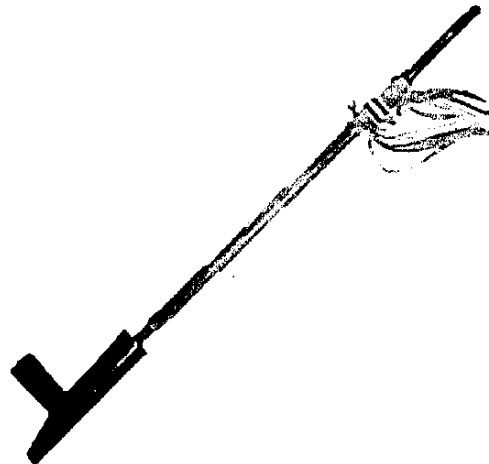


COURSE PACKET

REL 110: THE NATURE OF RELIGION

Professor Constantina Rhodes

Hunter College



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The Earth Spirit: its Ways, Shrines and Mysteries

The first men, by all traditional accounts, lived in perfect harmony with nature and the gods. Of their own accord, said Ovid, without the compulsion of law, they were honest and true. There was no punishment or fear, no judges or soldiers. 'The earth itself gave all things spontaneously, and men were content with its uncultivated produce.' Plato in his *Laws* refers to Hesiod's myth of the age of Cronus, when 'all that life requires was provided unasked and in abundance', the reason being that the men of that time were ruled not by other men but by spirits, these corresponding to the eternal element in human nature. The men of the age of Cronus were wanderers, living under the direct guidance and protection of the earth spirit, following the migratory paths of their ancestors, vitally concerned with the cycles of animal and plant life, the progress of the seasons, the movements of the heavenly bodies. Perambulating each year the wide range of their native territory, they traced the steps of the gods who first created it, thus living out a cosmogony in which every spot, every feature of the landscape had its mythical significance, reflected in the activities that took place there. Time was cyclical, not linear; creation was a continuous process, and the spirits that promoted it were ubiquitous and eternal.

From each station on the year's journey the sun and moon were seen rising and setting at certain positions on the horizon, and the same configurations of the stars were observed, constant for many lifetimes and only varying, like the people's habits, in the course of astronomical ages. So it was that every place became associated with a

day of the year and a plan of the heavenly bodies. On that day, marked by the rise of a familiar star, the local deities were active, speaking to the people in their dreams and intuitions and providing fruits of the earth appropriate to the season. This was the style of the golden age, when men lived in the paradisaical garden for which they were designed, as intimate with the vital spirit of the earth as was Adam with his Creator, yet no more concerned with religion, spirituality and formal ritual than they were with science, philosophy, usury or political economy. The earth was sacred, not because pious people chose so to regard it, but because it was in fact ruled by spirit, by the creative powers of the universe, manifest in all the phenomena of nature, shaping the features of the landscape, regulating the seasons, the cycles of fertility, the lives of animals and men. In this secure, immortal world the most assured reality was communication with the local gods, personifying aspects of the universal spirit of the earth. Rocks, trees, mountains, wells and springs were recognized as receptacles for spirit, displaying in season their various properties, fertilizing, therapeutic and oracular. The ancients, as Socrates remarked, had no pretensions to cleverness and were quite prepared to listen to a rock or oak tree if only it spoke the truth.

Before civilization sets in, the earth is the one universal deity; not the material earth, but the spirit by virtue of which, according to the ancient philosophers, it is a living creature: a female, because it receives the power of the sun, is animated thereby and made fertile. The body of the earth, like the body of a man, is corruptible and subject to change, but its spirit is unchanging, and therefore the essential nature of this planetary being is spiritual; indeed, Porphyry states that the physical earth is merely a symbol of the earth as it really is. The orthodox view that survived into the middle ages from prehistoric times is expressed by the alchemist Basilus Valentinus: 'The earth is not a dead body, but is inhabited by a spirit that is its life and soul. All created things, minerals included, draw their strength from the earth spirit. This spirit is life, it is nourished by the stars, and it gives nourishment to all the living things it shelters in its womb. Through the spirit received from on high, the earth hatches the minerals in her womb as the mother her unborn child.' Man in his natural state, enjoying the abundance of the virgin earth, considers any proposal to violate it, or to modify in any way its superficial appearance, to be sacrilegious as well as superfluous; in token of which is the dignified protest by the American Indian prophet, Smohalla, against the proposal to turn his people into cultivators:

'My young men shall never work. Men who work can not dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams. You ask me to plough the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's breast? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I can not enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men. But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?'

This most orthodox sentiment is a universal theme of prophecy.

The oldest and deepest element in any religion is the cult of the earth spirit in her many aspects. Especially to wandering men, nomads, pilgrims, itinerants, tramps and half-wits, she is the mother, and they, her children, partake of her sanctity. The pious

duty of settled people is hospitality to travellers, for they are acolytes of Hermes, the errant spirit of earth, who, as Mercurius, is also the Virgin; and even now the cult that Protestants unkindly call Mariolatry flourishes spontaneously within the Roman Catholic Church and would do so independently were it not recognized by the hierarchy. In Ireland and other Catholic countries, feasts such as the Assumption of the Virgin on August 15th are celebrated at holy wells and springs, and these natural shrines are resorted to on occasions for which the Church gives no official sanction. Protestant sects also, particularly the more primitive, spiritual ones, invoke the religious spirit by the imagery of rock, well and fountain. In the course of centuries the 'civilized' religions, Christian and Islamic, have failed to replace the primeval worship of the earth spirit by their more expedient moralistic deities, and have had to reconcile themselves to the realities of human and divine nature. So the fact remains, and will remain as long as people survive to recognize it, that a natural affinity exists between the earth and its offspring, both parties being animated by the same spirit and united by common interests.

In the religious symbolism of later times, as in the experience of all people from the beginning, the spirit of the earth energizes in many different forms; and these vary according to one factor, which is the relationship between this receptive 'female' spirit and her mate and polar opposite, the positive 'male' power of the sun. The earliest known man-made images are the hideous, squat representations of the pregnant earth goddess – hideous, that is to the aesthetic eye, to which however these objects were not addressed, having been shaped for a more practical purpose. They are often found in caves and subterranean shrines, and symbolize, obviously enough, the condition of the earth goddess following her union with the god of the heavens. Her other appearances, as virgin, bride, matron and withered hag, correspond to the seasons, and so ultimately to the state of her cosmic relationship. Characteristic of the earth spirit, and in accordance with its feminine nature, is its tendency to withdraw, to decline within the earth's dark recesses. In contrast, the predominant tendency of the positive force is to expand and activate. Thus in nature there are two opposite, complementary principles, the contracting and the expanding, or, in the language of Chinese metaphysics, the yin and the yang, through the interactions of which the balance of the universe and the cycles of life are perpetuated. In their myriad forms yin and yang are manifest throughout creation, but in essence they are unmanifest, being no more than concepts of the divine, as of the human mind. Proceeding from one source, yin-yang is indivisible, the presence of one term implying the other exactly like the negative and positive poles of a magnet. To think of them as sexual opposites is inadequate, for sexuality is but one aspect of their function. The pillar, the mountain, the erect stone, the tall tree are no doubt phallic symbols, but then, as Jung remarked, so is the penis. The phallus they all symbolize is the source of generative power in the universe, humorously represented as the organ of God the Father. This functions perfectly well without human intervention, and the first men were content to observe and accommodate themselves to the moods of the earth spirit as conditioned thereby. It was only later, when the artificial modes of settled life demanded the support of a technology,

that the yang force was invoked by the erection of 'phallic' pillars and the deification of the sun.

In 1889 the sturdy radical, Edward Carpenter, published a book with the provocative title, *Civilization: its Cause and Cure*, which in its opening paragraph referred to civilization as 'a kind of disease which the various races of men have to pass through'. The book was attacked by the Socialists of the Fabian Society, and by critics in general, with a degree of venom normally reserved for those heretics who deny the first principles of established religion. And indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century the miraculous wealth created by industry, science and usury, and sanctified by the cosmogony of Darwinism, had elevated the current belief in progress to the status of a religious faith. Carpenter's suggestion that the term 'civilization' be given an historical rather than an ideal value shocked rational people of that time as deeply as the historical approach to Christian legends shocked the old-fashioned clergymen. Since then, of course, ideas have changed: faith in progress is in decline, and it is possible to consider civilization as an historical phenomenon rather than as the divinely appointed goal of human development. Far from being a threat to civilization, this change of attitude could prove to be its salvation, for the most obvious yet neglected feature of the civilized state is its artificiality. Civilization is created by men in defiance of human nature. It is an artifact, made and maintained by art, and if the art is not cultivated it must necessarily decline. It is in the interests of civilization therefore to examine the conditions under which it first arose and the methods that have been used to preserve it.

The origins of civilization are prehistoric, of an age beyond literary record, so the only accessible source of information is the record of 'sacred history', which differs from the profane variety in that it reaches vastly further back into the past, drawing its material from myth and traditional cosmogony. Changes in the order of human society are represented in sacred history as changes in the hierarchy of gods. Thus the first revolution of Olympus marks the first deviation from the primeval ways of men. The golden age in Greek mythology was presided over by Cronus, otherwise Saturn. He was a most conservative ruler, determined to preserve the stability of his realm without change, and this he achieved by devouring all the children born to his wife, Rhea, daughter of Earth and Sky, for it was prophesied that he would one day be overthrown by a son. The time came when Rhea grew tired of this habit, and when she bore Zeus, she hid him in a cave in Crete, giving the father in place of the baby a wrapped stone. In due course Cronus was overcome by Zeus and retired, according to Hesiod, to the Fortunate Isles or, in Plutarch's account, to an island off the coast of Britain (one of the Scilly Isles is indicated), where in the manner of eclipsed gods and heroes he sleeps in the company of his retainers. So Cronus gave way to Zeus, and to a pantheon of earth and sky deities, in a revolution signifying a corresponding revolution in human affairs and a change in the relationship of gods and men. The wandering tribes of the age of Cronus, the simple hunters and food gatherers, had new gods to preside over new activities. Technology began with the theft by Prometheus of the artificer's fire; Hestia, goddess of the hearth, encouraged the habit of settlement, and the old cyclical life of nomadism gave way to a pastoral, agricultural economy.

There is of course much to be gained materially from this development, but the difficulty is that human nature has been formed, or at least deeply conditioned by millennia of existence dominated by the rhythms of the earth goddess and the heavenly bodies. Settlement involves loss of contact with the divinities that had ruled all previous time, removes from life its deepest reality and certainty, frustrates human nature. Men become as Adam expelled from the Garden of Eden. It is their immediate concern, having eaten of the tree of knowledge, to apply all their newly acquired arts to constructing a facsimile of the Garden, a model paradise, containing all the elements in their previous experience. So all settlements develop as cosmological schemes, representing in microcosm the order of the heavens as corresponding to the order of life and the pattern of the human mind. The marks people make on the ground reflect the philosophy of the time. Before the rise of philosophy in compensation for the inadequacies of civilized life, the earth is preserved unchanged as it left the hands of its maker; every later development of philosophy is faithfully depicted by men on its surface, whether consciously or not. The groves and temples of Arcadia, the radiating avenues of the imperial centre, the neatly ordered municipal garden, and the spoils and effluents of industrial rapacity, are each the product of a certain cosmology, a certain view of the nature of the universe and its relationship to men. On the face of the landscape can be seen the effects of the former sacred view of the earth and of the contrasting view now prevailing.

The philosophy that goes with the life-style of the wandering man is that of Heraclitus: 'All is in flow.' Every river is as sacred as the Ganges, according to the Indian saying; for the earth is pervaded by spirit in all its parts, and the nomad's garden of paradise extends over its entire surface. The prospect of the settled man is more limited. His territory is confined to his neighbourhood. In giving up the wandering life he has deprived himself of the full range of experience demanded by human nature, and in compensation he tries to reproduce on a small scale the sacred landscape of his ancestors. His formal paradise, which takes the place of the real thing, is consciously sanctified; the gods, localized in shrines, are invoked at their proper seasons by magic and ritual, their natural accessibility having lapsed. Whereas formerly every part of the earth was inhabited and directly ruled by spirits, these are now placed in reservations that the world outside may be freed for the sacrilegious proceeding of breaking the earth for agriculture, building and mining. Even so, these activities are carried out in the knowledge that they are objectionable to the earth spirit and defy the gods. They must therefore be attended by ritual designed to attract the gods' patronage. The farmer's year is regulated by the old deities, sun and moon, and its stages are sanctified by festivals and sacrifice; the sites of tombs, temples, houses and all artificial features of the landscape are located in relation to the paths and centres of the earth spirit, with placatory sacrifice at their foundation; mining, a particularly bold undertaking, demands a most circumspect approach to the earth spirit, details of which are given in Mircea Eliade's *The Forge and the Crucible*, involving ritual purification of the miners and magic ceremonies to gain the sympathy of the gods. The life of nomadic people, governed by the strict laws of nature, proceeds in ritual fashion, and the ritual cycle of

the year thus produced is repeated in settled communities, the difference being that whereas it was formerly spontaneous, among settled people it proceeds according to the word of the priest.

