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## Center Studies Possible Spirituality Beyond the Senses

Maine Perspective

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# Center Studies Possible Spirituality Beyond the Senses

It's in an artist's inspiration and in the feeling one gets looking at a spectacular sunset. It can be found in dreams, premonitions, unexplained coincidences - even near-death experiences.

There is a spirituality that pervades these feelings or experiences that can not be explained by modern sciences, and therefore is often dismissed. Yet all of us at some time or other have experienced some form of this spirituality - even if it's in the form of overwhelming love for something or someone. And some people, conscious that there may be something existing far beyond the scope of our five senses, are trying to understand it and become more conscious of it.

It's the recognition of the possibility that there may be a spiritual force beyond the realm of the human senses that has brought groups together throughout the country to share and explore its ramifications. Three years ago, a Center for Noetic Studies was established in the area, and now meets regularly on the University of Maine campus in an effort to create a forum for this exploration of topics including Zen Buddhism, Western mysticism, holistic healing, yoga and meditation.

"Great sages and philosophers have been telling us throughout the ages that a oneness underlies all of reality," according to Kyriacos Markides, University of Maine professor of sociology and one of the founders of the Center for Noetic Studies. "They have been telling us that what is experienced by the senses is only one part of reality. Mystical experiences are frequently dismissed as subjective or figments of the imagination. Western science claims that what is real is based only on the senses.

"The Center provides a forum to explore these other dimensions of experience."

Interest in establishing such a Center, patterned after the Institute for Noetic Sciences in California, grew after Markides wrote the first two books - The Magus of Strovolos: The Extraordinary World of a Spiritual Healer and Homage to the Sun: The Wisdom of the Magus of Strovolos - in a trilogy about Cypriot healers and clairvoyants. (The third book in the trilogy, Fire in the Heart:

Healers, Sages and Mystics has just been released.) For almost a decade, Markides has conducted research in Cyprus as a participant observer in the circles of these healers whose teachings for many serve as a guide for spiritual evolution and healing. After the publication of his books, Markides was contacted by people in the area interested in pursuing these matters.

"People called asking for ways they could explore their experiences," Markides said. "From that we realized there was a need in the area for a Center to explore these experiences not dealt with through ordinary channels - a combination of academic and non-academic people interested in bringing these ideas to the forefront of investigation. We create a safe environment to explore them."

While spirituality takes on many forms, and the Center is a forum for exploration of its many facets, it is focused only on "positive, non-destructive spirituality," Center organizers said. It does not address the one area of spirituality that has received increased attention in recent years - the occult.

"For years, modern culture has embarked on a project to bring the natural order under control of the human will," according to Jim Hunter, a social worker with Community Health and Counseling Services in Lincoln and president of the Center for Noetic Studies. "We have attempted to deny the existence of that which does not conform to such control.

"It's because of this presupposition of culture that many people are afraid to share their experiences that don't fit in conventional thinking for fear of being thought of as abnormal," Hunter said. "The Center facilitates open communication about what can and can't be considered real. Noetic Studies is not looking for the bizarre experience but the broader understanding of ordinary experiences - experiences shared by the vast majority of humanity."

Through the years, people have lost their sensitivity to such experiences as unexplained coincidences, premonitions or a mystical sense of being at one with the universe, according to Susan Greenwood, UM sociology instructor and Center member. "Peak experiences have been with us for a long time but they are not always recognized," she said. "Central to many people's private experiences are feelings of overwhelming compassion and love."

Academics and non-academics alike have participated in Center workshops and attended lectures since its establishment. People come for personal growth, for interaction with others who are interested in broadening their understanding of reality, and for exploration of specific topics.

"They come for explanations of what they're feeling and to meet with people who will not look at them with raised eyebrows - people who do not automatically reduce their experiences to chemical reactions," Markides said.

## Highlights of Center for Noetic Studies Fall Conference "Spiritual Attunement: Pathways to Self-Awareness"

**Evening Presentation featuring Guy Frigon of the Mic Mac Tribe**  
7 p.m., Nov. 2

**Workshops on prayer, Zen, yoga, movement, music and drawing**  
9:15 a.m.-4 p.m., Nov. 3

**Vegetarian Buffet Dinner** 5 p.m., Nov. 3

**Sacred Circle Dancing** 6:30 p.m., Nov. 3

For more information, 866-5623 or 866-4291