

New Thought, Spirituality and Science in the 21st Century—Part 1

By Rev. Douglas Kinney, INTA Executive Board Member

Since its beginning in the latter part of the 19th century, the New Thought movement has been in the forefront of an expanding and empowering spirituality. Drawing from an enlightened understanding of Jesus's teachings and the ideas of the transcendental movement, it championed the radical concepts that we are creating our reality from our beliefs and thoughts; that we can heal ourselves and others using affirmative prayer; and that we are all brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of God. Within this heritage, New Thought grew and flourished.

In the latter part of the 20th century, key New Thought concepts—especially the part on the power of beliefs and thought—went “mainstream” and became a central aspect of American and Western culture. A whole “industry” outside of New Thought is writing and lecturing about these concepts and their associated practices to millions.

In one respect New Thought is a “victim” of its successes, and individuals no longer have to be a member of a New Thought community to reap the personal benefits of this enlightened teaching. I think it is fair to say that New Thought needs a “second act.” What might it be? A place to start is to consider the evolution of the world's spiritual, intellectual, and scientific knowledge and culture since the founding of New Thought.

Above, I outlined the spiritual foundations of New Thought. The basic scientific perspective of that early era was provided by Newtonian physics. In the mid and latter part of the 20th century, Einstein's general theory of relativity and quantum mechanics established our outer boundary of basic scientific knowledge. In 21st century, physics is faced with the great mysteries of dark matter and dark energy, and today we don't know the form of over 95 percent of the universe's mass and energy. All of this portends a coming era of “new physics,” of which there are no clear scientific clues.

In the spiritual arena, there was—starting in the mid-1960s—an “explosion” in alternative spiritual concepts and practices being investigated and explored by many in what we call the “New Age” movement. Many participants in the New Age movement found homes in New Thought communities. (This was my journey.)

Now 13 years into the 21st century, the New Thought movement appears to have “stalled out.” The leading edge of Western spirituality is diffused with many spiritually curious individuals exploring alternative sources of information and practices; some examples are:

- Buddhism and Hindu teachings with their emphasis on meditation
- Past-life regression and other sources of reincarnation experiences
- Mediums and psychics providing information from deceased relatives and our spiritual guides
- Channeled sources—claiming to be “highly evolved” spiritual beings and/or teaching groups (for example, the Abraham group)—providing spiritual information and guidance

Today a significant fraction of Americans consider themselves spiritual but not members of any religious denomination. In censuses and polls, they check the “none” category. Dr. John Waterhouse—the President of the Centers for Spiritual Living and the recipient of INTA's 2013 humanitarian award—told the INTA membership in 2013 that he believes New Thought is the best fit for the spiritual “nones.” Our challenge is to make them aware of us and prepare ourselves to attract and accommodate them. It seems clear that this will require changes on our part because if what we

are already doing would meet their needs we would be experiencing a large expansion and not a contraction in participation.

Each era has its own dynamics and character. If we want to be a major force in 21st century spirituality, I see us needing to expand our perspective and recognize as legitimate the many varied spiritual experiences that millions have had. With our long history of successful spiritual practices supporting personal growth and healing, we have the potential to provide a grounded and disciplined structure to today's spiritual "marketplace." One in which the central issue is how to discern and identify which spiritual experiences, concepts, information, and practices we can have confidence in. In essence, we would serve as a spiritual information quality gatekeeper. To some degree, we have always served in this capacity, but today we need to expand the scope of our "umbrella."

I found that there is a new knowledge (or scientific) discipline being born by frontier scientists and investigators that will help in this role. Its researchers include quantum physicists, frontier biologists, mind and consciousness scientists, and scientifically trained investigators of unusual consciousness and spiritual experiences (such as near-death experiences—NDEs). The key characteristic of this new "knowledge discipline" is its systematic and critical examination of new discoveries and experiences. This approach is starting to provide us with levels of confidence on the new consciousness and spiritually related knowledge that points to spirituality being the foundation of physical reality.

I believe that New Thought, as an "open at the top" type spiritual and religious movement, can play a major role in bringing this new knowledge to the general public in an organized and disciplined manner. This includes the spiritual "nones," especially those interested in the deeper aspects and experiences of spirituality. This role is greatly needed because human spirituality as it currently exists is an unorganized and unreliable body of knowledge and practices. As a long-time practicing engineer, I know that it is engineers—applied scientists—who bring new scientific knowledge into application for the benefit of mankind. New Thought ministers, practitioners, chaplains, and teachers can be part of the "applied spiritual knowledge practitioners" bringing this knowledge to the benefit of mankind.