Settlement leads to the establishment of social hierarchies, to specialization, the development of arts and sciences, the building of temples and houses. For millions of years men, essentially the same as we are now, lived without these and presumably without feeling the need for them. Unlike many animals, men are not equipped by nature with the instinct to build houses. In the words of the New Testament, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head', and there are still people who are content to live accordingly. Tacitus describes a German tribe that lived entirely without artificial shelter, and another so proud that its members scorned to have personal possessions. Even today in frozen Patagonia the Ona people live out of doors, though, as Lord Raglan points out, they make ceremonial shrines for the gods. How and when the first settlements came about is a mystery; but as caves were residences of the earth spirit before they were inhabited by men, so it appears that the first buildings were temples and only later houses. It is significant that the earliest town known to archaeology, Jericho, was founded at the site of a sacred spring, and the original structure of about 8000 BC, lying beneath many layers of debris from later buildings, has been identified as a shrine to the local spirit. Towns may come and go, says the *I Ching*, but the well remains where it always was, thus explaining the phenomenon of successive towns built round the same sacred place, the spirit of which became the foundation deity, receiving the sacrifices offered in expiation of the crime of settlement and giving the law by which the city was governed. Implicit in this law was a contract between man and god by which the first was permitted a conditional use of land for agriculture and building in return for duties and observances paid to the second. So it was understood by the founding fathers of ancient cities. But as cities expand these limitations become more onerous and more neglected, with the result that, in the language of apocalypse, the holy city becomes Babylon, the parasitic whore, and proceeds to destruction. In this belief, the conservative element in ancient Rome objected to imperial expansion beyond the original city boundaries, considering it a breach of the foundation contract. Such counsels were of course ignored, and in consequence Rome, following the career of all previous empires, became Babylon indeed.

Plato, with his cyclical view of history, believed that civil life has been going on for 'a vast and incredible length of time' during which 'many thousands of cities have come into being and the same number have come to an end'. According to this view the tendency to form settlements is recurrent, with civilizations developing throughout history and collapsing, either, like the Tower of Babel, through the folly and arrogance of their inhabitants or, like Atlantis, through natural disasters. This traditional view of history is at present unfashionable, but there are in fact good indications that developed civilizations have existed in remote antiquity. Perhaps the most convincing to anyone who cares to study the subject is the existence all over the world of traditional units of measure that are undoubtedly derived, like the modern metre,

from significant fractions of the earth's dimension or, as in the case of the unit still surviving as the English mile, from an ancient canon of cosmology (details of which are given in the present writer's *City of Revelation*), a canon which provided the ground plan of temples from at least as early as the building of Stonehenge to Christian times. An example cited in A. E. Berriman's *Historical Metrology* is the Greek furlong, of which there are exactly 216,000 in the earth's polar circumference, the number 216,000 being equal to $60 \times 60 \times 60$ and thus an important number in the Sumerian sexagesimal system which has given us the 360-degree division of the circle and the 60-minute hour. The fact is that the exact sciences as practised in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome were less complete than those of earlier times; and they were less widely known. It is evident that the civilizations of historical antiquity derived the better part of their scientific knowledge from the traditions of a more developed, unified and widely disseminated system belonging to a previous age unknown to history. The very same conclusion emerges from the study of certain medieval mariners' maps by Professor C. H. Hapgood, described in his *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*. The map of the Turkish admiral Piri Re'is, for example, dated 1513 and copied from earlier charts of the time of Alexander the Great, shows with their correct longitudinal details of the South American coast unknown in Europe at the time the map was drawn. Other maps accurately represent parts of the Antarctic continent that have long been covered with ice. Of a twelfth-century Chinese map Professor Hapgood writes: 'It seems to me that the evidence of this map points to the existence in very ancient times of a world-wide civilization, the map-makers of which mapped virtually the entire globe with a uniform general level of technology, with similar methods, equal knowledge of mathematics, and probably the same sorts of instruments.'

This of course is not in accordance with modern theories of history, but it does strengthen the theory of Atlantis, the 'ante-diluvian world' that preceded and inspired all subsequent civilizations. So far, for lack of archaeological proof, the debate between the friends and opponents of Atlantis has tended to proceed in political or religious terms, with those who believe in cyclical history accepting Plato's account and those who favour the evolutionary view rejecting it. Modern historians are naturally prone to judge the civilized standards of ancient societies by reference to our own; yet the evidence of Stonehenge and other megalithic sites shows the existence 4,000 years ago of advanced scientific knowledge combined with a natural, unobtrusive technology, suggesting that the present world civilization is not the first, merely the most materially developed and materialistically directed.

The advice given in Plato's *Republic* to settlers in a new country is that they should first discover the shrines and sacred places of the local deities and reconsecrate them to the corresponding principles in the colonists' religion, with festivals instituted on the appropriate days; there should be at least 365 festivals in the course of the year. This was the universal practice of antiquity, and the idea behind it was to create a model of the golden age by imitating the festive cycle of the ancestral nomads. So comes about the continuity of sacred sites in association with a sacred calendar which persists in every religion. And the sanctity of local shrines extends to the paths that lead up to and

between them. The god approaches his shrine by a particular route. Once he was accompanied by his celebrants, the wandering tribe that had followed him from his previous residence. Now he comes with a religious procession, a ritualized sacred journey in imitation of the old ways. The celebration of the Mysteries at Eleusis was preceded by a day-long procession during which the pilgrims followed the style of the golden age with simple offerings of local produce at shrines along the way, every one of which had associations with the story of the resident goddess Demeter. In the same spirit, the Australian natives make ritual journeys in the steps of the gods who created the landscape, every feature of which commemorates some episode in cosmogony and has also some present significance for human or animal life. A rock may mark a source of fertility in women, a tree the place from which a certain animal or plant is generated. Each station on the journey has its day of the year, its mythological episode, the rituals and songs appropriate to it and its properties useful to men or animals.

The ways between these places have similar associations, for they are ways of the earth spirit, not merely secular routes but natural channels of energy, first traced out by the creative gods, followed by the primeval wandering tribes and still in settled times used by religious processions or pilgrims to a shrine. Traditionally they are also paths of psychic activity, of apparitions, spirits of the dead or fairies, particularly on one day of the year. People of the Irish countryside recognize certain lines, unmarked on the ground, as fairy paths, lines of a seasonal flow of spirit, which must on no account be obstructed or built on. A house on one of these lines would bring misfortune to its occupants and to the neighbourhood and for the same reason a site between two raths or sacred hilltop enclosures is also avoided. The photograph reproduced on p. 89, showing the corner of an Irish house cut off to allow the passage of a fairy path, is from a book of modern fairy lore, *The Middle Kingdom* by Dermot McManus, containing several instances of the mysterious moving lights associated with these paths. In Celtic tradition they are the spirits of the dead, the will-o'-the-wisps or 'corpse candles' that are said to hover over certain old tracks leading to the local church.

Even among the Anglo-Saxons, supposed to be less perceptive of spiritual phenomena than their Celtic neighbours, the tradition of spirit paths continues in the present generation, as is illustrated by the numerous modern accounts of stretches of haunted tracks recorded in Kathleen Wiltshire's *Ghosts and Legends of the Wiltshire Countryside*. Almost every old religious centre and manor house is locally reputed to be linked to others by a network of secret tracks or underground tunnels. 'We have plenty of evidence to show that the legend of an underground passage indicates a *real* secret route *above* ground', writes Dr Winifred Haward, and in her book *Hide or Hang*, which is about secret rooms and tunnels in the North of England, she records among other such legends the belief that a ghostly 'white lady' follows the course of a supposed secret tunnel from Barnburgh Hall in Yorkshire to St Helen's Chapel nearby. This apparition would in Wales be identified as Elen or Helena, the Celtic goddess of ancient tracks, in whom is remembered the first of all deities, the wandering spirit of the earth. The same is the Greek Hermes, protector of travellers, whose ways were marked by

lines of pillars leading to the central stone in the market place; and in Cornwall the old sacred ways are similarly marked by menhirs and stone crosses.

All these various traditions, which occur universally and evidently derive from some once unified system of knowledge about the ways of the earth spirit, refer to, as it were, a stream of magnetic current, fertilizing, and accompanied by manifestations of spirit, that passes through the country on certain routes and on certain days, its seasons determined by the positions of the heavenly bodies. The shrines located on its path were resorted to on those occasions when the local god, representing a particular aspect of the earth spirit, was in temporary residence. The properties of springs, lakes and rivers, says Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, vary with the seasons. In its early history the oracle at Delphi was active only once a year, and so it is with all natural centres of the earth spirit. Each one has its peculiar season of efficacy, commemorated in the date of the annual fair, feast, market or assembly that has always been held there. By these events were regulated the stages of the agricultural year, and thus the lives of all people in traditional societies proceed according to a sacred calendar, related to local topography, to local myths and customs, and deriving ultimately from people's actual experience of the earth spirit and their recognition of its ways, seasons and centres of influence. Strangers may conquer the land, imposing their own gods and cults on the natives, but the sacred places and the dates of their festivals remain the same as before, the attributes of the new deities are accommodated to the old, and the invaders become in time subject to the traditions of the country. It was the policy of the early Christians to follow antique precedent in this respect, with the result that almost every old church occupies a site with sacred associations far earlier than the present building, while the feast day of the saint to whom the church is dedicated has in many cases been inherited from the god of the previous religion. This continuity in the shrines and seasons of the earth spirit has an economic as well as a mystical cause, for the life of the country is little affected by political or religious change; the seasons of the agricultural year proceed in the same way, and must still be marked by festivals at the regular dates and places, whatever the system of government may be. It is only in recent times that lands have been colonized without the new inhabitants taking over the sacred calendar and topography of the old; and the effect of this omission may be judged by comparing the secularized landscape of, for example, much of North America with that of other continents, where even now most communities are located at sites originally chosen with some consideration for the earth spirit and retain some connection with the past through the associations of the sacred places at which they were founded. The difference between a modern industrial landscape, created by a society in which commercial values are paramount, and the traditional variety which has been developed for a more permanent function and on more permanent principles, illustrates visually the difference between modern and ancient philosophy. In the first case the buildings have been designed and sited for the immediate exploitation of the earth's resources in the interests of material gain with little concern for human nature and none for the proper relationship between the living and the dead. In the second, the earth is regarded as a living creature, whose life, health and fertility are bound up

with those of its inhabitants. According to this way of thought, the spirit of the earth and the spirit that animates all living things are of the same essence, so that the interests of men, not only for one life but for all times, are best served by studying the interests of spirit. The practical result of this policy is most clearly apparent in the landscape of China, where for thousands of years, throughout all revolutions and changes of dynasty, the same attitude toward the earth spirit and the same methods of reconciling its ways to the ways of men have been maintained. For the purposes of settled life, these methods were codified in the scientific and magical system of geomancy known as feng-shui, literally 'wind and water', which, since it appears once to have been practised over the entire world, and claims to have eternal and universal application, deserves more serious attention than it has yet attracted from western scholars. This it will no doubt receive when the symptoms of terrestrial sickness have become too blatant to be further ignored and the need arises to consider again the terms of the contract between men and gods by which settlement and civilization are permitted to continue.

The ancient, once universal geomantic science of landscape (feng-shui) can exist only in association with the traditional style of philosophy referred to above, according to which the earth is a living entity animated by spirit. This spirit is the natural environment of the spirits of the dead, and it is also related to the spiritual nature of men. Like the energies of the human body, the spirit of the earth flows through the surface in channels or veins, and between the two energy currents of man and earth there exists a natural affinity that enables men to divine the presence and local character of the earth spirit, to intuit how best to bring human ways into harmony with it, and even, by the exercise of will and imagination, to influence its flow.

Another condition that must obtain wherever geomancy is practised is that the prevailing cosmological idea express the concept of an organic, 'steady state' universe, that has been considered orthodox throughout far the greater part of history, rather than the modern evolutionary 'expanding universe' theory. The first of these two contrasting world views, the traditional one, emphasizes the permanent aspects of human life on earth, the fact that men are always subject to the same laws of the universe and of their own nature. Under these conditions the purpose of science is to benefit the life of the people as it is, and as it essentially always must be so long as the sources of life on earth remain the same. Thus the intention and effect of feng-shui in China was, as Professor Abercrombie puts it, 'to produce a landscape which had to preserve certain spiritual values and also to fulfil the practical purpose of supporting a dense population'. The Chinese were suspicious of all new ideas that were not relevant to this purpose and, observing that such innovations are commonly proposed for their own convenience by the commercial class, they discouraged that class from gaining the power to impose their own values on the others. A further safeguard was that, should a merchant become rich and established, so as to want to imitate the style of his betters, the example he found accepted as the most prestigious mode of life was that of the retired scholar. The modern and opposite tendency is to value artificial above natural sources of wealth, to respect innovations as tokens of human inventive-

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ness, to identify commercial interests with the interests of the people as a whole, and to blame the latter for any resistance to the social change promoted by the former. A high local population is now considered to be a destructive rather than a creative force relative to the harmony and productivity of the landscape; and so, alienated from the earth spirit and the local gods, it has become. In terms of the present system of philosophy, the geomancer's two aims, to preserve the landscape of the golden age and to make it support a large settled population, seem incompatible, which indeed they must be as long as that system prevails.

