
The White Wing Report

The Top Seven Spiritual Trends of 2008

From Sedona, Arizona
November 2008

- **Interconnectedness:** We are becoming increasingly aware of our oneness with all life and what that awareness actually looks like in our lives.
- **Gratitude:** More people than ever are actively practicing gratefulness and more studies are being conducted on the results of gratitude in our lives.
- **Life Resizing:** Accumulating “more” things is becoming less meaningful. Souls are striving to become bigger as more people let go of things that no longer fulfill.
- **Seeking Stillness:** Silence is being valued as the great consciousness accelerator that it is.
- **Our Enormous Impact on the World as Individuals: the Power of One.** More people are realizing that one person’s actions can also cause the “butterfly effect.”
- **Hyper-focused:** We are becoming more aware of our impact of focusing beyond the "exterior" self to the service aspects of our beings, which heightens our focus not only of others, but of ourselves.
- **Approaching Global Shift:** More people are realizing that a global shift of some sort is becoming necessary and imminent.

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EMERGING SPIRITUAL TRENDS IN 2008

Interconnectedness

"We are an interconnected world where each of us must play a role in shaping the vision and collaborating across jurisdictions."

--The International Council for Information Technology in Government Administration, October 2008, Seoul, South Korea

People are getting spiritually connected and continue to explore the internet as a means to do that in record numbers this year. YouTube, Google, Facebook, and other social media are connecting us and allowing us to spread information quickly. Spiritual information is flowing fast across these channels.

In April 2008, both Facebook and Myspace had about 115 million unique visitors globally. The race is on, although Facebook still has to catch up to Myspace in the US domestic markets. Facebook has over 30 million photos uploaded a day. Of the top twenty sites on alexa.com, fully half of the most visited sites in 2008 were social sites like hi5 and Facebook, or file sharing sites like megaupload.com. A question asked for the personal profile on Facebook is on one's religious views although that is no longer displayed in the main profile page with the new Facebook look.

People are continuing to move outside of formal churches to smaller spiritual groups and communities to get their spiritual nourishment and connections. Having a friend over for dinner or meditation is seen as valuable spiritual enrichment. People are bringing God, home, through meditation and prayer. This doesn't dilute the effect of reaching out to others in need but personalizes it.

A new survey by Barna Research on Christian church attendance has identified new "church" options such as house churches, marketplace ministries and cyberchurches. The Barna Christian polling group noted five types of people: unattached, intermittents, homebodies, blenders and conventionals. The Barna Groups says, "The numbers consistently point out that those who live without a regular face-to-face faith connection tend to be relatively isolated from the mainstream of society, tend to be non-committal in institutional and personal relationships, and typically revel in their independence," based on two nationwide surveys.

Many spiritual seekers feel that a building is no longer necessary to stay connected to their fellow humans and to God or their spiritual source. The Pew Forum Survey of early 2008 found that the number of people who question the necessity of churches and remain out of those churches is growing. The recent church scandals have left church goers in a state of distrust. Once written in stone rules, have been blatantly broken by some of those who preached them. While the clergy maintain that this migration away from the church is contrary to their teachings, many faithful find

spiritual comfort in television or internet broadcasts of services such as Rev.Sky St. John's podcast service in Oahu, Hawaii.

While the Pew Forum Survey is focused on religious affiliations and does not encompass the whole of the spirituality movement, it does give an insightful look into the shifting sands of religion in the USA today. 28% of those surveyed have switched religious affiliation from their birth religion. 25% of young Americans, 18-29 years old, say they are not affiliated with any particular religion. 37% of the survey participants are married to a spouse with a different religious affiliation. Thus acceptance of other spiritual views is being brought into and thus taught within the home.

This interconnectedness trend is showing up everywhere and creating what often appears to be chaos. What affects the USA stock affect affects world markets. The financial world staggered with the financial crisis in the USA markets this fall and there may be more to come. Ted Nicholas, of The Success Margin recently traveled to Australia. He said that they are really "tuned into news about the U.S. economy and the fears of recession. When the U.S. sneezes, the whole world catches cold."

Even the new leader of the most influential nation on earth said,
"Human aspirations are universal for dignity, for freedom, for the opportunity to improve the lives of our families."
--Barack Obama.

