

# Spiritual awareness rising, or more visible

(Editor's note: In this final installment of a series of articles about religion on the UNL Campus, the author examines some of the motivation behind religious expression in society, 1974.)

By Rebecca Brite

In the '60s, movements arose which purported to combat society's ills—civil rights and antiwar, marches to Selma, Ala., and Washington, D.C.

The movements of the '70s, however, seem characterized by a different feeling. Encounter groups and sensitivity training explore behavior and motivation. Communes leave cities for the country and the cry is "back to nature."

For the past few weeks the Daily Nebraskan has interviewed campus ministers, students and others in an effort to examine current thought about religion and mysticism at UNL.

By far the majority of persons interviewed agreed that, if interest in and awareness of the spiritual is not actually rising, at least religious or mystical behavior is becoming more visible. And everyone agreed there has been a trend away from social action, toward inner search.

A recurring question throughout the interviews has been, "Why?" What in the middle '70s has produced this apparent change in so many people's approaches to life?

In interviews Monday some possible answers to this question were given by a social scientist and a theologian whose special interests include observing human reaction to spiritual experiences.

Rayma Shrader has a master's degree in anthropology and is an instructor with the UNL Extension Division.

For her thesis she attempted to draw a parallel between religious movements historically in other cultures, and present Western interest in mysticism and the occult.

Shrader said when a society as a whole feels its existence to be threatened, "revitalistic" religious movements almost invariably will rise.

These movements, she said, often are characterized by the emergence of Messiah-like leaders, "ecstatic" behavior (speaking in tongues, trance states, frenzied dancing) and a belief that dead ancestors will return, bringing with them the old ways and a better life.

Shrader said such movements are especially prevalent when a native culture comes in contact with a white colonial power. She cited the Ghost Dance of the late 1800s, when thousands of Plains Indians believed their ancestors would rise to aid them in overthrowing the white settlers.

Revitalistic movements exhibit the same characteristics from culture to culture, in every time and place, she said. She believes that the rapid changes and shifting values to today's society have brought about such a movement.

Modern Pentecostal religion, including trance states and speaking in tongues, current music and dancing styles, the appearance and acceptance of world religious leaders and even the nostalgia craze all may be symptoms of a new Western revitalism, she said; a reaction to stress and frustration.

Religion in the '70s also may stem from societal despair, according to Keith Stephenson, a Biblical scholar and historical theologian who is a professor at the Nebraska School of Religion.

"All religious experience begins, generally, with the realization that things are not as they should be,"

Stephenson said, "and humans usually react one of two ways to this realization.

"Either the power of the realization is turned against things as they are, in order to make them as they ought to be, or that power is turned to the person's inner self, and enables him to live with things as they are, in spite of them."

Stephenson said that, in the '60s, religious reaction was largely the first type. Social action movements were an attempt to make things as they ought to be, and thus were a form of religious expression.

In the '70s, he said, religious reaction has switched to the second type, and takes the form of drawing into personal emotions and "psychic needs."

Stephenson proposed that the switch may be due to "a loss of balance between necessities and possibilities.