Feng-shui has been defined as 'the art of adapting the residences of the living and the dead so as to cooperate and harmonize with the local currents of the cosmic breath'. Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilization in China* gives a good concise account of its function:

'Every place had its special topographical features which modified the local influence (hsing shih) of the various ch'i of Nature. The forms of hills and the directions of watercourses, being the outcome of the moulding influences of winds and waters, were the most important, but, in addition, the heights and forms of buildings, and the directions of roads and bridges, were potent factors. The force and nature of the invisible currents would be from hour to hour modified by the positions of the heavenly bodies, so that their aspects as seen from the locality in question had to be considered. While the choosing of sites was of prime importance, bad siting was not irremediable, as ditches and tunnels could be dug, or other measures taken to alter the feng-shui situation. . . .

'The two currents, Yang and Yin, in the earth's surface, were identified with the two symbols which apply to the eastern and western quarters of the sky, the Green Dragon (Chhing Lung) of spring in the former case, the White Tiger (Pai Hu) of autumn in the latter. Each of these would be symbolized by configurations of the ground. The former ought always to be to the left, and the latter to the right, of any tomb or habitation, which should preferably be protected by them, as if in the crook of an elbow. But this was only the beginning of the complexity, since high and abrupt escarpments were considered Yang, and rounded elevations Yin. Such influences (shan ling) had to be balanced, if possible, in the selection of the site, so as to obtain three-fifths Yang and two-fifths Yin.'

Needham goes on to credit feng-shui with 'the great beauty of the siting of so many farms, houses and villages throughout China'.

The long continuity of Chinese civilization, to which feng-shui has made an important contribution, has in turn preserved the methods of that science up to the present day; and thus has come down to us a legacy from the primeval golden age. Not that the early wandering people needed any formal system of feng-shui, because, as they lived and moved under the direct influence of the earth's subtle energies, its principles were naturally integrated in their lives. Like all sciences, feng-shui is an expedient of civilization, a technique for reconciling human nature to the limitations imposed on it by settlement. But the perception of the geomancer is that of an earlier age, the perception of the earth spirit as the ruling factor in life. It is his responsibility to

ensure that no changes are made to the shape and appearance of the landscape that might disturb locally the harmonious flow of the earth's vital energy. More than that, he may actually improve the landscape, manifesting its latent powers and making the pattern of its energy field conform more closely to the ideal requirements of its inhabitants. This he does by judicious siting of all buildings, tombs, walls and roads, with the addition of pillars, temples and monuments at the spots designed by nature to receive them. Here is Ernst Börschmann's description of the Chinese landscape as formed by feng-shui from the text of his fine book of photographs, *Picturesque China*:

'Certain summits of the neighbouring mountains, often the main summit, are crowned with pagodas, small temples or pavilions to harmonize the magic forces of heaven and earth. This thought is akin, for instance, to our conception of the outflow of magnetic force from a pointed conductor. And the Chinese geomancer also regards the forms of nature as a magnetic field.'

The field of terrestrial magnetism, like the energy field of a plant or animal, exists only by association with a living body; and as traditional Chinese medicine by acupuncture treats the human body by regulating the currents of vital energy that flow through the skin, so the geomancer treats the body of the earth. Textbooks of feng-shui describe the nature of the telluric current, give examples of the energy patterns it forms in relation to different kinds of landscape and landscape features, and show ways of adapting its natural flow to human convenience. In some districts, particularly in wild, steep, rocky parts, the ways of the earth spirit are rapid and violent, and if the country is to be made habitable its energy must be tamed and directed into more evenly flowing channels. Where, as in flat, featureless country, it moves too sluggishly, with a tendency to stagnate, it can be stimulated by making lengths of straight avenues and water-courses and adding vertical features to the landscape. Thus the irregular fissures in which streams of energy cascade down the mountains are picked up and domesticated in the valleys by the stone walls of the fields surrounding a settlement, and an inspired example of feng-shui principles in England is the tall spire of Salisbury Cathedral (a building said to have been sited by divination on the spot marked by the fall of an arrow shot from the hill of Old Sarum), rising above the water meadows of the Avon. In feng-shui the laws of dynamics and aesthetics are united by the one canon that serves both, resulting in a landscape delightful to the eye of poet and philosopher and best disposed to fulfil the practical requirements of the people.

An important factor in manipulating the earth's subtle energies is the influence of the heavenly bodies, particularly the sun and moon, which throughout the day, varying with their respective positions, set up tides and currents within the terrestrial magnetic field. So the patterns on earth follow the patterns in the heavens, and the geomancer's task in shaping the landscape is to emphasize this correspondence. His professional qualifications combine a knowledge of the traditional sciences, astronomy, astrology, geometry, number and proportion and land surveying, with the diviner's direct sensitivity to the flow of telluric energies. His instrument is the magnetic compass, first used, according to Needham, for purposes of feng-shui. The geomancer's compass is set in the middle of a circular wooden board inscribed with a number of con-

centric circles, each ring divided into segments marked with letters and symbols, from which the geomancer can read off the properties of any piece of ground and the influences it is subject to, thereby discovering whether or not it is an auspicious site for the purpose he has in mind. There is a detailed interpretation of the various sets of symbols on the geomancer's compass in E. J. Eitel's *Feng-Shui*, a curious book, published a hundred years ago and now again in print, by a prim clergyman of the London Missionary Society in China. As a representative of western civilization, Eitel had naturally to compare Chinese science unfavourably with the European system, but despite this, he gives a sympathetic account of feng-shui as a force that spared the Chinese landscape from the excesses of nineteenth-century industrialization. It is, he writes, 'eagerly availed of by ministers of state as a satisfactory excuse for their own unwillingness to further the progress of trade and civilization'. Yet he continues, 'Would God that our own men of science had preserved . . . that child-like reverence for the living powers of nature, that sacred awe and trembling fear of the mysteries of the unseen, that firm belief in the realities of the invisible world and its constant intercommunication with the seen and the temporal, which characterize these Chinese gropings after natural science.'

A use of feng-shui that became ever more important with the growth of the Chinese empire was to assist the concentration of power in the imperial capital by diverting the natural, serpentine streams of earth energy into long straight channels and directing them towards the emperor at the seat of government in Peking. These channels were the imperial dragon paths (*lung mei*) of China, carefully preserved even into the present century by the Government Board of Rites; on their course no buildings or tombs other than those of the emperor and his family were allowed to be sited. Some stretches were paved and became used as roads; others ran invisibly across country, their course marked by obelisks, ceremonial bridges and temples with their main axes coinciding with the alignment. In this way the spiritual energies of the earth, generated in mountain temples and monasteries, their flow regulated at sacred stations along the way, sustained the emperor, as he was also sustained by the service of the people. By the same channels, the solar current, distilled from above by the emperor and his hierarchical, cosmologically ordered court, diffused its fertilizing influence throughout the kingdom.

As well as having this symbolic and magical function, straight roads running to all parts of the country from the imperial centre have also, of course, a more obvious use to the state rulers as providing means of control and communication. And thus the mystical, as always, combines with the practical. Hitler observed that empires are built on straight roads, and through his architect, Albert Speer, arranged the ceremonial centres at the foundation of the Third Reich accordingly. The influence of Rome was extended throughout its empire by a network of roads conceived as radiating from the centre; so was the power of the pre-Conquest empires of Central and South America. Versailles, with its avenues directed towards the seat of the Sun King, is the complete image of the imperial solar capital. In England, the great sixteenth-century landowners cut or planted long rides that stretched from their palaces to distant towers and castles

often far beyond their own possessions, thus symbolizing and magically procuring control over the surrounding countryside. This arrangement was also convenient for the noble occupation of stag hunting, and to that extent the long woodland avenues had their mundane purpose; but essentially their function was mystical, to set up a two-way flow of spirit between the local ruler and the people, with the palace as the control centre and point of fusion. Many other architectural features, now commonly considered only in their practical aspect, have similar mystical origins, beginning as devices for feng-shui purposes. Mircea Eliade writes: 'It is highly probable that the fortifications of inhabited places and cities began by being magical defences; for fortifications – trenches, labyrinths, ramparts, etc – were designed to repel invasions by demons and the souls of the dead rather than attacks by human beings.' The Great Wall of China served an obvious military purpose, but it was also built in accordance with feng-shui principles, to shelter the kingdom from the unfavourable influences traditionally located in the north. Whether these were manifest through invading armies of men or demons was of little practical consequence. The Wall excluded both, in the same way that a wall round a park or garden preserves both its physical inviolability and its peaceful atmosphere.

Feng-shui, as the Chinese acknowledge, is or has been practised universally. Its simple origin, as a method by which wandering people divine the course of the earth spirit, is illustrated in Spencer and Gillen's account of the Achilpa, a tribe of Australian nomads, who carry with them a wooden pole and take whatever direction is indicated by the way in which the pole bends. So there are people among us today who make every decision in life by reference to a pendulum, horoscope or home oracle. When one of the Achilpa clans broke its pole, its members became distraught, lay on the ground and waited for death. At the other extreme are the highly technical systems of feng-shui which, as civilizations grow more elaborate, have been developed to support them. In the empires of antiquity it was a state-controlled science, directed by the emperor himself, whose main responsibility was to observe meticulously the rituals connected with it. Court life was conducted according to the pattern of the heavens, with the king, as the sun in the planetary system, rising at sunrise, retiring at dusk and throughout the seasons imitating the sun in its different aspects. The fourth-century Roman Emperor Julian, who restored for a time the old religion, described himself in his *Oration* as 'attendant of the sovereign Sun', for 'the planets, dancing round him as their king, harmoniously revolve in a circle with definite intervals about his orb, producing certain stable energies'. It is a remarkable tribute to the will and power of the Church to suppress the old cosmology that it was more than a thousand years after Julian that Copernicus began timidly to reintroduce the traditional heliocentric system; and it is a remarkable token of the political influence of cosmology that suppression was considered necessary. In justification of the Christians (who opposed the old magical system at a time when it had become degenerate and, deprived of its former control by responsible temple initiates, dangerous), one need only consider the effects of the old cosmology as, distorted to caricature, misapplied and vulgarly manipulated, it appeared in Hitler's Reich. Chauvinistic supporters of modern institutions

as self-evident improvements on the old may profitably compare this recent travesty with the canonical pattern of kingship that was established throughout the ancient world.

In Ireland, for example, the High King's court at Tara was arranged as a microcosm of the heavens and of the country as a whole, thus imprinting the kingdom with a sacred pattern and declaring as official policy the unsuppressible human ambition for paradise on earth. Assemblies were held, attended by the kings of the four provinces, corresponding to the four points of the compass, together with their followers who occupied the four provincial halls, north, south, east and west, while the kings sat facing their provinces round the High King in the central hall. He was at that moment at the very centre of the universe, setting forth the pattern of cosmic harmony as the model for affairs on earth, and symbolizing the ancient idea that each individual is at the centre of his own universe and is therefore responsible for ordering it on true cosmological principles. Similar events took place at the appointed seasons at provincial and local centres of power. In China there was an important ceremony at the winter solstice, when the Emperor knelt at the centre of the circular walls and terraces of the Temple of Heaven, which constituted a cosmological scheme like the rings on a geomancer's compass. In Edkins's account, 'he thus seems to himself and his court to be in the centre of the universe, and turning to the north, assuming the attitude of a subject, he acknowledges in prayer and by his position that he is inferior to heaven, and to heaven alone'. The sacred king, functioning in the social system as the sun in the planetary, charged with solar energy and transmitting it to the people, was a universal institution, known throughout the East, in the African kingdoms and even as far and as recently as North America in the eighteenth century. At Natchez a solar king reigned from an observatory temple on the great mound, which only he might enter. He was called the Great Sun, dressed in a cloak of feathers, and throughout his reign he never touched the ground, being borne around in a litter for fear he might discharge the solar power invested in him. The Great Sun, his hierarchy of lesser suns, and the beautifully structured society he served, were exterminated by the French in 1729, a few survivors taking refuge among the neighbouring Indians, by whom they were respected for their magical powers.