We have heard about "oneness" for centuries and even millennium, but today more of the realities and implications of that are starting to show up. Books like Joe Vitale and Dr. Hew Lue's *Zero Limits*, discuss some practical ways to get to the oneness state. Even today with the enormous spiritual resources available, the practical aspects to get to where we "know" spirituality resides, often remain unused or underused.

For instance:

"We live in a fast-paced global era in which the interconnectedness and smallness of the world have become increasingly apparent. But access to information in today's world has not yet eliminated the many cultural misunderstandings between Western and Arab societies.."

--World Security institute Jan 2008

This trend to connect with each other worldwide appears to be growing significantly as people are looking for more spiritual answers in the midst of wide planetary turmoil.

Gratitude

The Native American philosophy's of deep thanksgiving hasn't been touted much in current spiritual media, but the idea of gratitude is mentioned everywhere. More

people are writing in gratitude journals daily. Blogs and websites on gratitude are proliferating. Studies showing the results of gratitude have been conducted with astonishing results.

Professor Robert Emmons has conducted a ten year gratitude study on many groups including students and adults with diseases. His results are consistent. Emmons said, "People who keep gratitude journals improve their quality of life." Emmons started his study on students at UC Davis in 1998. He asked one group to keep a gratitude journal and list five things they were grateful for each day. The other group was to list five complaints. The thankful group was 25% happier than the complainers along with notable increases in psychological and physical well being. Emmons was joined with another psychologist, Michael McCullough, of the University of Miami. McCullough writes, "Scientists are latecomers to the concept of gratitude. Religions and philosophies have long embraced gratitude as an indispensable manifestation of virtue, and an integral component of health, wholeness, and well-being. We are engaged in a long-term research project designed to create and disseminate a large body of novel scientific data on the nature of gratitude, its causes, and its potential consequences for human health and well-being"

McCullough also said that grateful people "place less importance on material goods; they are less likely to judge their own and others success in terms of possessions accumulated; they are less envious of others." This also refers to Spiritual Trend Number Three in this report - less emphasis on materialism. In the above studies of gratitude, they also discovered that those who regularly attend a religious service or engage in spiritual activities are more likely to be grateful.

A professor at Kent State Salem Campus, Dr. Steven Toepfer, has also been conducting a study on the effects of gratitude letters by students written to those who have impacted their lives. Kent's findings reinforce the impact of the gratitude findings "to have terrific psychological and physical benefits. We are all walking around with an amazing resource: gratitude," says Toepfer. "It helps us express and enjoy, appreciate, be thankful and satisfied with a little effort. We all have it, and we need to use it to improve our enjoyment from life." Kent State magazine winter 2008.

Perhaps in addition to Thanksgiving Day, we could hold "Gratitude Day."

Life Resizing

There has been a growing rise in spiritual agitation in the masses as people's lives are becoming less materially fulfilling and more out of synch with their soul's needs. The gap is increasing, but the inner search is expanding.

While most people in America have far more than they "need," more people are realizing that a corresponding increase in pleasure does not automatically happen or can be maintained permanently with the accumulation of more goods. There is a downsizing trend due to the current housing and economic situation. With the

housing market still not having reached the bottom, fewer are looking to their homes as a place to spend more money and upgrade in order to quickly turn around their profits and sell. The home is becoming the haven again for the soul with trends toward simple designs. People are also buying and driving smaller cars not only to save fuel costs but to decrease dependence on foreign supplies.

This resizing trend relates to a definite increase in the green movement. Major grocery stores, including Wal-mart carry at least one line of green products.

Instead of a white wedding, some brides are also turning to green. While the green wedding trend began in 2006, it has expanded not only here in the USA, but also in Europe this year. Brides want to provide their guests and themselves with a great experience but decide they can do this by choosing recycled materials that have less waste accumulation for their special day. More new brides consider this an ethical decision.

Seeking Stillness

As the world appears to become more chaotic and unpredictable, a natural way to seek balance for the outer challenges is continuing to grow. That is to turn inward and seek stillness.

