A Seeker's High Profile Draws Fire
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"I'm not the leader of this movement," insists Shirley MacLaine. "I'm not a high priestess of New Age concepts. I'm just a human being trying to find some answers about where we came from and where we're going."

Shirley MacLaine is holding up pretty well-considering. No one else is in her unique position. As an Academy Award winning actress, a highly talented dancer/entertainer and now a metaphysical author/lecturer, she has entered the limelight from several angles, and her high visibility makes her every word known. With this influence and her current spiritual aspiration, she is lending strong credence to a recently-popular but not-so-new movement called the New Age. But it's costing a price in more than money.

What is the price? And who's paying? Detractors claim that with her expensive seminars, she is taking advantage of vulnerable and sincere people to get rich. Advocates say MacLaine is the one that pays as she endures the harsh criticism (primarily centered around the price of her seminars) from those who-in the face of materialistic priorities-are cynical of concepts like karma, reincarnation, inner plane beings and the "Higher Self."

"For flocks of educated people to cough up $300 each for two long days in a drafty hotel ballroom to explore their inner beings-with no prospect of making any money-well, this I had to see," writes Marlys Harris in a recent article for Money magazine.

MacLaine is undaunted. In anticipation of an interview for TIME magazine in which she appeared on the cover, she said, "I think the thrust of this article [TIME, December 7, 1987], aside from bemused sarcasm, is going to be that a lot of people are getting rich on all this. I think journalists investigating belief in the

unseen have to adjust the way they are judging the issue of materialism in relation to spirituality. Anything you want to learn costs money."

The New Age, with which MacLaine has been so closely associated, is very difficult to define. It's certainly not new. It's been around for decades-at least since the early '60s. No one seems to know exactly where the term, "New Age," came from, but many of its associated elements like faith healing, fortune telling and channeling go back centuries, and at least a portion of its fundamental belief structure-including concepts of karma, reincarnation and the inherent divinity of man-is Vedic Hindu wisdom. It's criticized as a farce by one writer and acclaimed as a fundamental reawakening of ancient knowledge by the next. Yet, in the world of commerce, big corporations will pay $15,000 for a four-day seminar to have their staff learn "holistic systemic thinking."

Today, MacLaine is making another movie. She's also writing a new book. Life goes on.