Such institutions were no doubt highly artificial, but then, as already emphasized, so is civilization. And the solar king was no mere symbol, ornament or tax-eater, but a working instrument, a kind of electric generator or conductor of the positive current by which the spirit of the people and the fertility of the earth itself were maintained. In some cases, if the king did not 'work', if the forces of nature were unresponsive to his influence, he might be deposed. It was a custom of the Assyrians to punish him for any calamity suffered by the people. In China, natural disasters, as well as social disturbances, were attributed to the emperor's carelessness in the performance of ritual, or to wrong relationships within the court, every type of disaster having its particular cause which the emperor was required to remedy. Some of these are specified in 'The Great Law', a chapter in the *Chinese Annals*, edited in 1050 B.C. and quoted by Raphael Patai in his *Man and Temple*:

'When the course of nature goes its proper way, it is a sign that the government is good, but when there is some disturbance in nature, it is a sign that there is some error in government. With the help of fixed tables it is possible to learn from the disturbance in nature what is the sin that caused it. Any disturbance in the sun accuses the emperor. A disturbance around the sun – the court, the ministers; a disturbance in the moon – the queen, the harem. Good weather that lasts too long shows that the emperor is too inactive. Days which continue to be too cloudy show that the emperor lacks understanding. Too much rainfall shows that he is unjust. Lack of rain shows that he is careless. Stormy wind, that he is lazy. Good harvest proves that everything is all right; bad harvest, that the government is guilty.'

On the other hand, 'the extreme excellence of good government is so fragrant that it influences intelligent and invisible beings'. So it is stated in the *Shu-King*. Here is revealed an essential difference between ancient and modern theories of government: under the former system, disturbances among the people were blamed on errors in government, the assumption being that human nature responds agreeably to cosmic harmony and thus to its faithful reflection in the conduct of the rulers. If that conduct is not in accordance with the heavenly pattern, the people are naturally and rightly rebellious. The modern tendency, promoted by the evolutionists' abolition of human nature as a constant standard, is to establish some secular social theory as state law, require the people to conform to it, and coerce them if they fail to adapt their ways accordingly. As for the 'intelligent and invisible beings', the spirits of earth and the dead, whose interests were considered before all else by the ancient law-givers, under materialism they have no vote and so are not consulted.

Despite the warnings of prophets and the efforts of all sensible people to arrest its progress, civilization tends to grow more elaborate and to make ever greater demands on the earth that sustains it. There comes a time when the old, natural devotion to the earth spirit, together with the traditionalist ideal of preserving the earth as the gods made it, is exchanged for a new object, which is the desire to increase the products of the earth by artificially stimulating its fertility. This stage is marked in sacred history by the appearance of sun gods, the heroic divinities of reason, intellect and centralized government, whose legends refer always to their victories over dragons or serpents, sacred emblems of the previous order. At Delphi, where in archaic times oracles were given in the name of the goddess Earth, the sun god, Apollo, killed Python, the goddess's serpent, and usurped the shrine together with the oracular function. Zeus killed Typhon, the dragon offspring of Earth, and took over the oracle at Dodona, and St Michael, as archangel, kept the hilltop shrines and the reputation as a dragon killer that he had previously enjoyed as a Celtic sun god.

In the terminology of feng-shui the serpent represents the mercurial currents of the earth spirit gliding in serpentine channels through the earth's crust – the yin force in nature. It is to this force that Plutarch, who was a priest at Delphi in the first century AD, refers in *The Decline of Oracles*: 'Men are affected by streams of varying potency issuing from the earth. Some of these drive people crazy or cause disease or death; the effect of others is good, soothing and beneficial.' The factor that produces from the

one source these various effects is the complementary yang force, the power of the sun. So Plutarch, in reference to the oracular power of the earth spirit, goes on to quote the old belief that 'the sun creates in the earth the right conditions and the right temperament for it to be able to produce the exhalations that inspire prophecy'. This understanding was the basis of the solar technology that has at different periods brought revolutionary changes into the lives and ideals of people throughout the world.

When the serpent current of the earth spirit is transfixed by the lance of the dragon killer, it can no longer move freely about the earth, for its energies are now fixed and concentrated on one spot. When Apollo killed Python, he performed an act that is repeated in feng-shui ritual wherever the foundation stone of a house or temple is laid. The Indian procedure is described in Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*:

'Before the masons lay the first stone, the astronomer shows them the spot where it is to be placed, and this spot is supposed to lie above the snake that supports the world. The master mason sharpens a stake and drives it into the ground, exactly at the indicated spot, in order to fix the snake's head. A foundation stone is then laid above the snake. Thus the cornerstone is at the exact centre of the world.'

St Joseph of Arimathea is said to have done much the same at the foundation of Christian Glastonbury by planting in the earth his staff which blossomed into the sacred thorn, and there are many similar foundation legends elsewhere. At Delphi, by spearing the serpent and so localizing its energies, Apollo raised the productivity of the oracle, which, having previously been visited by the animating spirit on only one occasion in the year, now became active the year through, except for three months when the god was absent and Dionysus, reigning in his place, temporarily restored the wilder, more elemental rites of the past.

The same policy of artificially increasing the earth's fertility and multiplying the gifts of its spirit, instead of accepting what is given by nature, is evident wherever the solar gods take over the archaic shrines of the earth goddess. The appearance of the sun god signals the introduction of a technology that aims to alter the natural channels of the earth spirit and to stimulate its energies for the benefit of an increasingly large settled population. This innovation is naturally opposed by traditionalists and religious people, and so in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus the Furies, servants of the old Delphic goddess, cry against Apollo: 'He made man's ways cross the place of the ways of god and blighted age-old distributions of power.'

In the Temple of Apollo at Delphi was the omphalos stone that marked for the Greeks the centre of the world. It was also said to stand over the tomb of Python which implies that it was at the spot where the stake was driven through the head of the serpent at the foundation of the sun god's shrine. Thus it served to concentrate the powerful telluric energies of the place on that one spot and to intensify the local power of the earth spirit to generate prophecy. The 'age-old distributions of power' were disturbed, and the prophetic influence was diverted from the place where it formerly issued, near the Castalian spring and the Sibyl's rock, to the omphalos in Apollo's temple.

In describing the activities carried out by the priests of the sun gods as a technology, it is not intended to suggest that theirs was a mechanical science confined by the laws

of physics, but science of a more subtle, metaphysical order. The object of their attention was the animistic world of spirit, the forces of nature called by the Chinese the Kwei Shin and known by various names to all people on earth. The attributes of this dualistic spirit, the Kwei and the Shin, are yin and yang respectively, the first signifying the contracting principle as exhibited in the Lares Rustici, the nymphs of hills and streams, the grosser spirits of the dead, the second being the expansive force, the spirits of the upper air and the finer part of the spirit in men. These two have to some extent different characteristics, the Kwei for instance responding to ritual while the Shin are properly invoked by music; but in practice they are inseparable, complementary opposites of the same order, and in magical ceremony they are addressed together as the Kwei Shin.

-- Spirits are invoked in temples, each one of which is unique because it is designed to attract a particular god or aspect of a god and must therefore feature his peculiar local attributes. Men in their natural state do not invoke gods, being content with what is given unasked by nature; and to do so, to study the Kwei Shin, to note their ways, weaknesses and potentialities, and to use this knowledge in the construction of shrines for localizing their energies, is a form of technology that has been refined to a point of great precision in the past. Archaeologists have to some extent succeeded in reconstructing the physical life-style of the people who covered great areas of northern Europe with their monumental apparatus of stone circles, pillars and dolmens some four or five thousand years ago, but for the monuments themselves they have no explanation, apart from vague suggestions of a ritual purpose in connection with a cult of the dead. This is indeed so, but astronomers now recognize that all these great stones, from the vast, extensive alignments of Carnac and the sun-moon temple of Stonehenge to remote sites in the northern isles of Scotland, were precisely located in relation to the heavenly bodies and the natural features of the landscape. From all that has recently been discovered about the scientific knowledge and methods of the megalith builders, it appears that their system was in the synthetic magical tradition of Egypt, Babylon and the ancient East; and it was certainly in close accordance with the principles of feng-shui, for the same astronomical and geological factors that the Chinese geomancers considered in locating the sites of temples and tombs are also apparent as having determined the sites of the corresponding monuments in Europe. For many years now, experienced dowzers, including Merle and Diot in France and Guy Underwood, Reginald Smith and many others in Britain, have observed the fact that every megalithic site is over a centre or channel of the terrestrial current whose emanations are detected by the dowser's rod. All ancient tombs and stones were placed so as to coincide with and accumulate the flow of the earth's vital energy, its 'spirit'; and this implies that the 'cult of the dead', which all agree was an important motivation of the great stone builders, was not merely the pious and superstitious hope of life eternal that savages are supposed to cherish and Christians often do, but a very exact science of spiritual invocation, of such proven value, in terms of benefits obtained, that by the beginning of the second millenium B C the greater part of the physical and intellectual resources of nations throughout Europe must have been devoted to its

maintenance. The very number and size of prehistoric works in earth and stone; their occurrence, together with the habitations of their human contemporaries, in the remote islands and desolate parts of Europe which no one now either cares to or knows how to populate: these alone give some picture of the numerous and widely distributed population that was supported by the subtle technology of the great stone builders in western Europe, as it was by feng-shui in China. 'They grew corn on the sides of hills which we now never attempt to stir,' said William Cobbett in his early nineteenth-century travels, as he observed the ramparts and terraces of neolithic cultivators all over the deserted downlands of southern England; and as final evidence of the high spirit engendered by the ancient science one need only compare the present melancholy, depopulated condition of the highlands and western coast districts of Britain and Europe with those same parts as they must have been when inhabited by the ancient people whose heroic level of experience is revealed in the myths and bardic traditions that have survived them, and whose magical achievements persist in the folklore associated with their monuments.

A remarkable relic from the prehistoric past is the body of local tradition, consistent throughout Europe and beyond, that attributes to every ancient stone and sacred place certain of the various qualities that are traditionally functions of the earth spirit. In the many cases where megalithic structures have been erected by or above sacred springs or at other such natural shrines, it is obvious that their local reputation as instruments of healing or fertility or as centres of spiritual activity has been taken over by them from the ground on which they stand. Thus a stone placed by a healing well may serve as a permanent residence, like a storage battery, for the spirit that formerly animated the water only for a short season in the year. Every ancient standing stone is like the omphalos in the Temple of Apollo, driven into the head of the felluric serpent current, fixing and augmenting the energies which had formerly fluctuated. Yet in the end the system became onerous and ineffective, demanding at least as much from the people as it gave in return. St Patrick is said to have freed Ireland from the final excesses of a degenerate priesthood, whose altars demanded ever more sacrificial blood before they could evoke response from the resident spirits. The Celtic saints aimed to restore the earlier invocations of the earth spirit at its natural springs rather than in the temples and stone monuments where their ancestors had located them, and their attitude survives in the spiritual, nonconformist sects of the modern Celts, deriving from the Protestant Reformation.

Why this should have happened, why the spirits located in stones and temples should have abandoned them or become unsusceptible to invocation, is a question that deeply concerned the Greeks of classical times. Plato referred to the denser population and higher fertility of the country in past ages, when the native spirit was animated and everywhere streams of prophecy issued from the oracles. By the beginning of the Christian era, the oracles, which had long been corrupt, were almost all extinct. Many people believed that the gods were dying in portent of the approaching end of the world. Plutarch put forward an alternative, less hysterical theory to account for the withdrawal of the earth spirit from its old familiar shrines, that 'with

regard to the powers that are associated with the earth, it is quite likely that these should change their locations, that their flow, impelled from some other direction, should alter its course and that within the earth there should be in the whole course of time many revolutions from such cyclical processes. . . . And the same view should certainly be accepted with regard to the spirits of prophecy; their power should not be thought of as eternal and ageless, but as subject to change.'

Here is revealed the inevitable betrayal by any institutionalized system of technology of the people who have come to depend on it. The earth spirit, as Plutarch indicates, is only apparently constant in its seasonal tides, for over great periods – and sometimes abruptly because of earthquakes, cataclysm, etc – its course shifts, as do the beds of rivers. In this it follows the slow orbital variations of the heavenly bodies. The early nomadic people, living by and imitating the ways of the earth spirit, could adapt themselves to its gradual changes. The settled people, however, wanted their gods to settle with them, and so located them in shrines to be visited at seasons determined by the priest's calendar; and finally these shrines were adorned with temples as permanent residences of spirit. The land became more productive, the people richer and more numerous – until, under the influence of cyclical changes in the heavens, the flow of spirit began to withdraw from the temples and take other paths. The latter-day priests, having neglected the principles of the old astronomical science by which the temples were first sited and planned, and no longer sensitive to the earth's spiritual energies, could only resort to more frantic invocations, attended by ever increasing sacrifice, in attempts to repeat the former results. And thus followed, as it has on many occasions and at many places over the world, a reaction against the artificial and ever more futile proceedings of the magicians, and a return to simpler ways.

