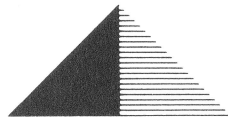
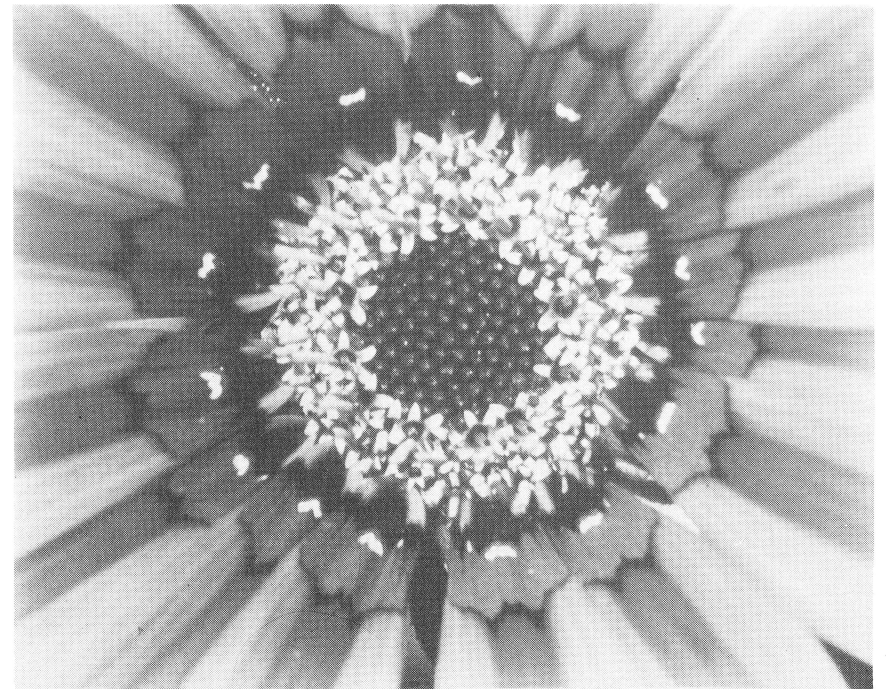


# **RADIANCE**

The Experience of Light



PYRAMID FILMS Box 1048 Santa Monica, CA 90406 (213) 390-FILM

***Discussion Leader's Guide***

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## The Film

Dorothy Fadiman, the writer/director of **RADIANCE**, had an inner experience of dazzling light. She realized that the “light” of saints and mystics may not just be a metaphor. Perhaps, it was an actual energy. She decided to find a way to explore and share this insight. Her career had been one of communication through freelance writing, leading workshops, and as an exhibiting artist. In 1976, she and Michael Wiese, the producer, co-created a slide presentation titled **Do Saints Really Glow?** which communicated the power of illumination to awaken awareness. The following year, work began on a film based on the slide presentation. The film captures the essence of the original experience with its new title, **RADIANCE: The Experience of Light**. Featured in the film are the cinematography and editing of John V. Fante and the photography of Steven Mangold and Barry Brukoff, and the paintings of Jeanette Stobie. The film offers an array of nature footage, religious art, video images, kinetic mandalas, and a narration track which leads magnetically from the personal to the universal.

**\* As an Art Film, it is unique and elegant . . .** The film can be viewed as a visual poem, with the narration and music weaving a lyric tapestry.

**\* As a Dramatic Moment, it is deeply moving . . .** The film can be viewed as a journey through a range of feelings, from contemplation through passion, after which one is safely brought to shore.

**\* As a Documentary, it is informative and intriguing . . .** The film can be viewed as an inquiry into realms of human potential which are uncharted.

## Suggestions For Viewing

1. Make the room dark. Some of the visual effects are subtle, so we suggest blacking out as much ambient light as possible.
2. No discussion before viewing the film. A few introductory remarks followed by a moment of silence, with eyes closed will provide a receptive atmosphere.
3. Allow a time of quiet, a few moments of silence to follow the film to allow people to reflect. Then invite people to share their own experience.

## SUBJECT AREAS INTRODUCED IN THE FILM

When *RADIANCE* is viewed as a documentary, we suggest the following topics for discussion.

**RADIANCE stimulates questions about energy in the body.** It is crucial to be stimulated and challenged. Not only can we conceive of the possible, but consider the unheard of, the ridiculous, the wonderful mysterious questions of the unknown. In *RADIANCE* we proceed from the known to the unproven in sequences that flow visually, and open speculation without demanding any belief. By making fresh connections, new relationships can unfold, and new, exciting questions take shape.

**The Inner Experience of Light.** The concepts presented in this film will be inspiring to some, challenging to others, and simply affirming to people who already feel aligned with certain experience of light. To the filmmaker, the original experience of being filled with brilliant energy was vivid. But was it real?

That question opens many doors.

The experience of inner light is unquestionably real to the people who see it. For those who have

only read or heard about luminous states, this light is often treated as an illusion or hallucination occurring during a period of high suggestibility. Recent scientific studies are beginning to provide evidence that certain mystical visions may not just be symbolic.