More people “know” that spiritual stillness is important, yet like exercise, not everyone practices it. Yet the awareness is now there. Finding stillness is not as easy as it used to be. More noises and distractions than ever are appearing. Instead of cutting down on commercial advertising, it is hitting us on the web. There are TV monitors at Wal-Mart stores with their own content, and news monitors at many gas station pumps. Silence is becoming a rare commodity, but it is an essential element for the soul. While most people long for it, most people’s lives have more noise, not silence.

Yoga is growing rapidly as not only a way to health but also the byproduct of the inner peace it brings. The 2008 study by Yoga Journal – the preeminent source of yoga information - indicates that 6.9% of U.S. adults, or 15.8 million people, practice yoga. 72.2% are women; 27.8% are men. 44% of yogis have household incomes of \$75,000 or more; 24% have more than \$100,000 and these yoga practitioners spend almost \$6 billion a year on yoga classes and supplies, an increase of 82% since Yoga Journal’s last study in 2004.

Author Cheryl Richardson says, “Going into the silence is like taking a bath in pure, white light – it clears you, calms you and quiets you; and it helps you manage the stress of normal everyday life. The idea of spending time in silence and stillness runs contrary to the messages we receive from the world around us. Instead, we’re rewarded for our ability to multitask, and to be productive, fast and efficient. This is exactly why so many people feel spiritually restless. The more you make stillness a priority, the sooner you’ll be released from the fear and anxiety that come from living

in an uncertain, ever-changing world. Over time you'll come to realize that the peace and joy you seek can only be found within." From Experiencelifemag.com

Even children are learning and longing for this stillness in our over stimulated world. Called "mindfulness," it is being taught to adolescents in Oakland, CA through Laurie Grossman's 5 day program. Gina Biegel's dramatic study on using mindfulness to help teens cope with such stress disorders as depression has been a commanding success. Biegel, author and psychotherapist, found that after 8 weeks, 80 percent of the adolescents no longer had signs of depression or suicide. With these results, more schools are implementing this type of program.

Even forums ponder the stillness effect. Ramachara on Oprha.com posted, ""Stillness is no-thought, quiet, silence, resting potential. Out of stillness comes intuition, poetry, sense of oneness, and other right brain qualities, and mixed with left and other brain healthy qualities can provide wisdom."

Fr. Jonah, Abbot of the monastery of St. John of Shanghi and San Francisco teaches *The Path to Prayer: Keep Inner Stillness*. He writes, "This process is about total transformation of our lives. Coming to a place of spiritual maturity where we are not battered around by our own thoughts and feelings and desires."

Film reflects life. *The Pleasure of Stillness* is a film about Sally Grass, a critically acclaimed New York based dancer and choreographer came out this year.

Spiritual retreat growth has continued as people seek places of solitude to connect with their inner being. Throughout North America there are over 1,000 monasteries, abbeys and spiritual retreat centers where one can reorient oneself from the hectic life to a place of spiritual, mental, and physical refreshment. A resource for retreats in the USA and Canada is www.findthedivine.com, which lists more than 1,400 locations and has 55,000 retreat and spiritual seekers visit the site per month. Phil Stone of finfthedivine.com said, "The number of seekers of the retreat experience will probably increase a lot this coming year as individuals will be looking for answers about life's purpose and meaning. A bad economy and war are indicators that people are seeking answers from the quiet voice of God." Retreat center growth in the US appears to be steady at about 10% a year according to Stone.

The Travel Industry Association found that 25 percent of respondents in a representative sample of 1,500 adults said that they were interested in spiritual vacations

From the earliest of times. Those seeking spiritual growth and purification traveled to sacred and holy sites across the globe. It appears that today those journeys are again coming to the forefront as spiritual tourism helps searchers nourish their hunger for the divine.

Our Enormous Impact on the World as an Individual - The Power of One, which reinforces Trend Number One.

It was an election year in the USA. More people than ever were convinced that their right and responsibility to vote could and would make a difference in the election results. According to an article in Associated Press, Americas voted in possibly the highest turnout of the century. Early projections put the figure at 136.6 million Americans who went to the polls or voted early. An estimated 23 million young voters ages 18-29 cast their ballots this year.