In this brief account of developments in the eternal relationship between men and earth, the principal reference has been to the earth's spirit, called by such various synonyms as the 'serpent current', the 'telluric force' and 'the earth's subtle energies'. Its names are legion. It is the prana or mana of eastern metaphysics, the 'vril', the 'universal plastic medium', of occultists, the anima mundi of alchemy. Its modern 'discoverers' have each given it names of their own: animal magnetism, odyle, orgone energy. Dr Wilhelm Reich tried to catch it in boxes of wood and metal; the playwright August Strindberg hunted it with a bottle of liquid lead acetate in the cemetery of Montparnasse. Its properties have been discussed for as long as there have been people capable of discussing anything, and so wide and contradictory is the range of its manifestations that the epithets applied to it have varied from 'Satan, that old serpent' to 'Bride of Christ'. To the ancients it was notoriously two-faced, and this quality is reflected in the gods that personify its many aspects. As Mercurius it has an affinity with all animated spirit, for that god 'runs round the world enjoying alike the company of the good and wicked'. He is a god of both life and death, of initiation, inspiration, prophecy and delusion, the traveller's friend, yet to his earnest, uncritically devoted followers a wilful deceiver and 'fool's lantern'. His company is kept by the

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high-spirited of all temperaments, and the course of his study is a popular path to madness.

Like Kundalini, the vital serpent current that animates living bodies, the spirit of the earth is discernible only in its effects and not by analysis. It is therefore of no concern to physical science and may not be included in the scientific canon of existent phenomena. Yet its influence was formerly considered to condition every aspect of life on earth, and, as already here indicated, heroic efforts have been made by individuals, as well as by the priests and scientists of great states, to learn its secrets so as to bring forth its more socially desirable properties. The alchemists aimed to capture the spirit of Mercurius as the mobile agent in their operations, and they spoke of 'fixing' it, using the imagery of the stake driven through the earth serpent, by which means their predecessors, alchemists of elemental cosmic forces, had attempted to raise the subtle spirit of the earth.

All these good people shared the noblest ambition, to invoke again the golden age on earth. No doubt in their time they did much to promote human convenience and comfort, and civilizations have been humanized by such efforts; but their falls have thereby only been delayed. For the human spirit, like the spirit of the earth, is a natural wanderer and does not for ever accept domesticity. Attempts to fix nature's volatile principle will always be made; and the spirit may for a time accept the ways imposed on it by human nature in its material aspect. But sooner or later it will prefer its own ways, and will take them, whatever obstacles are put in its path. Behind this animated current is the Mystery, hinted at in the catacombs of Eleusis, that may not fully be comprehended within the natural limits of human experience. Thus is feng-shui translated as 'wind and water', because, as the Reverend E. J. Eitel was told by his Chinese houseboy, 'it's a thing like wind which you can not comprehend, and like water which you can not grasp'.

From: Sarah Rossbach, Feng Shui:
the Chinese Art of Placement

Two

ORIGINS

I climb the road to Cold Mountain,
the road to Cold Mountain that never ends.
The valleys are long and strewn with boulders,
the streams broad and banked with thick grass.
Moss is slippery though no rain has fallen;
pines sigh but it isn't wind.
Who can break from the snares of the world
and sit with me among the white clouds? . . .

Origins

Among a thousand clouds and ten thousand streams
here lives an idle man,
in the daytime wandering over green mountains,
at night coming home to sleep by the cliff.
Swiftly the springs and autumns pass,
but my mind is at peace, free of dust and delusion.
How pleasant, to know I need nothing to lean on,
to be still as the waters of the autumn river!

—Han-Shan, "Cold Mountain"*

China has no shortage of awesome landscapes. For centuries the Chinese have drawn inspiration from snaking, craggy mountain ranges with peaks melting into misty sky to rivers weaving through fertile valleys and feeding a patchwork of yellow and green oddly shaped rice paddies. Eighth-century poets celebrated nature in verse, courting the moon, sky, mountains, and streams. T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906) painters glorified nature's vastness, power, and peace: on silk scrolls, they created miniature panoramas of jagged, towering peaks, razor-straight waterfalls cascading through clouds into terraces and gorges, tiny footbridges crossed by even smaller hermit sages. Taoist thinkers became disciples of nature: idealizing it, seeking a harmony with the natural "way," an identity with the cosmos. Poets, artists, and philosophers alike all yearned to fit into the grand scheme, the harmony and immortality of nature. From this reverence for nature sprang early Chinese religion (Taoism), science (astronomy, geology, magnetism, and alchemy), superstition (astrology, shamanism, fortune-telling), and lastly—a peculiar combination of all three—feng shui.

*Han-Shan, *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by Han-Shan*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 58, 79.

MAN AND NATURE (Chinese-Style)

The Chinese saw a magical link between man and the landscape: Nature reacts to any change and that reaction resounds in man. They saw the world and themselves as part of a sacred metabolic system. Everything pulsed with life. Everything depended on everything else. The Chinese felt they shared a fate with the earth: When it was healthy and prospered, they thrived; when the balance was destroyed, they suffered. So it made sense, in feng shui terms, to enhance the environment rather than to harm or deplete it, thus hurting the chances for good luck and happiness.

The roots of feng shui grow out of a primitive agrarian way of life, when the fate of man was inextricably bound up with the whims and cycles of heaven and earth: with weather, fertility of the earth, floods, accessibility of water, and amount of sunlight. Man was vulnerable to nature, so he kept watch on it.

From the semidivine emperor—the go-between of heaven and earth—to the laboring peasant, a yearly concern was successful crops. Both ruler and subject looked to nature for signs of drought, flood, and famine. In agriculture, the farmer depended on nature for his life source. In government, the emperor looked to nature for reaffirmation of his right to rule, the mandate of heaven. Since the Chou dynasty (1122-256 B.C.), emperors made annual appeals to heaven on behalf of their kingdom for good crops, good health, and peace. A natural disaster signified that an emperor had lost the balance between heaven and earth, leaving him vulnerable to overthrow. So he relied on special advisers to look for and to interpret omens.

Control of nature's creative and destructive forces—harnessing wind and channeling water—was therefore crucial. "He who controls water, governs the empire,"* is an old Chinese saying. An

*Paul Sun, trans., "Feng Shui: An Ancient Theory of Village Siting," in *The Village as Solar Ecology* (East Falmouth, Mass.: The New Alchemy Institute, 1980), p. 22.

emperor's hold on power depended on controlling both floods, rivers, and canals.

In China—a nation slightly larger than the United States, including Alaska—natural conditions vary widely. In north China, where cold winds rip through houses, mountains and trees provide screens. In the south, where floods annually threaten crops, homes, and lives, mountains provide elevation and irrigation lessens damage. In flat, loessial soil regions, such as the Loyang area, where winds whip up sands, the Chinese dug a network of tunnel homes as shelter from the wind.

Thousands of years ago, as Chinese civilization sprang up along the fertile Yellow and Wei river valleys, feng shui's basic premises also developed from the topographical and geographical nature of the area, a mixture of rugged mountains, plateaus, rivers, valleys, and plains. Long before there were architects, natural phenomena such as wind and water were viewed as sacred signs mysteriously instructing shamans where the most auspicious place was for a house, an altar, or a grave.

The ancient Chinese found that a house sited halfway up a hill on the north side of the river facing south received optimal sun, was protected from harsh winds, avoided floods, and still had access to water for crops. In such surroundings, it was easiest to survive: rice, vegetables, and fruit-bearing trees grew under an unhindered sun, cattle grazed on lush grass, and a house stayed relatively warm in the winter. The environment proved comfortable and harmonious, and helped inhabitants to survive and to grow successful and even wealthy.

When that significant, auspicious, and ideal space was unattainable, the search for antidotes led to the study of feng shui. Soon thereafter, the pursuit and fabrication of a viable physical setting became a basic environmental science, with its goal the control of man's immediate surroundings.

Feng shui supports the modern idea of ecology and conservation. Its message is: Harmonize with, do not disrupt, nature.

Tampering with nature might disrupt its equilibrium. Costs of changing the environment range from pollution to overpopulation. Changes must therefore be planned and executed carefully. Indiscriminate altering of nature can set off a series of events leading to unpredictable results. (The Chinese did not always practice what they preached. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they lumbered extensively in the north for firewood and consequently drastically altered the ecological balance, changing dense forest into a dust bowl.)

THE SACRED ART OF POSITIONING

The Chinese have always stressed position, be it within the landscape, the world, or the cosmos. And to locate the correct spot, they used mystical methods ranging from numerology and astrology to orientation and images. For example, they sought meaning through designating cities, buildings, and people with names implying and invoking central power. China itself, *Chung-kuo*, means "Middle Kingdom"—the nation at the hub of the universe, the heart to which all power flows and from which even greater power emanates. In Peking, the emperor's domain, the "Purple Forbidden City," (*Tzu Chin Ch'ing*), alludes to the North Star, *Tzu Wei*, the constellation around which all stars revolve. There the emperor, the son of heaven, mediated the country's fate, keeping peace between heaven, earth, and man.

But power and good fortune came initially from the landscape. The Chinese invested their surroundings with sacred meanings derived from natural shapes, growth, and orientation. The earth had many guises ranging from dragon to disembodied god, all possessing a cosmic power that ruled man's destiny. The entire Chinese universe was imbued with sacred gods, spirits, and creatures, who lived in heaven and earth, moon and sun, sea and land.

The Chinese cosmos, however, was holistic, tying all natural features into one body. In one creation myth, the landscape itself was not just a chaotic and hostile mass of mountains, rivers, and forest, but a god figure transformed.

The origin of the world lay in a primordial egg which hatched a god who lived 18,000 years. Then he died. His head split and became the sun and moon, his blood the rivers and seas, his hair the plants, his limbs the mountains, his voice the thunder, his perspiration the rain, his breath the wind—and his fleas the ancestors of man.*

So the Chinese were building not on an undefined, unknown wilderness but on the flesh of a god figure, who once had human form and spawned and fed human parasites. On a religious level, feng shui is an attempt to communicate with and to attain blessings and power from the primordial god/earth, tapping its resources and power.

FENG SHUI EXPERTS

Feng shui experts are at once the priests and the doctors of environmental ills. They hold the sacred and profane knowledge of the fates of man and earth. As priests, they read and interpret both visible and invisible signs and positive forces in the cosmos. They define man's place in the universe. As doctors, they detect the earth's pulse, determining where man will live the most healthy, productive, prosperous, and happy life, and where buildings will least disturb the earth's circulation.

Being receptive to the environment, the feng shui expert can analyze physical settings such as mountains, trees, wind, water, and

*Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden* (New York: Rizzoli, 1978), p. 29.

star alignments. Most likely, the early feng shui man was similar to a rainmaker. He gathered information from his surroundings, reading signs and forewarnings in breezes, leaf colors, moon rings, the smell of rain, insect and animal behavior, rock moisture, and stars. To stay in step with nature's best ch'i and to gain power from it requires special talents and special knowledge. As Lin Yun explains:

We possess many senses, not just the five common senses—hearing, smelling, tasting, seeing and touching—but many more. We all have insights. We pick up feelings from people, places, dreams, atmospheric energy. Some people give us a sense of foreboding. Some places make us feel happy and comfortable. We pick up these yet-to-be-named feelings and intuit reality and destiny from that.

He claims people possess more than one hundred "senses," most of which are latent. Feng shui experts have developed their senses to be more keenly aware, more tuned into the environment—like a shortwave radio, they use psychic antennae to pick up messages, signals, and static from their surroundings.

Today feng shui is a complex system that some Chinese choose to handle themselves, while most call for professional advice. Advice varies because of the different theories practiced today. Around the third century A.D., feng shui divided into two principal schools. One, developed in Fukien province, stressed direction and dependence on a cosmic compass, where the relationship of various elements in the Chinese universe—the stars, the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, and others—are charted in concentric circles around a compass. The other, originating in Kiangsi province, was concerned with shapes and directions of land and water masses. In the twelfth century, feng shui blossomed through the metaphysical theories of Chu Hsi, a respected scholar who stressed the "investigation of things (leading to) the extension of knowledge."

Historically, feng shui men ranged from semiliterates and

scholars to Buddhist and Taoist priests. Though there are several feng shui texts, much of the information has been passed down orally, often from father to son. (A feng shui woman did not exist, because Confucian custom prevented transmitting important and sacred knowledge to females: "Teach sons, not daughters.")

In the Chinese eye, feng shui experts, as in most vocations, run the gamut from wise man to charlatan. Some hold positions of respect in communities and use feng shui not only to divine sites, but also to settle local disputes. Others, however, are less public minded, milking residents of money and giving feng shui rhetoric in return. At the turn of the century, near Canton, for example, one geomancer charged a whopping \$3,000 for choosing an auspicious burial site for a wealthy woman. Feng shui frauds are not infrequent: They assign bogus cures, leading some skeptics to use "feng shui professor" as another term for liar.