For me this effort starts with providing insight into and answers for three existential questions: What is the nature of the soul, where does it come from, and what happens to it after physical death? Most of the Eastern spiritual teachings use the concept of reincarnation to help answer these questions. New Thought is generally agnostic on reincarnation. For example, in the 1950s, the *New Thought* magazine devoted two issues to debates on this subject between New Thought leaders. At that time there was no consensus. I like how Ernest Holmes ended his arguments with the following: "what I write is merely my own personal opinion, ... so I will set forth some of the reasons why I do not believe in the theory of reincarnation, well knowing, of course, that if the theory is true I cannot change it and if it is not true no one can make it so." Today we have our answer on the reality of reincarnation from:

- Scientific investigations by Dr. Ian Stevenson and others of the phenomenon of children who remember their previous life in detail
- Many recalled past lives that have been largely substantiated
- Results supporting reincarnation from a scientifically designed group regression study with over 1000 subjects
- Dr. Walter Semkiw's research demonstrating how our appearance, personality, and companions are basically the same from one life to the next

- The reincarnation information provided by thousands of subjects in between-lives regression in which we, as souls, experience the spiritual realm (what Christians call heaven)

I document all of these sources and the information and evidence they provide in my new book *Frontiers of Knowledge* (overviews are also provided in *Framework of Reality*). I consider this information part of our spiritual knowledge foundation for the 21st century. It is one we must acknowledge if we are going to provide receptive and useful spiritual homes for the “nones.”

An even more significant body of information on our nonphysical spiritual nature is provided in the thousands of documented NDE cases. Gallup Polls in the United States and Germany found that four to five percent of their populations have experienced aspects of an NDE. Researchers have also found that we don’t have to nearly die to have some of these experiences. NDErs and other individuals with their out-of-body experiences (OBEs) provide strong clues about our basic spiritual nature: an essence that can exist in a nonphysical holographic form separate from our physical body.

Many of the near-death OBEs have been verified by scientifically trained investigators. For example, researchers have verified specific resuscitation details many NDErs described being performed by operating-room personnel. I and others claim that this demonstrates that consciousness is more than the physical brain. We can think of these as the first scientific evidence for the existence of the soul.

Also, the consciousness of many NDErs “traveled” to and experienced what I and others label the spiritual realm (heaven in our Christian religious terminology). Jan Price, the wife of John Randolph Price (a major late 20th century New Thought leader and writer), had very rich experiences in this realm that she documented in her book, *The Other Side of Death*.

In my own research, I have found and documented the similarity of the experiences in rich NDEs with those that subjects experienced in Dr. Michael Newton’s innovative between-lives regression process. Both are providing us with insight into the nature of the spiritual realm and what souls experience in it between earthly incarnations.

All of the above sources and more provide us with insight and, in some cases, answers to our most fundamental existential questions:

1. What is the nature of reality?
2. What happens to us when we die? Is there an eternal soul consciousness that continues on?
3. Is the concept of reincarnation real; and if so, what is the soul’s purpose in having a human life?
4. Is there a spiritual realm (heaven) where souls reside; and if so, what are the characteristics of this realm?
5. What is the nature of God?

In this short article, I have provided information relevant to the first four questions. I end by briefly summarizing the information available on the second part of question 3: what is the soul’s purpose for having a human life. This information is significant because it provides insight into issues that confront humans: why do some of us have very difficult and challenging lives; why are some visited by tragedy; why do some babies die at birth; and why do some have mental and physical handicaps? For the “nones” and ourselves, we need to be able to provide insights and, when possible, explanations.

Many of my sources, especially the between-lives regression findings, are very clear on the soul's purpose of incarnating. Almost all souls choose to incarnate into a physical world because dealing with challenging human conditions provides opportunities for spiritual growth that are not available in the spiritual realm. (A few appear to come with a with a primary service mission.)

The soul has free will and not all souls choose to incarnate in physical realms. They can pursue development through activities in the spiritual realm. Some of these nonincarnating souls are probably members of the large number of soul teaching groups that are being channeled through humans (for example, the Abraham group).

I have outlined a path for how the New Thought community can prepare itself to play a larger role in developing and teaching spiritual concepts and practices relevant to a 21st century spirituality. In two subsequent articles, I will (1) summarize key frontier scientific and spiritual information available today that provides us with an expanded perspective of reality and (2) synthesize and summarize the spiritual and scientific information available on the infinite nature of God (All That Is).