

At A Glance: Altered States of Consciousness

(excerpted from *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*,
John Ankerberg, John Weldon, Harvest House, 1996)

Description: Altered states of consciousness (ASCs) in a New Age context comprise unusual conditions of perception achieved by the deliberate cultivation of often abnormal mental states, states not normally experienced apart from specific religious techniques and/or occult programs.

Founder: Not applicable.

How does it claim to work? Most New Age practices or techniques (e.g. yoga, meditation, crystal work), and New Age supernatural experiences (e.g. channeling) generally claim to trigger or induce ASCs by stilling the mind, regulating psychic energy, or by voluntary spirit possession. Proponents believe these altered states of consciousness produce a “higher” and/or monistic state of consciousness or “being” (e.g. the perception that “all is one”) leading to dramatic spiritual revelations and a positive restructuring of the participant’s worldview.

Scientific evaluation: Science cannot evaluate subjective claims concerning any state of consciousness and ASCs in particular are highly subjective. Research into altered states generally includes a mixture of the scientific investigation of normal, marginally altered consciousness (the sleep-state, dreams) and occult and parapsychological exploration of mystical, occult states.

Examples of occult potential: Spirit contact or possession; development of psychic abilities; conversion to occultism; psychic quickening or regeneration.

Major problems: Frequent connection to occult practices; dramatic alterations in one’s worldview which often insulate a person against biblical truth.

Biblical/Christian evaluation: New Age ASCs are prohibited on the basis of their occult alliances.

Potential dangers: Mental illness, occult bondage, spirit possession.