This need and awareness of the ability of an individual to make a difference has started to take hold of the youth. People are practicing little acts of kindness realizing that it is up to each one of us residing on this planet to make it a better experience for as many people as we can, including ourselves.

Robert Evans had an idea. He had an idea about using little messages on a business card size that he calls "Pass Along Cards." Evans wanted to do something simple yet powerful like the Pay it Forward concept. By identifying each card with a unique ID number, the recipient or giver of the card can track where the little card has been sent by going on the web. The little Pass Along Cards have been a stunning success with over 1 million cards shipped to over 100 countries. There are many others like Evans who use the power of the internet as "spiritual ammunition" for compassion and caring.

And one of the highest religious leaders on the planet shares his message of compassion and the difference each one of us can make.

"Because we all share an identical need for love, it is possible to feel that anybody we meet, in whatever circumstances, is a brother or sister. No matter how new the face or how different the dress and behavior, there is no significant division between us and other people. It is foolish to dwell on external differences, because our basic natures are the same.

Ultimately, humanity is one and this small planet is our only home, If we are to protect this home of ours, each of us needs to experience a vivid sense of universal altruism. It is only this feeling that can remove the self-centered motives that cause people to deceive and misuse one another."

--14th Dalai Lama

We affect the wave of life. The wave affects us all in an intricate dance of vibration.

Hyper- Focused

Hyperfocus is a focus so beyond oneself and so far removed from self that it circles back around to oneself without that being the intent of the original gesture. Many people have been experiencing a sense of great personal fulfillment as a byproduct of releasing the need for self-gratification.

Giving of our selves can be done through time, service, goods, and money. Although overall "charity" has increased, some of that was built into the foundation systems due to natural increases of inflation and growth. The dollar is less valuable as a gift. Devalued stocks are being donated to charities, but the effects of that probably won't be calculated until 2009.

The Giving USA Foundation's annual report of 2008 reported a slight increase - 1% in donations and pledges, \$306.69 billion. Most of those funds are donated to religious organization followed next by educational organizations. The 2009 report will come out at the end of 2009 and they expect a slight decrease due to the economy. Individuals still represent the bulk of charitable donations at 75%.

So far the economic downturn has not changed the intent of the rich and super rich's planned charitable donations. In a study of 600 affluent consumers with a net worth of at least \$1 million conducted by the Elite Traveler/Prince Associates in January 2008 found that almost 70% of the super rich (over \$30 million in net worth) will increase their charitable donations this year, fully aware and expecting the economy to worsen. They report that super rich donors realize "their support is needed now more than ever to offset cut backs from those who have felt the pinch from a weakened economy." 47.6% of the Rich will also increase their charitable giving.

Another survey conducted by the Grizzard Communications Group, an industry leader in fundraising, published their results on September 29, 2008, listing expected charitable donations due to the economic downturn. 13% of those surveyed expect to increase their giving while 29% (over double) will decrease their donations. It is the older donors (over 65) who say they will give less.

Personal giving is seen as a much stronger motivator as the economy slows and people are feeling financial stress. Help is being given more frequently to family members in the form of a check, paying for home repairs for adult children, paying off credit cards etc.

The Internet, including sites such as youtube.com is being increasingly used to pass along information geared toward raising funds and searching out the needs for those funds. An email can go out and raise tens of thousands of dollars to help someone or some group in need. Several of the Spiritual Heroes of 2008 have personally done this. There is an increase in both in people searching for spiritual help and answers, in churches, groups, organizations and companies catering to those needs.

While there were still plenty of natural disasters like Hurricane Ike this year, but fewer of the enormous level of Katrina, large organized relief efforts weren't needed as. Yet the overall appeal for help globally has been greater this year. A survey of 44 Catholic churches indicated that demand for their services including housing and financial assistance was greatly increased - nearly 86% for financial assistance alone.

Small groups were traveling all over the world with the intent to share needed skills including dentistry, nursing, surgery, and business education. These mini but very effective efforts are expected to grow because of the personal impact and bonding that results and also the effectiveness of this type of help. Appeals from these small groups often go out over the internet to raise funds and encourage prayers for their support.