The Chinese are not beyond invoking the mystical to solve the mundane. While a few with a philosophical bent might see feng shui as a way to stay in step with the cosmos, the more ambitious see it as a necessary edge over others in life. Still, many view feng shui as a paradox: While some scorn it as superstition, most don't turn their backs on it completely, suspecting that feng shui experts possess an innate special wisdom, power, and knowledge.

Feng shui experts guard the secrets of their practice. This practice crops up in various incarnations in Korea, Japan, Laos, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. Feng shui methods are tailored to a range of local needs; a village wise man in Malacca, Malaysia; a graveside exhumers in rapidly developing Singapore, where even the dead can't rest in peace; a publicity-conscious businessman turned feng shui expert; a professional feng shui man who became the most financially successful geomancer in Hong Kong.

Feng shui men today don't exactly fit the image of Mandarin sage—no long silk robes, no white wispy beards. When crew-cut Chen To-sang checks out a client's ancestor's grave, he dons bright

yellow running shoes. Choi Pak-lai prefers well-cut three-piece suits. Although he occasionally sports a cotton mandarin jacket, Lin Yun generally garbs his portly shape in Hawaiian print shirts, black slacks, and slightly elevated shoes.

Black Hat Feng Shui

Tibetan Tantric Black Hat feng shui is practiced by only a handful of experts, among them Lin Yun. Black Hat feng shui is a hybrid of many customs, thoughts, and practices. It arose from the long journey of Buddhism from India through Tibet and finally to China. Along the way, it incorporated religious and philosophical theories, rites, and disciplines from the countries it passed through. From India it carried the word of compassion, the concept of *karma*,* the practice of yoga, and the structure of an organized church, replete with proselytizing monks and religious ritual. In Tibet, it picked up magical and mystical knowledge and ritual such as chants and charms. After arriving in China, it was influenced by indigenous culture—yin-yang theory and Taoism, ancestor worship and animism, divination and feng shui, and even folk cures for every imaginable problem ranging from stomachaches to malign spirits, scholarly aspirations to childbearing, from attaining wealth and power to manipulating the destruction of one's enemies.

One outcome—Black Hat feng shui—is a practical eclectic version of feng shui, mostly based on intuition and mystical knowledge. Its feng shui cures are both logical—*tu-shi*, translated as “within our experience or knowledge”—and illogical—*chu-shi*, translated as “outside our experience.”

* *Karma*: briefly, that one's destiny is determined by one's own good and bad deeds performed in this and past lives.

DIVINATION

One of the origins of feng shui was Chinese divination. The early Chinese used omens to decide on cures for sickness, sacrifices, and the advisability of war; to check out the hunting, farming, and fishing prospects; and to determine the auspiciousness of time and space.

One form of divination that influenced feng shui was astrology, a celestial model of cosmic order on earth. The emperor's palace in Ch'ang-an, the first capital of Imperial China, built in the third century B.C., was constructed, some say, in the shape of and along the astrological path of the Big Dipper—a particularly lucky constellation revolving around and pointing to the ever-stable North Star. Thus the emperor sat at the center of earthly power.

Divination and rituals are not new to the West. Before building any city, Greeks and Romans determined a site's suitability by inspecting the livers of animals grazing there to see if they were healthy. They also employed astrologers to ensure that the city was oriented in line with the cosmos. And like most Chinese towns, Western counterparts generally were laid out along a north-south axis.

But, more than astrology, feng shui was influenced by the pre-Taoist text the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*. Growing out of a divining process using “oracle bones”—tortoise shells and ox shoulder bones that, when placed over a fire, cracked in several “yes” or “no” directions—the *I Ching* is the mother of Chinese thought and practices. It stresses the connection between man's destiny and nature.

By tossing coins, wooden blocks, or yarrow stalks, the Chinese interpreted omens, instruction, and wisdom from the resulting trigrams. These trigrams symbolize nature: ☰ heaven, ☷ earth, ☳ thunder, ☶ mountain, ☲ fire, ☱ wind, ☵ lake, ☴ water. They became symbols of other concepts such as family relations (☳ mother, and ☶ father), cardinal directions, time, and, finally, various stages of change.

The *I Ching* stresses a fundamental Chinese approach: constant cyclical change. Philosophically, it provides an overview of the universe as an entity and all things in it in constant flux. In fortune-telling, the outlook is never static: If circumstances are good, danger lurks around the corner; if luck is bad, things will look up—eternal regenerative change. Man floats with the ebb and flow of nature's tides.

I Ching symbols conjure up cosmic power and energy and are used as good luck charms and hexes. Printed on a cosmic compass, its trigrams provide feng shui men with eight bearings to properly align desks, doors, and buildings, setting man along a correct course in life.

TAOISM

Out of observation, identification, and dependency on nature came *Taoism* (pronounced "dowism"), a philosophy based on the patterns of nature. Influenced by the *I Ching*, it defined man's relationship to the universe. The Taoists believed man was influenced by the cosmos, its topographical permutations, and its passages of time. By studying nature, the Taoists made contributions in scientific fields: astronomy, mathematics, geology, cartography, mineralogy, and chemistry.

The Taoists glorified nature. Love of nature permeated their view of life. Things would not be correct until man could mirror within the harmony of nature without. They exalted it in their poetry. Taoism "seemed to answer the yearnings of men of feeling and imagination for a vision of the eternal in which they could forget the chaos of the present."*

*Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 96.

High rises the Eastern Peak
Soaring up to the blue sky.
Among the rocks—an empty hollow,
Uncarved, and unhewn,
Screened by nature with a roof of clouds.
Bringing up my life ceaseless change?
I will lodge forever in this hollow
Where Springs and Autumns unheeded pass.*

—*Tao-yun*, A.D. 400

Man's place in nature's enormous expanse and eternal change seems insignificant, "a drop of water in a flowing stream." Yet, he is also an integral part of the universe, swept along and controlled by its flow. This was expressed in the traditional landscape paintings of monolithic mountains looming over streams crossed by tiny human figures. It was at once a transcendental solace and a humbling thought to know you were part of a huge eternal structure.

Taoists perceive man and his surroundings as microcosms of the universe, *Tao*. Ideally, man should reflect the balance of nature. A third-century sage, Liu Ling, underlined this identification with the cosmos. Prone to lounging naked in his room, even when receiving visitors, he remarked to shocked guests, "I take the whole universe as my house and my own room as my clothing, why then, do you enter here into my trousers?"† Some Tang dynasty poets would drink themselves into dreamlike stupors to unite and commune with nature. One eighth-century poet is said to have drowned when he reached out for the moon in drunken ecstasy.

Although remaining a philosophy, Taoism also became a popular religion. Prompted by the influx of Buddhism to China,

*Arthur Waley, *Translations from the Chinese* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 79.

†Feng Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York and London: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 235.

Taoism adopted the trappings of an organized church: priests, rituals, and temples. To popularize Taoism and to compete with the growing appeal of Buddhism, Taoist priests also integrated native Chinese customs and wisdom: folklore, filial piety, sacrifices, astrology, herbal medicines, and feng shui. Hence, popular forms of Taoism and Buddhism became interchangeable. Even Confucian elements crept into Taoism, as many devotees prayed for scholarly advancement, offspring, and blessings from ancestors.

Unlike Taoist philosophy, the religion is worldly, more pragmatic than the Taoist philosophy. It deals with daily dilemmas rather than esoteric thought. Taoist priests use rituals to help believers achieve earthly comforts—social position, money, good marriage—preoccupations Taoist thinkers sought to transcend.

Along with its large repertoire of folk cures, religious Taoism adopted *I Ching* and Tao symbols to work as sacred charms. These potent religious symbols, while infused with Taoism's original message of an ever-changing universe, functioned as a precaution against earthly ills. Circling a mirror or a Tao symbol, *I Ching* trigrams create an amulet with mystical powers purportedly strong enough to ward off demons, disease, and other destructive forces from homes, shops, and temples. These charms operate in a manner similar to a Christian cross against vampires and devils or a dashboard Jesus against car crashes.

Though the seeds of feng shui were sown thousands of years ago, feng shui, as practiced today, grew out of both esoteric and popular forms of Taoism. Man's place in nature was to be in harmony. The Chinese used feng shui as a way of linking man's destiny with that of nature by placing graves, buildings, and people in what they divined to be a cosmologically auspicious environment.

Tao, of Taoism, literally means way, principle, process, or road. Tao is the eternal rhythm of the universe and how the universe works. It is also the way of man: Both the universe and man obey the same natural law. From early times the Chinese saw the cosmos as a way, a moving pattern. And that way was Tao.

Tao's roots spring from the Chinese people's witnessing the cyclical seasonal changes from summer to winter to summer again and the daily replacement of the sun and the moon—opposites continually spawning each other, constantly changing yet eternally recurring. Opposites seem to flow from one another rather than to conflict. Tao unites everything, exemplifying the need of nature and man to bring all opposing forces into a fluctuating harmony.

Tao connotes both a doctrine and a process. In the sixth century B.C., Confucius used Tao to preach the moral way or social order, emphasizing political and bureaucratic responsibilities. At roughly the same time, Taoist philosophers, such as Lao-tse, reacting to Confucius, used Tao to express the way of nature, urging people to return to the simple life and thus to return to the original harmony with nature.

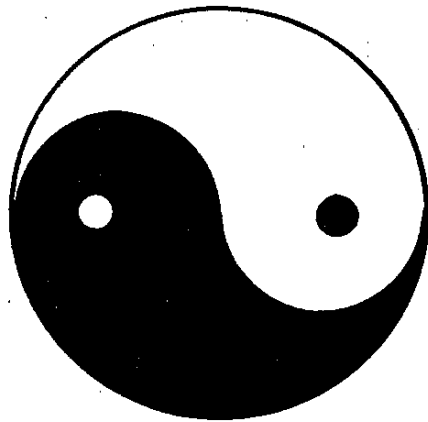
Taoism offers a philosophical genesis. Lao-tse said, if opposites do indeed spawn each other, if summer gives way to winter, then reality must have sprung from nonreality: Before there was an *is*, there was an *is not*: a big void, a unity in nothingness, or a cup—maybe it is empty, maybe it is full, but it is undifferentiated. As Lao-tse wrote, "It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang; the named is but the mother that rears the 10,000 creatures...."*

To balance the environment, feng shui men must determine the patterns of Tao. Two Taoist concepts—*yin-yang* and *ch'i*—guide the Chinese in establishing cosmic harmony on earth.

Yin and Yang

Yin and yang, the two primordial forces that govern the universe, symbolize harmony. They are opposites. Yin is dark, yang is light, yin is passive, yang is active. Yin is female, yang is

*Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 141.



Yin-yang symbol.

male. In the *I Ching*, yin is — — — — —, yang is — — — — —. But, unlike Western ideas of conflicting extremes, yin and yang are complementary. They depend on each other. Without dark, there is no light. Without hot, there is no cold. Without life, there is no death. Like a magnet's positive and negative poles, yin and yang unite.

All things contain varying degrees of yin and yang. Yin and yang continually interact, creating cyclical change. Some describe this ceaseless change as the swing of a pendulum: Winter gives way to spring, only to return in a matter of months; heat replaces cold, which gives way to heat; night follows day, which reemerges after some hours of darkness. There is a sense of wholeness in the movement of yin and yang. And the natural process that unites the two is Tao.

Lin Yun explains Tao's process:

Yin and yang merge together into one—naturally and constantly creating Tao, the universal situation. The moon

(yin) comes out and as it recedes, the sun (yang) rises, then sets equaling one day, and this moon-sun interplay goes on naturally, creating the Tao of heaven and earth. The Tao of couples is when a woman and a man get married and become a family, giving and receiving with each day. Or luck can be rotten and then improve, becoming man's fate and fortune which is never constant, but fluctuates, sometimes good, sometimes bad. This is the Tao of man.

In Chinese traditional medicine, the body needs to maintain harmony. The Chinese say the inside is yin and the exterior is yang. When something goes wrong, the Chinese doctors say they can trace it to an imbalance of one of the principles. If you have an upset stomach (yin) and you feel nausea, your mouth will open (yang) and you will vomit—then you will feel better. This applies also to the emotions. If your heart or mind is upset or uneasy, you might cry; or if you are angry, you might yell. People's personalities must also have a complementary amount of yin and yang to get along harmoniously in marriage and in work.

In feng shui, the yin and yang of a house or a gravesite must be balanced, bringing residents into harmony with their environments.

Ch'i

Ch'i is the most important component of feng shui. One feng shui expert wrote: "If a geomancer can recognize ch'i, that is all there is to feng shui." Ch'i is the vital force that breathes life into animals and vegetation, inflates the earth to form mountains, and carries water through the earth's ducts. Ch'i is a life essence, a motivating force. It animates all things. Ch'i determines the height of mountains, the quality of blooms, the extent of potential fulfillment. Without ch'i, trees will not blossom, rivers will not flow, man will not be. And while all things—hills, streams, trees, humans, stones—inhalate ch'i, they also exhale it, thus affecting each other.

