After I rehearsed what had

happened to me, Charlie, the communal family's unofficial spiritual leader, replied: "There's no conflict if you want to pray to Jesus, and he [another at the table] wants to meditate on Buddha, and I want to smoke a joint. We're all experiencing the *same* God."

After Charlie finished speaking his words continued to reverberate in my mind: "It's all the same God. It's all the same God." Somehow this common conception hit me like a new revelation. Could it really be that beneath the outward quibbling the Jesus Freaks and the hippies were all experiencing the same God?

Immediately, as though in confirmation of what Charlie said, I had a visionary experience more powerful than any I'd had before. I lost all consciousness of the room and the people in it. I felt as though I'd transcended all finite boundaries. I could hear very distinct, audible voices speaking to me in the most intimate and reassuring manner. Intuitively I "knew" who they belonged to—people from distant points in space and time. The explanation for such "long-distance communication" seemed to be that we were all "plugged into" the same Universal Mind.

I also had a vision of a blue or positive energy, which I sensed represented God, and a red or negative energy, signifying the devil (which, like God, was impersonal). The blue energy was drawing me to enlightenment and peace—the transcendence of this unnecessary conflict I'd been going through. The red energy was seeking to keep me locked into ignorance and self-destructive ego patterns, and was using this conflict to do so.

Once my consciousness returned to my body I felt moved to go outside. Emotionally overwhelmed, I looked up at the stars and thanked God for answering my prayer. My inner conflict was now entirely gone.

That first night in Cave Junction had a transforming effect on me. I now had a seemingly unshakeable confidence in my mystical experiences and the validity of using drugs to achieve them. Nevertheless, drugs were no longer so necessary to have such experiences. To some extent I was always in a state of "cosmic consciousness" now. Also, my psychic abilities now seemed five times stronger. Telepathy and precognition (often verified) were almost becoming daily parts of my experience. And I was becoming increasingly aware of "spiritual presences" hovering around me, especially as I'd lie in bed at night.

I was led to believe by a few members of the commune that I was welcome to stay on and join the family. A month later I would find out that was not the majority verdict. There were too many people to fit comfortably in a large two-story structure that had recently been completed. Those who had not contributed to its construction were to move on for the winter. But during the month I was there I had what could have under different circumstances been several years' worth of spiritual experiences.

ONE OF MANY CHRISTS

Truly, the belief that "there is no conflict" was foundational to the commune's spirituality. Eastern mystical scriptures, occult books, tarot cards and other occult paraphernalia, drugs, and unself-conscious nudity were combined with an abundance of well-read Bibles, Christian art and symbols, and frequent, reverential references to Jesus.

The commune's "Christian" orientation made it easy for me to reason that I was being true to the revelation given me at the beach. Jesus *could* be integrated with my drug-based spirituality, I'd concluded, and God had brought me here so I could learn how to do it.

The significance of my beach revelation was particularly "explained" to me by one of the books on hand at the commune, "Levi's" *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (a turn-of-the century work). Its account of Jesus' life and mission (based on the ethereal "Akashic Records" which only special psychics like Levi can read) was similar enough to seem consistent with the familiar Gospel story, and yet the Jesus depicted there was a mystical master who spoke of the very kinds of "realities" I had encountered during my drug experiences.

The Aquarian Gospel's Introduction explains that we are now in a transition phase from the Piscean to the Aquarian Age. In the New Age the level of consciousness manifested by Jesus ("Christ consciousness") will become widespread, making it an era of enlightenment and peace.

This scenario seemed to explain the rash of people like myself in the inchoate New Age movement who were suddenly experiencing cosmic consciousness. We were the forerunners of a new age and a new phase in evolution.

Whereas I had not been able to accept the suggestion that I was *the* Second Coming of Christ, I did find acceptable the idea that I was becoming *one of many* Christs, sort of a collective Second Coming. It now seemed that the experience in Laguna was God's way of moving me in this direction, and so achieving Christ consciousness became a major objective of my spiritual life.

During that month I read from several other books as well, including Eastern and Western scriptures. Each seemed to confirm my spiritual experiences, including the Bible. For instance, I understood John 3:3 ("You must be born again") to be speaking of the mystical "ego death" I was going through.

"Ego death" was a critical aspect of my experience. Even when not on drugs my consciousness was to some degree in what mystics term "the Now"—very aware of my immediate surroundings and of an interpenetrating spiritual dimension, but very out of touch with my past and a normal sense of self. Increasingly I identified myself with the God within rather than the Elliot Miller without.

In spite of such feelings of high attainment, during my stay in Cave Junction it seemed I could not quite achieve Christ consciousness as I understood it. My ego refused to remain completely dead. Instead, I found myself going through moments or even hours in which the most painful pieces of my past would flash back and torment me. I was struggling to find a way to completely extinguish Elliot Miller so that Christ could fully "incarnate" in me (as I imagined Jesus successfully did at the time of his baptism).

When I was asked to leave the commune I went through a brief emotional upheaval. Although I understood and respected their decision, it still hurt. I had felt like I was already a part of the family, but obviously the majority did not share that sentiment. And, had not God brought me here? I'd assumed this was my ultimate destination—my own ideally-suited environment.

