



Los Angeles Makes Movies. San Francisco Makes Movements.

Is Spirit's Next Move World Spirituality? • BY MARIANA CAPLAN

The San Francisco Bay Area is world renowned for starting movements that are imitated throughout the globe, from feminism to gay rights to ecological activism. On the spiritual front, the popularization in the West of Buddhism, yoga, pioneering psychologies, and meditation sprung forth from groups of passionate visionaries gathering together in a living room in Haight-Ashbury, renting a storefront south of Market Street, or envisioning a university and transforming ideals into realities. People used to have to travel to India, South America, or Africa to access the world's great spiritual traditions. Now, at the millennium, the global village brings riches from all the world's great traditions to our Bay Area doorstep, or even to our laptop or cell phone.

Renowned integral philosopher Ken Wilber and Oxford-trained spiritual teacher and philosopher Marc Gafni are, among others things, movement makers, and World Spirituality is quite possibly the next great movement in Spirit's evolution. Hundreds of millions of well-educated people are searching for the "pattern that connects"—a compelling, universal set of spiritual principles by which they can live, yet cannot find within the confines of conventional religious institutions.

Interfaith spirituality is all too often characterized by "Jews who don't believe in Judaism getting together with Christians who don't believe in Christianity," and the New Age movement offers a smorgasbord of processes and practices ranging from the cosmic to the comical that often leave seekers with spiritual indigestion and even lopsided spiritual growth. World Spirituality is the next step beyond both interfaith and New Age. Finally, there is an alternative for the eclectic among us who wish to consciously engage grounded spiritual practice and community, offering an option for singles to meet like-minded people and for families to study, practice, and celebrate spirituality in community.

For many people, the classical religions have lost their power. Whereas some people remain contentedly rooted in their religions, even evangelically so, and others continue to be staunch atheists, millions more experience themselves as innately and deeply spiritual and connected to a larger whole, but they don't fit into a simple box. Either they don't feel at home in any particular religion and instead are consciously or unconsciously piecing together disparate practices and elements into a kind of World Spirituality, or they are what Gafni calls *dual citizens*—committed to their native or chosen tradition yet not held by it exclusively, drawing upon multiple sources to meet the totality of their souls' needs.

It is now possible not only to be a dual citizen of two countries, but also to remain committed to one's native religion or chosen spiritual tradition while at the same time being a citizen of World Spirituality. "Twenty-five years ago if you had two passports, the FBI investigated you. Nowadays it is highly desirable. The same is true of spirituality," said Gafni.

Wilber, whose Integral Theory is one of the lodestones for the center's vision, points out that World Spirituality is not merely the gathering of shared truths held by various religions but rather a deep recognition that the leading edge of all religions is evolving from an ethnocentric to a higher, world-centric consciousness.

There are three reasons World Spirituality is a compelling and realistic possibility for the first time in the evolution of humanity. To begin with, today's core challenges to survival are not confined to a particular religion, country, or region; challenges of the magnitude we face require the evolution of a new spiritual consciousness that offers global solutions.

Next, there is a growing critical mass of World Spirituality citizens

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who have evolved a world-centric consciousness and, as such, feel responsible for the world as a whole.

Finally, for the first time in history, the most profound teachings and living teachers from all the great systems of Spirit are readily available in a non-coercive and open-hearted form, not only to people of their particular religion, but to all who wish to study and practice with them. World Spirituality seeks to unite our common ground while acknowledging, celebrating, and partaking in the diversity of the world's religions and cultures, so each religion can put forth its deepest and most profound contributions.

While the idea of a World Spirituality is not new, the actualization of it remains an evolutionary leap whose time has come, and there is little more exciting than to be in the wake of a movement that is breaking ground. The yearning to articulate a World Spirituality is rippling across the globe in the hearts and minds of tens of millions of people, and this nascent urge needs to be articulated, lived, and practiced. As yet, there is no set of practices, obligation, or surrender, leaving seekers and practitioners without guidance or a formal community with whom to practice. This is soon to change, however, with the opening of the Center for World Spirituality on March 5 in San Francisco.

A global think tank with a Bay Area practice center, the Center for World Spirituality will offer monthly services, including dharma, music, dance, and yoga, led by Marc Gafni, Jai Uttal, Nubia Texiera, Decker Cunov, and myself. Jai Uttal and other musicians will hold down the world music front, and local and visiting spiritual teachers from the world's great traditions will regularly offer teachings. There will be a World Spirituality children's program offered during each celebration service, as well as mingling time, where spiritually oriented singles can connect.

The think tank is inspired by visionaries Ken Wilber and Marc Gafni, along with other evolutionary integral leaders, and draws deeply upon Bay Area "grandparents" of World Spirituality, including Huston Smith, Claudio Naranjo, and Angeles Arrien. It is supported in its first phase by private Bay Area donors and cosponsored by Tami Simon's Sounds True multimedia company, Integral Institute, and iEvolve Global Practice community, along with a council of over 100 spiritual leaders and thinkers representing all religions and regions of the world.

The opening of the Center for World Spirituality will focus on an awareness campaign for human trafficking, with a particular focus on the San Francisco-based Nepalese Youth Foundation—founded by global activist and former California Supreme Court lawyer Olga Murray—which frees young Nepali girls from prostitution and abuse.

Having roamed the world writing about, researching, and practicing the world's great mystical traditions for the past 20 years, I'm putting all my eggs in this basket. 🐣

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