First we focus on self. Then we move up to an outer focus of our place in the world, resulting in our service to that world. When this reaches its capacity, in an unexpected twist, we come full circle to our inner divine spark. The outer focus curves back in on itself almost like Einstein's theory of time, so one acts in pure harmony with both inner and outer realms. By focusing on service, one's spirit becomes like an eternal spring that never runs dry.

Approaching Global Shift

We know that change is happening rapidly worldwide and there will have to be much more to adjust to with all the already dramatic changes most of us are experiencing in our daily lives. There is an underlying feeling appearing in more and more lives that a significant shift in life as we know it is both imminent and desirable.

In the semi-annual Dilenschneider Group Trend/Forecasting Report for 2008 titled "A World in Turmoil: Big Changes Ahead – Be Prepared," Robert Dilenschneider reports that "In just ten short years – maybe less- your life will be changed dramatically from what it is today. And much of it is positive." In the area of spirituality, the report says, "We will be moving, haltingly, toward a better understanding of the world's religious and moral values."

"We are living through one of the most fundamental shifts in history — a change in the actual belief structure of Western society. No economic, political, or military power can compare with the power of a change of mind. By deliberately changing their images of reality, people are changing the world."

— Willis Harman, *Global Mind Change*

Most of the Top Spiritual Heroes mentioned this trend if not here, then in their other work. While no one can predict exactly how and when this will happen, some feel this shift is well underway and the results will be amazing.

Let us hope so.

While we can find measurements of increases in spiritual attendance, retreats, and sources of spiritual help, it is difficult to measure what is taking place in individual's hearts and souls. Only by the outward effects of such a deeply personal change, can we glean some measurement of the rate of spiritual growth. But it is a start and we are seeing some of harvest of that welcome unfolding already.

Whatever 2009 may bring, the spiritual force is ignited and ablaze. How fast the spiritual fire spreads is up to us.

In Peace,

White Wing Entertainment

For the Best Spiritual FILMS, BOOKS, AND WEBSITES of 2008 see the Appendix.

The White Wing Report is prepared annually by
White Wing Entertainment, LLC, to enlighten and inspire.
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APPENDIX

BEST SPIRITUAL FILMS of 2008

Last year another festival was added to the growing number of new Spiritual Film Festivals. The European Spiritual Film Festival is dedicated to featuring films that focus on the theme of global spirituality, allowing “the public a platform for vast discovery, understanding, and respect. By spirituality, we mean all things that touch upon the life of our minds,” said founder Marc-Olivier Louveau. “There were few festivals based on spirituality such as Sun Valley, Tokyo, Tel Aviv, Sau Paolo, New York and a festival in Tehran. I realized there was no equivalent in Europe and that it was void that had to be filled. We are one of the oldest continents in the world with numerous religions, beliefs, philosophies, mythologies and practices..., and we had no film festival with competing films dedicated to spirituality.”

This fledging festival in its second year, encourages an emerging generation of filmmakers whose films treat different aspects of spirituality and the human experience. Founder Louveau said that this year twice as many films were entered, not only features and documentaries, but shorts and animations. For Louveau, the best spiritual film he saw in 2008 was *Red Belt*, a film about the practice and principles of Martial Arts. Louveau said, “It lets us stand at the end, taller, more aware. We feel a beautiful emotion.”

While no film was consistently chosen in all the above spiritual film festivals as the top spiritual film of 2008, several films made splendid showings, including *Blindsight*, *The Kite Runner* and *Beyond the Call*. The film, *Away From Her* starring Julie Christie, the story about holding on to love through the pain of Alzheimer’s, received stunning praise wherever it was shown.

Blindsight is a breathtaking film about the story of six blind Tibetan teenagers who set out to climb the highest mountain on earth – Everest.

The Kite Runner, directed by Marc Forster, is the story of Amir, who as a young boy from Afghanistan betrayed the trust of his young friend Hassan. Amir flees the Taliban to return to his homeland now devastated by war to earn back that trust.

Another spiritual film festival, The Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival started by Dr. Mary Gervase states that “A spiritual film or documentary is defined as one that cherishes the human spirit/and or explores one or more spiritual traditions around the world. Each filmmaker will be free to how they want to interpret the term in their film.”