Pacing back and forth in a nearby grove, I got hold of myself. "Surely, God is in control of this turn of events as much as the previous ones. He must have lessons for me to learn that I can't learn here." My faith once again grew strong, and I committed myself to God to take me wherever He wanted me between Cave Junction and Long Beach.

SURRENDERING CONTROL TO "GOD"

Completely triumphant over this uprising of "ego," the next day I packed up my things and was driven in a huge van to Interstate 5 in Grant's Pass. As I quietly sat thinking about my spiritual struggles, my Inner Voice distinctly sounded within my mind: "The reason you keep having battles with your ego is because you're afraid to let go of it. If you want to become a Christ you must die in your mind and let me take over."

This guidance seemed reasonable enough; like the next logical step on my spiritual path. And so, without reservation I began at once to surrender control of my entire being to "God." I found that it was a gradual process that would take perhaps hours to complete. But within minutes there were already dramatic results.

By the time I was let out of the van, I felt like I was surging with power. It was raining, and so I decided to put my new power to a test. Based on the belief that all reality is one Mind, and that a Christ is so connected to that Mind that he can control external reality (as Jesus did with his miracles), I looked up at the completely overcast sky and confidently commanded the rain to stop and the sun to shine. *Immediately*, the clouds parted and the afternoon became sunny and dry.

My "power surge" continued to accelerate. In spite of uncertain circumstances, I had no fear in the world; nor had I any doubts about what I was experiencing. This was the consummation of my spiritual quest—God had ordered everything I had gone through before to bring me to this moment.

The spot where I was dropped off turned out to be a miserable place to catch a ride; there was absolutely no traffic. So I decided to use my new power again. I simply willed for someone to come by and pick me

up. Again, “nature’s” response was immediate. I was picked up and driven south to Ashland, 20 miles north of the California border, where I was dropped off at the crossing of Highway 5 and a road going west into Ashland.

I stood there hitchhiking south for a couple of hours. The process of possession continued, and I felt as high as if I’d taken LSD, though I was now under the influence of no drug.

Suddenly, my euphoria turned to alarm. I strongly sensed that my soul was in great danger, as though something evil was trying to consume me. I began to resist the entity taking possession of me, but then the thought crossed my mind: “This is just your ego putting up its last fight for survival. God is good! He wouldn’t do anything to hurt you.” Satisfied with this explanation, I yielded again. The negative sensation was now gone, and it began to feel as though I was fading out and something else was moving into my place.

As I stood there hitchhiking I watched a steady succession of cars heading west toward Ashland. For no earthly reason, one of those cars off in the distance caught my attention. Intuitively I knew that they were going to stop and ask me to get in, even though I was hitchhiking in a different direction! I further sensed that this car would take me to the place God wanted me.

Not surprisingly (by now) as they approached the driver slowed down, rolled down his window, and asked me if I’d like to have dinner. “Sure,” I replied, telling myself as I headed toward the car: “When I get in they’ll be talking about God, because these are God’s people.” I opened the door and the driver greeted me with the words: “Praise God!” “Praise God!”, I replied, “God told me you were going to pick me up.”

A MOMENT OF TRUTH

We pulled up to a two-story home in a residential area called the “Shiloh House,” a commune as large as the one I’d just left, only its long-haired members were clearly Jesus Freaks. Now convinced that there was no conflict, I no longer felt uncomfortable in this kind of atmosphere—Jesus Freaks, too, knew God.

As I sat down in the living room my mind was throbbing with so much energy that it felt like it was pressing against the walls. After identifying myself as a Christian, I proceeded to extol the insights of Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*. The more informed and discerning in the room no doubt recognized that they had a less-than-orthodox “Christian” on their hands.

One particularly discerning observer, named Ed, came over and engaged me in a one-on-one discussion. As I expressed my peculiar views about God, Christ, and drugs, Ed would calmly but firmly correct me with the biblical view (e.g., “God is no more the universe than the maker of that chair is the chair”).

The more we talked, the more I “lost my cool,” annoyed that I would have to butt heads with another narrow-minded Jesus Freak during this moment of personal triumph. “When will these Christians stop being so bigoted?”, I asked myself. “Why can’t they accept the validity of other people’s spiritual experiences?”

In the midst of my arguing, a realization came over me like a tidal wave. God had clearly brought me to this house. But if his goal was to possess me, and everything I’d gone through was intended to bring me to this point of surrender, then why during his moment of success would he bring me *here*? Why at such a critical time would God bring me to a place where I’d be told, in effect, that what I thought was God was a demon, unless the entity that was possessing me *was* a demon, and *that’s* what God wanted me to hear?

Within a couple of minutes my entire perspective had “done a 180.” Instead of seeing my life as a continual progression toward Christhood, I saw it as a spiritual battleground, particularly since I’d been searching for the truth. Because I was not yet fully aligned with either side of the battle, I’d remained wide open to the influences of both. Through messengers and direct messages (e.g., giving me advance notice of crucial events) God had indeed “met me half-way”—pointing me to Jesus as the only way to Him. But Satan also was using messengers and direct messages—pointing me to myself and reinterpreting God’s unique revelation in Jesus as a revelation of my own Christ potential.

