

***Knowing the Facts about Visualization***  
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This eBook is taken from the author's book, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*. Updated 2012.

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### **Info at a Glance**

**Description.** New Age visualization is the use of mental concentration and directed mental imagery in the attempt to secure particular goals, whether physical, psychological, vocational, educational, or spiritual.

**Founder.** Unknown; the practice is ancient.

**How does it claim to work?** Visualization attempts to program the mind to discover inner power and guidance. For example, by using the mind to contact an alleged inner divinity or "higher" self, practitioners claim they can manipulate their personal reality to secure desired goals, such as occult revelations, financial security, health, or improved learning abilities.

**Scientific evaluation.** Scientific research on forms of imagery (not necessarily visualization) has provided some useful insights into brain/mind interaction and the ability of mental processes to affect the mind-body function. Unfortunately, modern science does not always separate legitimate from questionable research. And legitimate research is easily misused when tied to parapsychological and New Age premises or goals.

**Examples of occult potential.** Visualization is often used as a means to, or in conjunction with, altered states of consciousness! It often accompanies occult meditation and is frequently used to develop psychic abilities. It is used in channeling to contact "inner advisors" or spirit guides. It has long been associated with pagan religion and practice such as shamanism and Buddhism. Many human potential and occult New Age seminars, such as The Secret (<http://www.thesecond.com.au/>) and Silva Mind Control (884) employ it.

**Major problems.** New Age visualization assigns the human mind a divine or almost divine status. This not only represents a significant distortion of human nature, but it can also mask spiritistic manipulation of the mind, reconceptualizing this as a natural or divine endeavor.

**Biblical/Christian evaluation.** As an occult practice, New Age visualization is prohibited; but even alleged Christian forms are insufficiently critiqued, of dubious value, or subject to abuse.

**Potential dangers.** Chief hazards include occult influences and problems arising from the denial of reality by overreliance upon one's "divine" mind and its alleged power or "wisdom." For example, in the areas of medicine (physical self-diagnosis), education (e.g., tapping the knowledge of "inner counselors"), and religion (receiving psychic revelations), the process can produce a trust in false data that could result in foolish or harmful decisions.

## Introduction and Influence

The practice of visualization is a directed form of mental imagery and concentration, which is having broad and substantial impact in our culture. It involves the deliberate manipulation of the mind, individually or in conjunction with an assistant, to alter one's consciousness toward a specific goal—often the seeking of some form of secret knowledge or power. What is perhaps the most authoritative general text on the subject states, "If there are two important 'new' concepts in 20th century American life, they are meditation and visualization" (209:XI). "The growth of interest in visualization since the 1960's is part of a new climate of thought in the West. This new climate has manifested in an interest in all forms of imagery, in the experience of Eastern religions and philosophy, in hypnotism, and in hallucinogenic drugs and altered states of consciousness in general" (209:34).

Visualization is prominent in modern humanistic and transpersonal education and is increasingly finding its way into conventional educational curriculum. Jack Canfield is Director of Educational Services for Insight Training Seminars in Santa Monica, California, past president of the Association for Humanistic Education, and consultant to over 150 schools, universities, and mental-health organizations. In "The Inner Classroom: Teaching with Guided Imagery" he asserts:

Guided imagery is a very powerful psychological tool which can be used to achieve a wide variety of educational objectives: enhance self-esteem, expand awareness, facilitate psychological growth and integration, evoke inner wisdom, increase empathy, expand creativity, increase memory, facilitate optimal performance, evoke a more positive attitude, and accelerate the learning of subject matter (2233:27).

New Age visualization claims to work by using the mind to influence reality and one's perceptions. Proponents claim that by properly controlling each person's alleged mental power, they can influence and change a person's ideas, consciousness, or even their physical and spiritual environment. Visualization can supposedly be used to change one's self-image from negative to positive by holding a positive image of oneself in the mind. Visualization may also be used to uncover a claimed "inner divinity" that can allegedly manipulate reality. By creating the proper mental image and environment and then holding it or projecting it outward, practitioners claim they can exercise mental power over every aspect of their lives. (Related practices are used in magic ritual to call on spirits in order to secure such goals (see "Questions and Concerns").

Proponents say proper visualization methods can affect health, finances, educational abilities, relationships, vocation, and even one's destiny. For example, in many Hindu and Buddhist religions, the thought or image one holds at death is believed to powerfully influence one's supposed reincarnation. This is one reason for adopting mental training exercises such as visualization. In the Hare Krishna sect (ISKCON), devotees chant the name of the Hindu god Krishna thousands of times per day to infuse and influence their consciousness so at the point of death their thoughts will have been so conditioned by "Krishna consciousness" that they will immediately be ushered into Krishna's presence. On the other hand, if one is thinking of something like a pig or a worm at death, then one will reincarnate as that (883:52,57).

Because the mind is said to be so powerful and work so dramatically, visualization and imagery practices are being pursued by literally millions of people in America. These practices are having growing impact in diverse fields, from New Age medicine and education, to a variety of occult

practices, to certain schools of psychotherapy such as the Jungian, humanistic, and transpersonal, to human potential seminars. A standard work on visualization comments:

In the last hundred years specialists in different fields have begun to rediscover the existence and meaning of visualization. Historians, religious scholars, archaeologists, physicians, and psychologists have begun to study the nature of the inner image as it relates to their area of specialization. There is no widely accepted overview of visualization at this time. There is only a general striving toward understanding in many fields, from many view points (209:21).

Many scientific journals on visualization have emerged, such as the *Journal of Mental Imagery*. These also document the impact of visualization in psychology, education, the arts and literature, linguistics, mythology, anthropology, sociology, religion, and even thanatology (e.g., 685:1-2). Of course, different forms of visualization exist, with different goals, but even the following brief perusal of its influence shows how widespread the practice has become.