It's a provocative phenomenon. Some see it, some don't! For those who do, the whole world sparkles like diamonds, light floods the body, some see a radiant messenger.

**Universality of Light.** Whether treated as a metaphor or an actual physical reality, brilliant light *is* associated with intense spiritual events. Aldous Huxley, a lifetime student of consciousness, reviewed a number of visionary experiences. He concluded that light is *the* most common factor. Mircea Eliade, from the perspective of comparative religion, and Maurice Bucke, in his classic, *Cosmic Consciousness*, both find, as did Huxley, that light is one of the major factors in almost every mystical encounter. Illumination appears universally, whether the experience is spontaneous, from a psychedelic drug, or during meditation, chanting, dancing, fasting, etc.

Light is also a recurrent theme in religious ceremonies and rituals throughout the world.

**Holy People and Spiritual Exercises.** Certain Eskimo Indians link the key step in a holy man's initiation with the presence of a mysterious light which the shaman can feel in his body. Thousands of miles away, Australian medicine men are initiated by a mythic magician whose eyes are said to shine with light. He sprinkles the candidates with sacred water, described as liquefied quartz, their bodies then become filled with crystals, manifestations of celestial light. Not only for the shamans and holy people, religious guidance for any individual who seeks God-experience may involve working with light. Actualism, a contemporary Western system, teaches people to direct light through their bodies from a radiant star visualization above the head. The desired effect is a release of physical tension and elevation of spirit. From the Indian, *Rig Veda*, discovering "the god of gods" is attained by contemplating "Very High Light." A Chinese source, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, describes a method of meditation, "circulation of the light," which leads to conscious realization of the light of heaven which then blazes forth from within. With few exceptions, when saints and holy people have been described or painted, they are emanating an aura of light. Christ, Buddha, and Moses are among those

who have been described as visibly radiant.

In Western philosophy, the theme of light linked with divinity is not well recognized, but is definitely present in the works of thinkers like Plato, Plotinus, Paracelsus, Goethe, and Descartes. There are hundreds of cross-cultural examples of spiritual light, but the link between enlightenment and physical light has stood virtually unexplored until recently.

**Recording and Measuring Energy.** The possibility of observing and understanding human energy systems is a subject of growing interest. We are now finding out that the metaphysical concept of an energy body may refer to a measurable phenomena. There are several methods of recording energy fields around bodies. One of these Kirlian photography, is based on producing photographs from the interaction of high frequency currents with matter. With Kirlian photography we may have a scientific way to measure changes in this "energy field" which some systems have referred to as the "aura."

The results are controversial. Some of the color effects have been shown to be an artifact of the film, and there is a question about the extent to which moisture affects the results. It remains, however, that the

patterns of radiant emission which the photographs show are at least reflections of the changes a body goes through. According to the research of Thelma Moss at U.C.L.A., the energy surrounding the object (e.g., a fingertip) is recorded by the photographic film. The visual image thereby produced has been shown to contract, expand, or even send out flares, depending on the physiological and/or emotional state of the subject.

Another kind of measurement being done involves the detection of direct-current electrical characteristics at the acupuncture points. Russian research has shown that the eyes emanate a measurable radiation.

**Energy Input.** Not only are we establishing the validity of energy emanating from the body, but also the extent to which energy input affects the organism. Several years ago, it was shown that energy applied to an amputated stump caused a rat to partially regrow its limb. Energy input affects mental states as well. Several studies show that psychiatric hospital admissions correlate with changes in the earth's magnetic field, stages of the moon, and solar flares.

Many cultures have accepted the body as a vibrant organism which has measurable, chartable, changeable patterns. Much Eastern medicine is based on diagnoses and treatment in

relation to these patterns. East Indian, Arabic, Tibetan, and Oriental countries have archives full of medical charts showing various patterns of energy flowing through the body. Western medicine is hesitant to accept these ideas, but curious. Experimental acupuncture programs are appearing in selected settings, like alternative holistic centers, which are being created throughout the United States.

It is crucial to be stimulated and challenged. Not only can we conceive of the possible, but consider the unheard of, the ridiculous, the wonderful mysterious questions of the unknown. In *Radiance* we proceed from the known to the unproven in sequences that flow visually, and open speculation without demanding any belief. By making unlikely connections, new relationships are suggested, and new, exciting questions take shape.

## Religion

When *Radiance* was shown for the first time to an art history class, the professor pointed out that it was a living icon. To the extent that this work communicates the energy of the author's original experience, we have an actual phenomenon. A popular understanding of "icon" is simply a symbolic likeness of a religious figure or scene.

However, the metaphysics of iconography reveal that the object itself has the power to communicate energy.

Not only does *Radiance* provide an opportunity to share in the expression of a spiritual experience, it also invites an exploration of "holy light" from several perspectives: that holy light and everyday light are not separate forces, but connected on a continuum; that holy light exists universally, from ancient rites to sophisticated theologies; that holy light is not limited to the experiences and appearances of saints and mystics.