Since I'd been completely happy on my mystical path and had no desire to be a Jesus Freak, I was now facing a real moment of crisis. It was also a moment of truth. The first thoughts that came into my mind were: "Go back on that freeway and start hitchhiking. Put all of this out of your mind. After all the power and triumph that has come within your grasp today, do you want to start all over again on a new spiritual path? And what of your friends in Southern California? If you become a Jesus Freak they'll think you flipped out!"

But I knew it could never be the same again. How could I continue my quest for truth if I ignored what happened here? I'd be living a lie. And besides, who would want to go back on that freeway knowing it was the devil he'd be returning to?

At Ed's suggestion I agreed to stay on a few days and study the Bible. That was the only pronounced "decision" I made—a nonthreatening way of saying "I surrender." But *surrender* I had, and simultaneously the spiritual presence that I *had been* surrendering to disappeared.

But the spiritual battle over my soul did not entirely end that night. For example, during my second day at Shiloh I ran into a fellow alone upstairs (a visitor, but I had thought he was an established member) who engaged me in a metaphysical discussion. After he made reference to "om," the primordial "hum" of the universe (a Hindu concept), I was at once intrigued and ill-at-ease. "Most people here don't seem to believe in such things," I observed. He replied that different people were at different points of advancement. "Hmmm, maybe there's a place for mysticism after all," I thought.

At that instant Ed came rushing up the stairs, rebuking the visitor and proclaiming: "The Holy Spirit told me you were stumbling this brother." The visitor cowered before Ed's spiritual authority like a bad little boy who had been caught by his mother inciting his friend to steal some cookies.

FALSE PEACE AND FALSE LIGHT

It seemed at every turn I received further confirmation that my decision to follow Jesus and abandon my New Age path had been a moral choice between good and evil. I finally yielded once and for all to this heavenly verdict, but I still had difficulty understanding exactly what had been wrong with my former "sacramental" use of drugs. After all, hadn't it made me a better, more spiritually-minded person?

After a couple weeks of painful confusion over this, I finally turned to prayer: "God, you know I've given up drugs for You and I'm willing never to use them again. But it would really help if I understood why. Please show me what is wrong with them."

Rising up from prayer I headed downstairs and sat on a couch next to Ed's fiancée Janette, just in time to overhear her refer to "drugs" in conversation with Ed. "What was that you were saying?" I asked, wondering if my prayer would be instantaneously answered.

"I was just talking to Ed about my sister. She'd accepted the Lord with us before, but has now gone back to smoking marijuana. So I'm writing a letter to warn her not to use drugs, because they open your mind to a spiritual realm, but that realm is not of God. It gives you a false kind of a peace and a false kind of a light, like the peace and light the Antichrist will give to the world. And so you can have a false sense of security that you're on the road to God when you're actually on the road to hell."

Janette's answer once and for all delivered me from my conflict. I could finally understand why drug use, or, for that matter, Eastern meditation or any method of inducing altered states of consciousness, was not the way to reach God. It was possible to have a spiritual experience—to even feel blissfully enlightened and serene—without really experiencing God. Spiritual evil can and does masquerade as spiritual good (2 Cor. 11:14), and trancelike states of consciousness tend to open one up to such influences.

As I submitted to the spiritual regimen of the house, including daily personal and group Bible study and prayer, I gradually began to understand experientially what *authentic* spirituality is—entirely different from what I'd known before. I remember it dawning upon me after three months in Ashland that I now really knew what it was to be "born again"; what everyone meant when they spoke of having a *personal* relationship with the Lord. I no longer just knew about Him—I *knew* Him. I found this intimate

fellowship with Christ to be the sweetest thing I'd ever known in life. It surpassed the "bliss" of cosmic consciousness just as one would expect the genuine to surpass the counterfeit.

In my 18 years of experience I have found evangelical Christianity to be entirely satisfying, both experientially and intellectually. It has profoundly answered the questions and met the needs that first propelled me on my quest for truth. It is my heart's wish that New Agers will not take this testimony lightly, for I believe I had the same intellectual and experiential reasons for rejecting Christianity in favor of Eastern/occult mysticism as they. If I can find abundant satisfaction in Christian faith, it seems to me they could too.

Actually, I have no reason to doubt that I would have gone on to become an active participant in the contemporary New Age movement were it not for one thing only: through all my spiritual experiences I remained *open* to the possibility that another world view could be true than the one to which I was currently attracted. For this reason it is ironic when New Agers now accuse me of closed-mindedness *because of* my Christian beliefs.

My biggest concern about today's New Agers is that they seem to be closed to everything but pantheism. Today's seekers do not appear as interested in finding objective truth as those of 15 to 20 years ago. Spirituality without such commitment falls right into the hands of the Evil One. Jesus said, "Seek and you shall find" (Matt. 7:7). He also said "I am...the truth" (John 14:6). My experience, and that of countless others, testifies to the piercing accuracy of both these claims.