Ch'i is a pervasive concept in Chinese traditional arts ranging from acupuncture and medicine to feng shui and gung fu (commonly known as "kung fu"). It can include such diverse phenomena as the energy that moves waves; the source of fertile earth; what martial artists channel when striking powerful blows; what acupuncturists seek to activate with their needles; and even man's aura. For thousands of years, the Chinese have hired feng shui experts to divine, like architectural dowers, where the best ch'i flows in the landscape.

Mentioned as early as the *I Ching*, ch'i later blossomed as a neo-Confucian concept in the twelfth-century work of Chu Hsi. To the Chinese, ch'i links spirit and substance. Light ch'i floats as air; heavy ch'i sinks to form matter. "Ch'i is extensive and vague. Yet it ascends and descends, and moves in all ways without ever ceasing. That which floats upward is the yang that is clear, while that which sinks to the bottom is yin that is turbid."*

Ch'i follows the patterns of Tao, changing, condensing, and expanding, inhaling and exhaling. At times it is mass; at other times vapor.

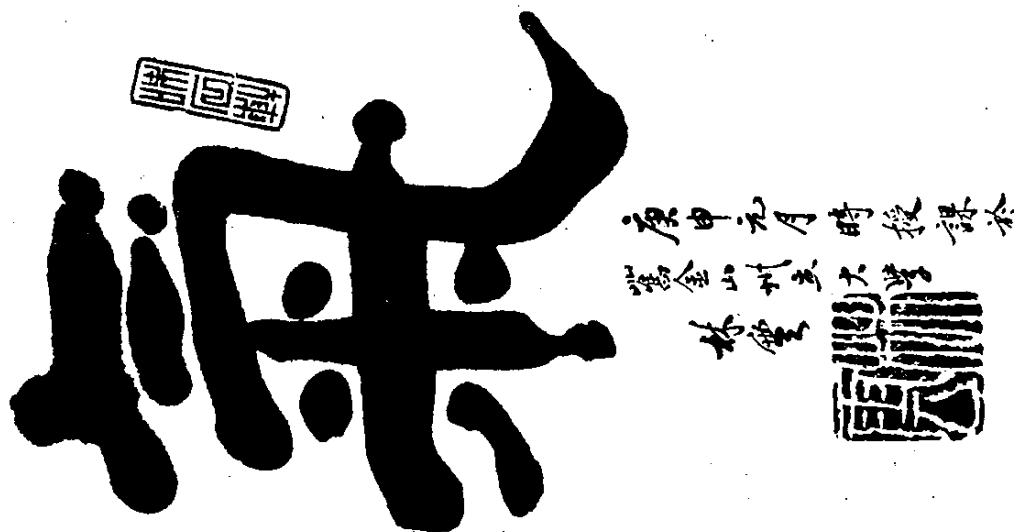
In Chinese, the character *ch'i* has two meanings: one cosmic, one human. Heaven's ch'i encompasses air, steam, gas, weather, and force. Man's ch'i includes breath, aura, manner, and energy. The two types of ch'i are far from separate. Man's ch'i is strongly influenced by the ch'i of both heaven and earth.

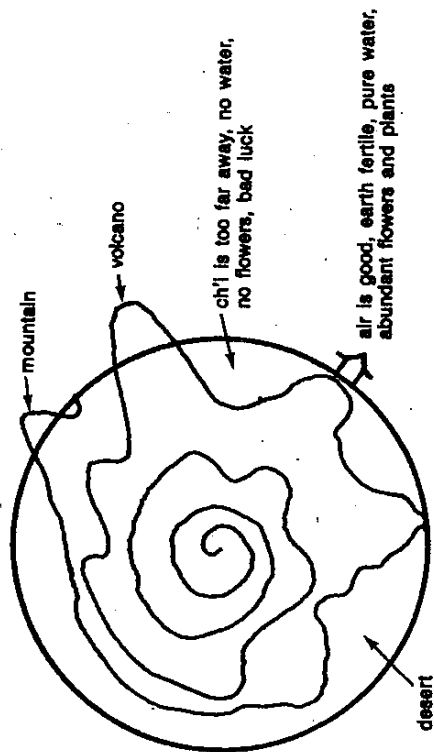
The land most influenced by ch'i, the Chinese claim, is the most habitable: Flowers, trees, and grass grow fastest, animals are the fattest and most useful, and people are the happiest, most comfortable, and prosperous.

As Lin Yun describes it, ch'i spirals around and around in the earth, ever-changing; sometimes "exhaling" toward the crust, sometimes "inhaling" toward its depths, always pulsating and

The character ch'i.

*Wm. Theodore De Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 1, p. 468.





Ch'i and the world.

manifesting itself in different ways: a high mountain, a deep ravine, a flat desert. In the course of its turning, ch'i may rise near the earth's surface, creating mountains. It may expand so strongly as finally to escape, erupting into a volcano. And if ch'i recedes too far from the earth's crust, the land will be dry, desertlike, and flat. The best situation occurs when ch'i nearly brushes the earth's surface, causing mountains to form, trees to grow tall, grass to be green, air to be fresh, water to be clear, clean, and accessible, flowers to bloom, and man to live comfortably and contentedly. When ch'i is too far away, no water flows, pollution and sickness thrive, and there will be bad luck.

Atmospheric ch'i molds human ch'i. Ch'i must flow smoothly and near a person to improve his ch'i. It must be balanced. If the current is too strong or too weak, it can have negative effects.

From the fetal stage, human life is said to be closely linked to

cosmic ch'i. This ch'i, in a sense, is a person's destiny. At conception *ling* (tiny airborne particles of ch'i), having entered a woman's womb, gives the fetus a spark of life. This is the embryonic form of the baby's ch'i. Ch'i pervades the whole body, determining a child's physical characteristics, movements, and mental state.

As with mountains and streams, the Chinese say, the human body is carried by ch'i, a central energy. Ch'i moves us, it causes contractions in muscles and tendons. The ch'i flowing out to the arms allows us, for instance, to bend our elbows, grasp and carry a cup, and sense hot and cold, thus warning of scalding things that might burn us.

Ch'i must flow smoothly and steadily through the body. If ch'i is too weak, we can't move. If it can't flow through an arm, that arm will be paralyzed. If ch'i doesn't circulate through the legs, they won't be able to walk, and if it doesn't reach the heart, then, without a beat, death will follow.

Human ch'i unites mind and matter. Ch'i is not just a signal telling us to move—*ch'i actually moves us*. Chinese painters stress the importance of the ch'i, or, roughly, the strength of the brush stroke. This creative ch'i flows through the body, the arm, along the brush, and then onto the paper or silk, linking artist with creation.

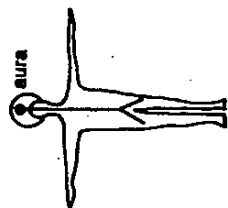
Ch'i, this breath of life, is man's aura, man's real self, his energy and soul. It can be seen by some. It propels us through life and affects our interaction with others. Because all people possess ch'i, every human movement influences both the self and other people. We have been said to give and receive all sorts of "vibes" and "chemical reactions." We are drawn together and repelled as magnets attract and repel. Whatever it is, we are sensitive to others' movements and manners, picking up intuitive information without words. In feng shui, people are also sensitive to the ch'i of their environment. Atmospheric ch'i shapes human ch'i, casting man's destiny. Feng shui practitioners try to direct a smooth, good current of ch'i to a person and divert or convert harmful ch'i.

People possess different types of ch'i, producing various character traits, problems, and reactions. The most desirable is an even distribution of ch'i throughout the body and channeled through the head, creating a halo similar to the Buddha's topknot or Christ's aureole. Another ch'i might be less developed, hiding timidly in the body. Some people have slanted ch'i rising out of their shoulders—the ch'i of an extrovert, or someone continually distracted by his surroundings and opportunities.

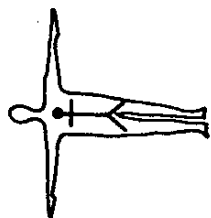
A very pretty woman who walks into a crowded room but is not noticed has muted ch'i or presence, while a not-so-pretty woman with slanted ch'i in the same room would create a stir wherever she turned, striking other people's awareness (ch'i) with her ch'i and sending out strong vibrations.

Ch'i, although rooted in a person's body, may at times be directed toward a different time or place. The Chinese call that state, "The body is present, but the mind is not." We'd call it daydreaming. Those whose ch'i rises up to the throat, but no farther, can neither speak up, overcome trials, nor endure hardship. One whose ch'i comes out of the mouth before getting to the brain may talk too much without thinking about what he is saying. Another person's ch'i may be unchanneled, coming out from every which way, indicating a jittery, nervous disposition—a person who is frenetic about what he does without having any real impact or direction. Others may have good intentions, but when they enter society and the world, they fail—their ch'i rises toward the heart and falls limply out of the side of the body. Those with a downward moving ch'i will be self-defeating and suicidal.

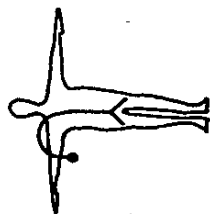
Lin Yun begins to analyze people's ch'i by telling them to "look left, then right." Some people move just their eyes, others their heads, others their whole body. Some move smoothly but slowly, others in jerking motions, while others look left, then stop for a second, then look right. After diagnosing their ch'i, Lin Yun tries to help them "untangle" the knots inhibiting their happiness and effectiveness.



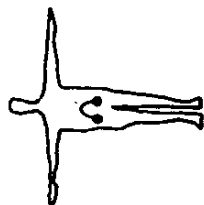
Buddha



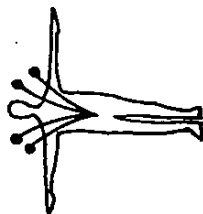
shy,
reserved



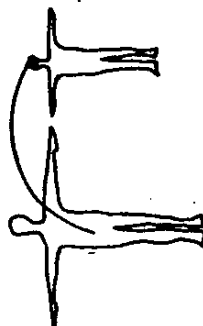
after embarking on any
plan, he/she falls



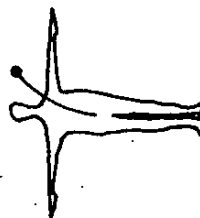
suicidal,
self-defeating



jittery,
unchanneled ch'i



daydreaming



oblique personality, that is,
a flirtatious or shifty person

Human ch'i variations.

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The Chinese admit feng shui has its limitations. Lin Yun says he can manipulate a person's destiny, but he can't change its general course. He says:

Everyone has a potential and a fate. People are born being basically lucky, unlucky and medium lucky. That is fate. Sometimes you can't do anything to help a person—they may be slated to die. But usually, you can improve your lot to a point through initiative, discipline and feng shui to actualize your potential. So that a medium-luck businessman with drive and an auspicious office lay-out and building can financially surpass a good-luck businessman whose work space has less beneficial surroundings.

According to feng shui masters, buildings, trees, and sun all affect the quality and flowing of our ch'i, but do not increase or reduce the amount of ch'i in a person.

Feng shui's goal is to tap the earth's ch'i, just as the goal of acupuncture is to tap a person's ch'i. The feng shui adept must find a place where the ch'i flows smoothly and the principles of yin and yang are balanced. If this isn't possible, feng shui offers methods of bringing the environment into harmony. In divining the potential of a landscape, house, tomb, or room, feng shui experts discern if ch'i is expanding or receding and make suggestions accordingly.

The Chinese distinguish between yin and yang dwellings—the houses of the dead and the places of the living. Yin structures are morgues, mortuaries, and tombs. Yang builders include residences; offices; schools; shops; companies; public works, such as parks, airports, ferry piers, harbors, and train stations; urban planning features, such as bridges, roads, and buildings; and prospective projects with developmental possibilities, such as oil wells, factories, racetracks, and casinos.

Examining the feng shui of a building or grave generally requires a house call or visit to the tomb site. Like doctors, feng shui men will discern ch'i circulation and pulse. While some use cosmic

compasses, others merely know where and how to look, sensing the luckiness of a site.

One seventeenth-century feng shui theorist wrote that recognizing an auspicious site requires special senses—a trained eye and a keen sensitivity.

There is a touch of magic light... It can be understood intuitively, but not conveyed in words. The hills are fair, the waters fine, the sun handsome, the breeze mild; and the sky has a new light: another world. Amid confusion, peace; amid peace, a festive air. Upon coming into its presence, one's eyes are opened; if one sits or lies, one's heart is joyful. Here ch'i gathers, and the essence collects. Light shines in the middle, and magic goes out on all sides.*

*Andrew March, "The Winds, the Waters and the Living Qi," *Parabola Magazine* 3, no. 1 (1978), pp. 32-33.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chiti Kundalini: The Divine Mother

THE TRADITION OF GURUS is very great. It is said that from time immemorial their strength, their power, and the force of their austerities have protected us like a mountain. It is such a Guru who transmits his shakti into the disciple, pierces the chakras, and stabilizes him in the *sahasrāra*.