## Exercises

**Communicating Religious Experience.** This film is an artistic statement of a religious experience. Think about your own moments of connectedness with the universe. Write a poem, a descriptive paragraph, or draw a picture which communicates the feeling of one of those moments. Perhaps a series will work even better for you. Continue until you feel satisfied. Share with others in the group.

**Linking Light With Divinity.** Light appears in conjunction with Divinity in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the Koran, and Kabbalah, the

Upanishads, the Teachings of the Buddha - essentially every major religion incorporates that link.

Choose a source of religious teaching. Give examples of the "light" - descriptive, explanatory, naming of God(s), metaphors, prayers, etc., as it appears in these writings.

**Physical Light.** Discuss some of the ways physical light (fire, candles, sunlight, shiny gold, etc.) is used in religious ceremonies. Give specific examples.

**Halos.** What do you think a halo actually is? An artist's interpretation? a symbol? an actual observed radiance? Discuss different types of halos - mandala, nimbus, aureole, etc.

**Sun Worship.** The sun was worshipped in Egypt for centuries as one of many Gods. However, under the reign of Akhanaten, a unique dimension of sun worship evolved. Discuss this particular period.

There are many sun gods. Select two from different times and geographical locations. Discuss their functions for the people who worshipped them.

**The Power of Prayer on Plants.** Recent research has proven, and been replicated, that positive attention stimulates plant growth. One of the descriptions of the

work is "the power of prayer on plants." (See *The Secret Life of Plants*, by Chris Bird and Peter Tompkins.)

Set up an experiment: take two boxes of seeds or seedlings. Give equal water, nutrients, and light to both boxes. Praise, admire, and love one group. Simply care physically for the others. Notice the results. If there is a difference in the two groups at the end of several weeks, what inferences can be drawn?

## Some Helpful Readings

Bucke, Richard. *Cosmic Consciousness*.

Descriptive discussion of individuals who had classic transcendental experiences, many with an experience of light. Causeway Books, New York, 1900, 326pp.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Two and the One*.

Scholarly discussion of the mystic light with many examples from worldwide cultures. Harper & Row, New York, 1962, 223 pp.

Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. Exposition of the one essential Reality, and its many forms. Harper & Row, New York, 1944, 306pp.

James William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The classic text for understanding higher states of consciousness. McMillan Co., New York, 1961, 416 pp.

Needleman, Jacob. *The New Religions*. (See NEW AGE CULTURE/ALTERNATIVE FUTURES.)

Tompkins, Peter and Chris Bird. *The Secret Life of Plants*. Comprehensive account of recent research, including plant communication and plant responses to the stimuli of human consciousness. Avon, New York, 1973, 402 pp.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*. What mysticism is and has to offer the average person. Dutton & Co., New York, 1915, 169 pp.

White, J. *The Highest State of Consciousness*. Essays of many thinkers on religious, mystical experience. Doubleday & Co., New York, 1972, 484 pp.

## New Age Culture

Through a visual, musical and narrative portrayal of ideas, we can experience a film which captures the spirit of its generation. What are some of the philosophical elements which mark the New Age Culture?

### Exercises

#### Community Consciousness.

*Radiance* was spawned from the Bay Area community of artists with contributions of talent from more than fifty people, living within a forty-five mile radius.

Among New Age craftspeople, there is a growing willingness to cooperate, with

many artists working on each other's projects. By setting aside a special day, one can experience a sense of this community interchange.

#### *Exchange/Work/Creation*

*Day:* Choose a friend to work with. Schedule a day, one person taking the morning, the other, the after- noon. Each select a project which can be worked on for 3 hours. De- vote half a day at each house to each project. Concentrate on giving full attention to your friend's and to your own project. Share a potluck lunch.

How did that feel? Note the range of feelings during the entire day - pleasure, resistance, satisfaction, frustration, pride, etc.

#### **Increase in Religious Interest.**

We are in a time of religious revival. *Radiance* celebrates this breadth of interest without favoring any one religion. It affirms the light of every faith. This eclecticism is a New Age statement about the consciousness of energy emerging in all of these movements.

Select two religious/spiritual groups, one in which membership has declined in the last 20 years, one in which it has risen. Contrast and compare.

**Art of the Electronic Age.** This film was created in an age of electronic magic. The special

effects are the work of many individual wizards. For example: the subtle impression of pictures dissolving into one another, the end titles superimposed over blue laser imagery. The body, sitting in a lotus position, which fills with sparkling light, is a highly developed form of electronic technique using video. The kinetic mandalas utilize sophisticated light show projection equipment, color wheels and prismatic lenses.

How has the increase in electronic media affected our arts? Enumerate things we've gained or lost with examples.

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**The Influence of the 60s.** This is the post-psychedelic, post-encounter marathon, post-campus radical, post-war resisting, post-Beatlemanic generation. Though no longer being shaped by those particular forces, we do have a political, philosophical, musical, moral inheritance from the 60s.

What connections or outgrowths do you see from the 60s into the 70s?