Spiritual films have been showing up in other film festivals as well and they don’t have to be mystical. The comedic documentary, *Purple State of Mind* by Director Craig Detweiler was awarded “Best Spiritual Film” at the 2008 Breckenridge Festival of Film in Colorado. In his acceptance speech, Detweiler concluded with the hope

that audiences will realize, “The concerns that unite are larger than the beliefs that divide us.”

Perhaps the words of critic Sara Shereen Bakhsian said it best, “The best spiritual film has to be one where a universal message resonates with the movie audiences, where if necessary, it transforms from the indie-flick appeal to the mainstream.”

TOP SPIRITUAL SITES ON ALEXA.com FOR 2008

The category "Christianity" leads the tops religious and spiritual sites with 76,512 top sites listed. The next closest listing is Buddhism with 2790 top sites.

Number 1 is www.biblegateway.com with a rank of 1848.

72.9% of the visitors are from the US.

In Buddhism

Number 1 is www.tibetan-buddhism.com

In the Enlightenment category

Number 1 is www.eckhartolle.com with a rating of 109,021.

40.9% of the sites visitors come from the USA.

In the Spirituality category

Number 1 www.sylvia.org with a rating of 306,845.

81% of the sites were visitors coming from the US.

In the Yoga category

Number 1 is www.yogajournal.com with a rank of 32,378.

60% of visitors come from the USA.

The "esoteric and occult" listing has more tops sites ranked (2413) than Buddhism.

BEST SELLING SPIRITUAL BOOKS OF 2008

On Amazon.com listed *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch, a former professor at Carnegie Mellon, ranked number 2 in the nonfiction bestseller category. It was the only "spiritual" book in the top ten on customer picks.

The story is based on Pausch's last lecture, "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" which was about enabling others to achieve their dreams and the precious value of time. Knowing he was dying, Pausch wanted to leave a legacy not only to his students but to his children so that they would know what their father stood for after he was gone. Pausch has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and died July 25, 2008.

Pausch said, "I've dedicated a lot of my teaching to helping young folks realize how they need to be able to work with other people--especially other people who are very different from themselves."

One of the Top Spiritual Heroes of 2008 Dr. Eldon Taylor had a New York Times Best Seller this year, *Choices and Illusions*, although several other Top Spiritual Heroes have had that honor in the past.

The Audacity of Hope by Obama also topped the New York Times bestseller list with several of his other books.

Eat, Pray, Love by Elizabeth Gilbert, a New York journalist, writes a beautifully moving story about her spiritual journey to Rome, India and Bali in a surprisingly candid and revealing manner.

90 Minutes in Heaven is by author Don Piper, who describes the horrific accident he suffered. Being pronounced clinically dead for 90 minutes, Piper describes how that experience of “heaven” has changed his life.

And New York Times bestseller *My Stroke of Insight*: by Jill Bolte Taylor is a fascinating look at a brain scientist’s own journey through the alarming process of experiencing a stroke and being aware of it as a scientist. Taylor says, “I learned that I have much more say about what goes on between my ears than I was ever taught and I believe that this is true for all of us. We can all learn that we can take full responsibility for what thoughts we are thinking and what emotional circuitry we are feeling. Knowing this and acting on this can lead us into feeling a wonderful sense of well-being and peacefulness.”

Fully six of the top ten paperback nonfiction books on the New York Times Bestseller list have “spiritual” themes.

And here in Sedona at the Well Red Coyote, the top bookstore in town, owner Joe Neri lists *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver as the current top spiritual book. But a local author’s book, *Jesus, Krishna, Buddha and Lao Tzu* by Richard Hooper is probably “the best consistent local seller,” according to Neri. The book parallels the teaching of the four great spiritual leaders organized into common topics.

The Sedona Creative Life Center offers the Sedona community access to the top spiritual leaders and thinkers in the world including Amma and Dr. David Hawkins. Director Nancy Spheeris, said that over 400 programs were presented to audiences this year. “As the economy worsens,” Nancy noted, “more people are seeking spiritual programs to help them through this.” Many of the attendees to the larger programs however come from all over the world.

***** END WHITE WING REPORT 2008 *****
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