



a journal of positive futures

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YES! #36, Winter 2006 **Spiritual Uprising**

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

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Atruism of polite American conversation: “Never talk about religion or politics.” In “Spiritual Uprising,” YES! invites you to break both parts of that rule simultaneously.

But the conversational ban is odd—from the anti-slavery and child labor movements of the 19th century to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, churches and synagogues were centers of organizing and activism; religion and politics have been allies or enemies through the ages.

Has religion lost its edge? Are churches now centers at best of apathy, at worst of right-wing reaction? Is organized religion now so sectarian that work across denominations is impossible? Explore with us the emerging idea that spirituality—the awareness of the interconnection of all things—is the key to reawakening the activist role of religion and to providing fuel for social change. Our stories of “spiritual uprising” are from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Native American practice. These stories say that beneath the doctrinal differences among these religions lie shared essential beliefs: the unity of humanity and the world, and the compassion that necessarily arises from an awareness of that unity.

The Stranger at the Door

Every Christmas, Mexican and U.S. Hispanic communities re-enact the story of Mary and Joseph’s search for *posada*—room at the inn. The ritual, called *Las Posadas*, is a reminder that biblical tradition makes offering hospitality to strangers a moral imperative. Emphasizing that tradition may explain why the Hispanic community has low rates of homelessness.

- Have you ever needed to ask a stranger for help—even something as simple as asking for directions? How did that feel?

- Have you ever helped a stranger—even with something as simple as directions? How did that feel?
- The article's author says, "The stranger seems to portend danger. If you have helped a stranger, how did you feel when the person approached you? Were you on guard, or were you comfortable?"
- What gets in the way of offering help? Describe the stranger you are most likely to help; the one you are least likely to.
- Is offering hospitality to strangers an expression of spirituality?

I Stand with You against the Disorder

Does the way we talk about the world change the way we see and think about the world? This meditation on the language and worldview of the Okanagan people says it does. A language that uses the same word to mean "our place on the land" and "our language" is expressing different core values than English. The author explains how the land, the language, and the people are woven together to create a community which breaks down if any of those strands is injured.

- Does the explanation of the way the Okanagan talk about themselves add to your understanding of their worldview? If so, how?
- What is your reaction to the phrase "people without hearts?" Do you think it accurately describes an aspect of American culture?
- The author says, "family is subverted by the scattering of members over the face of the globe. I cannot imagine how this could be family, and I ask what replaces it if the generations do not anchor to each other." If your family is geographically scattered, how do you answer that question?
- This is an article discussing language and the definitions of words. Does it belong in a group of articles about "spiritual uprising?"

The Prophets vs. Empire

A central component of Jewish and Christian tradition is resistance to empire. The story of Joseph, who went from prisoner in Egypt to architect of the enslavement of Pharaoh's subjects, stands as a warning against the seductive power of empire. The tradition of the Jubilee—a Sabbath day of rest; rest of the land every seven years; and forgiveness of debt, freeing of slaves, and return of land to original owners every 50 years—is a model of a just economy set free from imperial ambition. Is it time for Americans to build a culture that rejects empire and adopts the principles of the Jubilee?

- Does the vision of the world in this article seem possible to you, or is it just a pleasant dream? What parts seem easy to you? What parts seem impossible?
- According to the author we live inside an empire, and empire "plunders the commonwealth of the people while protecting the wealth of the elite, with religion going along for the ride." He says, "We have chosen ... a path of domination rather than justice." Does that "we" include you? What aspects of empire do you see in our society? What characteristics don't apply?
- The author lists some ways a "parallel culture" would be different from the culture of empire, including debt relief instead of military spending, use of alternative energy, small-scale organic farming, and support of community development banks. He says we need to take "simple steps into the world we want." What "simple steps" have you taken, or do you plan to take in the near future?



Java Justice

Members of three great faith traditions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—live in the Mbale region of Uganda, where coffee farming is the principal industry. Traditionally, they’ve kept to themselves; interfaith cooperation was rare. That changed after the 1999 coffee-price collapse threatened the livelihood of everyone, without respect to religious beliefs. A Jewish coffee farmer went door to door, and brought 400 farmers together to form the Mirembe Kawomera (“delicious peace”) cooperative to market their fair-trade coffee. Their common economic need led them to an understanding that—even in their faith—what unites them is stronger than what kept them apart.

- What in the world does fairly traded coffee have to do with spiritual activism?
- It took a financial crisis to break down traditional walls between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim coffee growers. Do you think that this sort of cooperation can happen without crisis?
- The kind of sectarianism that existed in the Mbale region hinders cooperation in many parts of the world. Have you ever been in a situation where religious differences prevented cooperation between people who otherwise had common interests?

What are you doing?

Send us stories of what you’re doing to change the world for the better. We’ll publish selected stories in YES!. E-mail stories of up to 500 words to: Editors@yesmagazine.org.

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