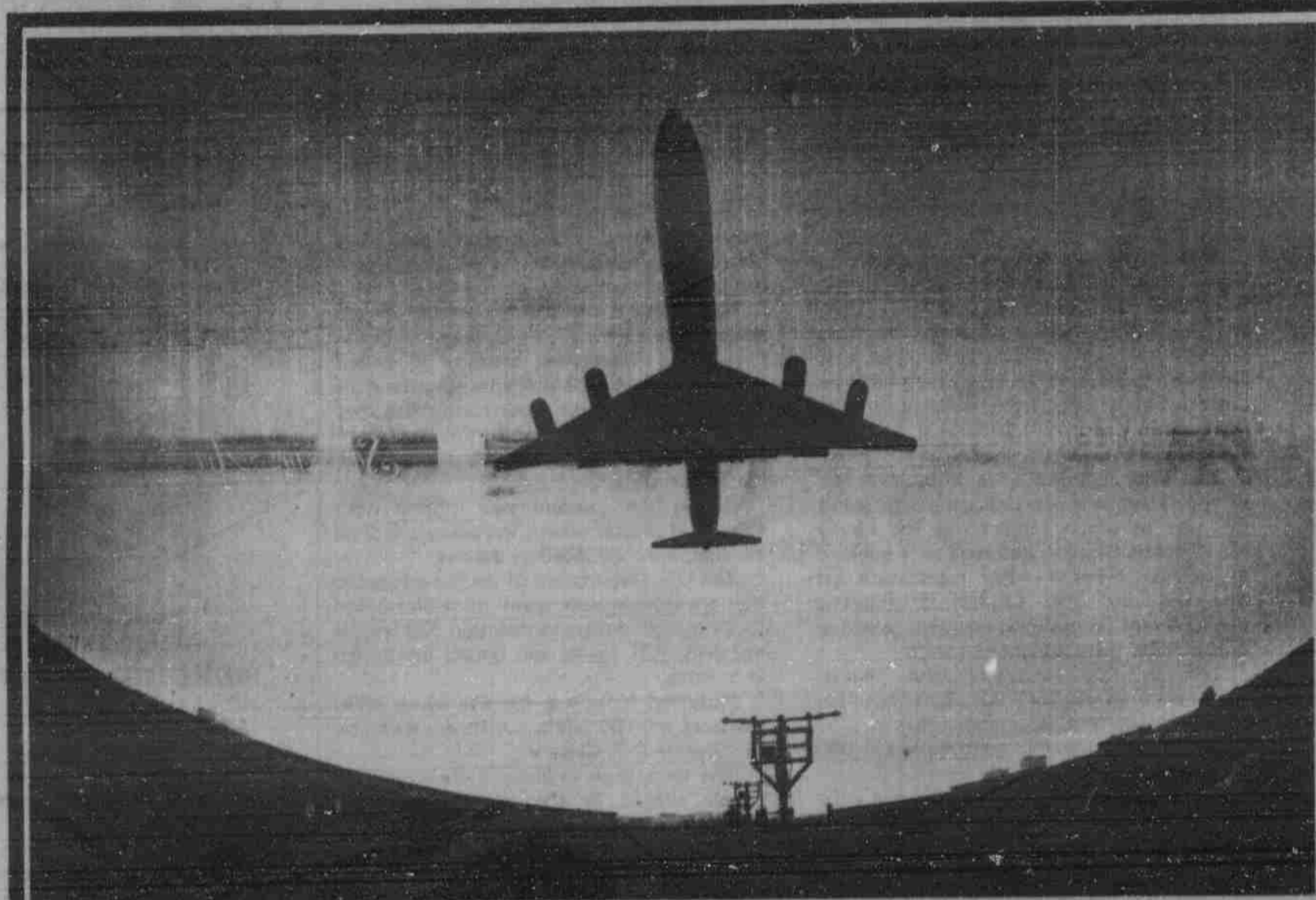
"In other words, people in the '60s saw what needed to be done, and they felt themselves capable of doing it," he said. "But now we are deluged with things needing change, or perhaps we have become more aware of our own limitations.

"Kierkegaard (a Danish theologian) said that, when this balance is lost, despair results," he said.

Stephenson summed up his thoughts by saying that there seem to be two general ways "for people to make sense of life.

"The first is to deal through the data of life, to be concerned strictly with the human processes," he said.

"That was how we worked in the '60s, but the '70s have brought despair, and we have given up trying to make sense of the human processes. We are now just trying to make sense of ourselves.



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## calendar

### Wednesday

7:30 a.m.—Student Affairs-Nebraska Union  
9 a.m.—Student Affairs staff-Union  
9 a.m.—Mini University No. 8 "The Freshman Year"-Union  
11 a.m.—Mini University No. 9 "The Evaluation Process"-Union  
11:30 a.m.—Endicott School-Union  
11:30 a.m.—Women's Action Group Film-Union  
12 p.m.—Student Affairs luncheon-Union  
12:30 p.m.—CSL Fees and Fines Committee-Union  
1:30 p.m.—Student Development staff-Union  
3:30 p.m.—Student Affairs-Union  
4 p.m.—Builders Buzz books-Union  
4 p.m.—Chi Epsilon-Union  
4:30 p.m.—Fees Allocation Board-Union  
5:30 p.m.—Engineering Toastmasters-Union  
5:30 p.m.—Gamma Lambda-Union  
5:30 p.m.—Mortar Board-Union  
6 p.m.—Student Affairs dinner-Union  
6:30 p.m.—UNL Band dinner-dance-Union  
6:30 p.m.—ASUN Senate meeting-Union  
7 p.m.—Free University "Why are we in Vietnam?"-Union  
7 p.m.—Interfraternity Council-Union  
7 p.m.—Student Veterans Assoc.-Union  
7:30 p.m.—Recreation Department Sports Clubs-Union  
7:30 p.m.—Free University "The Bahai Faith"-Union  
7:30 p.m.—math counselors-Union  
7:30 p.m.—UNL Wildlife Club-Union  
7:30 p.m.—Modern Language Department career planning-Union  
8 p.m.—Sigma Delta Chi-Union  
8:45 p.m.—Nebraska Union Board-Union

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