He causes the sublime Chitshakti to descend into the disciple. This is described in the *Pratyabhijñāvidyā* thus: *chitih svatantrā vishva siddhi hetuh*, "Chiti, by Her own free will, creates the universe."⁷ This Chitshakti is no different from Paramashiva, the supreme Lord. She is the ground of the whole process of creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe.

Chitshakti is completely free. She performs all actions and gives the fruit of all spiritual disciplines. She bestows both worldly fulfillment and liberation; She grants an easy means to happiness. Self-luminous, transcending time, space, and form, She is the creative aspect of Parashiva, the basis of all forms of energy. It is She who gives grace and She who controls it; She is the illuminator of transcendental reality. She is both worldly life and spiritual life. The glory of this supreme Shakti is marvelous. She is the knowledge of the enlightened and the fruit of action of the active. She is the ecstatic state of *bhaktas* and the dynamic Kundalini of yogis.

In fact, She is the beauty of the whole world. The whole world is adorned by Chiti. She is Parashiva's supreme Shakti, Chiti, who is exceedingly marvelous and can be perceived only through great wonderment. The entire functioning of this universe, from worldly to spiritual, is carried on by Chiti.

O Mother Chiti, beloved wife of Parashiva and His dynamic expression, You are His throbbing vibrations. You are the essence of the five elements that compose the universe. You are the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets. O Goddess Kundalini, You are heaven, Vaikuntha, and the netherworlds; You are the three worlds and the four directions. In Your divine existence, You assume the 8,400,000 forms of life—those born of sweat, seed, egg, and womb. You reveal these endless inspirations within Your own being.

You possess infinite modes of being. It is no wonder people become exhausted from investigating the nature of this universe, for the manifestations of Your divine light are endless. You have brought forth this creation, consisting of unity and diversity, within Yourself, but You remain completely detached. You rejoice only in supreme ecstasy. You can be attained through the Vedas, through Vedānta, through different scriptures and mantras.

O Mother Kundalini, You are the blissful Shakti that came from Nityananda. You are yoga and the eight limbs of yoga; You are the essence of *samādhi*; You are the *nirvikalpa* state; You are the almighty sustainer of the human body. O Mother Kundalini, the embodiment of Chiti, You are the pure-souled Guru of all great Gurus. Enthroned on the Guru's seat, in the two-petaled lotus between the eyebrows, You secure for Your disciples what they don't already have and preserve what they already possess. O Yogini Kundalini, You are the supreme deity of spiritual aspirants. O Guru, O abode of love, dynamic energy, You are the grace that came from Nityananda. You are the two-syllabled *So'ham*, his gift to me. Because of You, I am. Mother, You were the consummation of my initiation. With the Blue Pearl as Your vehicle, You appear to my devotees in my form and, through these visions, give them faith.

O beloved Yoga Shakti, I offer to You my love for my Guru. You are an incomparable bestower of fruits. You hold within Yourself countless powers. Assuming numberless forms, You become the Sita of Rama, the Radha of Krishna, the Lakshmi of Narayana, the Bhavani of Shiva, the yogi's power of yoga, the activating energy within *sādhakas*, and the grace-bestowing power of Gurus in the form of shaktipat. You are the Guru. You are the Shakti of those who transmit Shakti. This Mother Shakti, supremely honored, lives in the Guru, becoming the Guru. Therefore, the Guru is neither male nor female. He is only the power of blissful love, absorbed in his own ecstasy. He is the enlightening force of the fully unfolded Kundalini. Chiti Shakti and the Guru are the same. The Guru is in Chiti, and Chiti is in the Guru. The two are absolutely identical.

The Guru is the visible form of Parabrahman; in truth, he is Parabrahman. Moreover, the Guru who projects the divine Chiti into his disciples is not only the Guru, he is the disciple's own beloved life-breath, his own inner Self. Not only that, he himself is the wealth of the disciple's sadhana and the goal of his sadhana. It is the Guru principle, the essence of Guruhood, that one attains through sadhana—the Guru who has transcended the phenomenal world, who is full of divine ecstasy, full of supreme bliss. There is not the slightest exaggeration in the description of the Guru in the *Guru Gītā*, or in Jñāneshwar's song of the Guru's glory in *Jñāneshvari*: "Compared with the water that has washed the Guru's feet, the elixir of life is an ordinary drink." According to the *Guru Gītā*, worship of the Guru is the universal worship:

*gurureva jagatsarvam brahmā-vishnu-śivātmakam
guroḥ parataram nāsti tasmāt sampūjyed gurum*

The Guru is the whole universe, including Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. There is nothing higher than the Guru. Therefore, worship him devotedly.

You will understand the meaning of this only when you have a direct experience of the Guru, who is charged with Chiti. He is

all holy places, all gods. What more can I say? The Guru is the all-pervading Brahman taking the form of the universe, and it is this One who enters the disciple in the form of grace, who causes His own divine power of grace to enter into the disciple. To effect this entry is what is called shaktipat initiation, the true *kriyā yoga*, or Guru's grace. Guru's grace is the infusion of the Rudra Shakti into the disciple.

Auspicious Glances

Decoding the Magnificent Paradox
of Hindu "Idol Worship"



Constantina Rhodes Bailly

If you've ever had the good fortune to travel to India, you may have experienced, as I did, what seemed to be an incredible assault on the senses. It may have seemed as if the world were plugged in and amplified, and that your faculties of sight and hearing were challenged to meet the intense stimuli. In the bazaars lining the entrances to Hindu temples and Muslim mosques and shrines, one encounters Day-Glo colors in the heaps of bright powders for sale, to be used for the rituals within.

Garlands of bright orange marigolds are dazzling to behold, and their pungent fragrance becomes an unforgettable olfactory signifier of sacred places. Incense, flower petals, rose water, cow dung, decomposing garbage, sandalwood paste, camphor, and patchouli—all mingle in the heat of an ordinary day. Foods are a delightfully perplexing mixture of flavors: You find yourself asking whether that was sweet or pungent or hot, or all of the above.

India can impress the visitor as a place perpetually engaging in a vigorous symphony of colors, fragrances, and sounds in a way that is unlike anywhere else. When I first returned from

This article is a modified version of my presidential address to the American Academy of Religion/Southeast, presented on March 29, 1998 in Knoxville, Tennessee, and entitled "Four Arms, Three Eyes, and Infinite Possibilities: How to Decode the Auspicious Images of Hindu Sacred Art."

two years in India to complete my graduate work in New York City, what I had remembered as the bright lights and bustle of Broadway now seemed dull and vacant in comparison.

I had gone to India to continue my studies of the Sanskrit and Hindi languages, and to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation on one of India's traditions of mysticism. India has produced an extraordinary and multifaceted literature on the simple, uncluttered life of the spirit, the purity of extracting oneself from the images and entanglements of the world. In fact, the complexity of the yogic literatures had seemed to me to be almost excessive . . . until I set foot in India. The world-denying tendencies of Indic thought now impressed me as being in direct and inverse proportion to the burgeoning and pressingly insistent world of the senses. Even the brightly colored images of the gods that I met at every turn impressed me as being so many forms, and I found myself wondering what they had to do with the life of the spirit. In this wondering I was not alone.

Supported by others in the past, I simply assumed that the realm of the spirit was in direct antithesis to something of the impure or even unreal realm of matter and *maya*, or illusion, and that authentic "spirituality" would somehow denigrate any connection with the world of form. From such a point of view, these images of the gods could only serve to perpetuate one's entrapment in *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into this world), not to transcend it. Or so those particular Hindu philosophers whose theories made their way West would have us think. It was only later that I came to discover opposing, and indeed more widely embraced theories about approaching God *through* these images.

This article will explain the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of divinity in Hindu religiosity, and discuss how, contrary to common academic misconceptions, worship by means of sacred images is considered in certain Hindu schools to be in fact the most efficacious way to communicate with and to achieve the experience of union with God.

Scholars, Missionaries, and the (Mis)Understanding of Hindu Sacred Art

Indic religions have not always included an elaborate worship with images, but once this practice developed, probably around the sixth century CE, the Mimamsaka philosophers were quick to denounce it, building their argument on the premise that the

gods do not have bodies. Later, the renowned ninth-century philosopher Shankara qualified this view, arguing that the gods *do* have bodies, but that formed images are merely a step on the way to the highest, and are thus inferior accessories to worship. By extension, Shankara promulgated an elitism in which image worship was recognized as an acceptable activity for the inferior and the simple-minded, but not for those who "knew better."

Shankara's school took hold and it became the justification for an intellectual elite to extricate itself from the constant demands of worshipping a god who always seemed to be around, in favor of a transcendental, abstracted, clear, and clean union with the Absolute. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Shankara's negative view of image worship and its popularity with the vast masses of India would provide the clarification call for India's intellectuals and social reformers who sought to prove once and for all that Hinduism was indeed a monotheistic religion—even if from the outside it did not look that way. Such theories played right into the sensibilities of the British in India, and of the missionaries who brought with them the anti-iconic stance of Protestant Christianity.

As we in the West are well aware, the Hebrew Bible repeatedly admonishes against iconic worship, and a commandment states: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

In Hindu image worship, the focus isn't as much on the material as it is on the provision of a visible body to house the energetic essence of the divine and thereby to provide a means for *darshan*, the auspicious "seeing" and "being seen by" the deity. There is a visual communion with the divine by means of the faculty of sight. Discussing the great importance that Hindus place on *darshan*, or "seeing" the sacred, Diana Eck addresses this position:

On the whole, it would be fair to say that the Western tradition, especially the religious traditions of the "Book"—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have trusted the Word more than the image as a mediator of the divine truth. The Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible are filled with injunctions to "proclaim" and to "hear" the word. The ears were somehow more trustworthy than the eyes. In the Christian tradition this suspicion of the eyes and the image has been a particularly Protestant position. (20)

Secular visitors without any discernible religious agenda also had some trouble with the Hindu sacred images, not just for what they represented theologically, but for the sheerly exotic "otherness" of encountering so many such images at once. Therefore we might say that Mark Twain was recording his own case of sensory-overload when he wrote this in his diary about the "idols" that he encountered on his trip to India: "And what a swarm of them there is! The town is a vast museum of idols—and all of them crude, misshapen, and ugly. They flock through one's dreams at night, a wild mob of nightmares" (qtd. in Eck 18). But all of that irrepressible expansiveness wasn't necessarily a bad thing. If Twain was baffled and disturbed by the multifold expressions of religiosity in India, he also acknowledged a certain wealth of the spirit, for elsewhere in his diaries of India he wrote, "In religion, all other countries are paupers. India is the only millionaire" (Eck 24).

India's "spiritual millionaire" status notwithstanding, the Graven-Images-As-Nightmares theory still held strong. Thus it was that in 1893, when Swami Vivekananda introduced Hinduism to the Western world at the renowned World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the faith that he portrayed had nothing to do with the ritualized images of gods and goddesses. Rather, the Hinduism that he presented was a form that had won the approval of the missionaries, the scholars, and the social reformers—those who would align themselves with Shankara and reject the notion of *darshan*, looking away from the images as simply inferior and misguided props for the unlettered masses.

As the discipline of Religious Studies developed in the United States and began to include the study of "World Religions," the Academy bought right into the party line that was being offered. With very little exception, academic discourse and pedagogy focused on the elite, the upper-caste, the brahmanic, the Vedic, the transcendent. Now, by no means am I suggesting that these are to be ignored. On the contrary, they are Hinduism's classics. But by their very nature, the classics of any culture reflect a certain rarefied and select group. As for other aspects of Indology, it wasn't until quite recently that scholars began to publish studies of the Hinduism that was being practiced most of the time by most of the people.

Commenting on this shift in academic focus, the inimitable late Agehananda Bharati had this to say: "I think Ashish Nandy was right when he elaborated that modern Hindus are trying to make Indian divinity into some sort of a square,

semitic-sociocentric-monotheistic God, feeling embarrassed, as they do, about the chthonic, often hermaphrodite, often trickster-like faces of Indian divinity" (314).

What, Then, Is a Hindu Sacred Image?

Hindu sacred images, called *murtis*, are developed according to rigorous application of canon, a genre of classical texts known collectively as the *Shilpashastra*. Herein are specified the measurements and proportions for the image of particular deities . . . measurements with such meticulous precision as to make the canons of Praxiteles seem lenient by comparison. Every factor in the making of the icon, from selection of materials to the state of mind of the artist while working, is prescribed in the texts. In the fabrication of a wooden sculpture, for example, the proper tree must be located during specific phases of the moon, and the entities dwelling in and around the tree must be propitiated for use of the timber. The Hindu artisan of these sacred forms, known as the *shilpin*, belongs to a special subcaste; the *shilpin* himself must adhere to strict yogic disciplines of prayer, fasting, and meditation preceding and during the periods that he works on the images.

Once the *murti*, or image, has been created, it undergoes an elaborate consecration known as *pranapratishta*, in which the priests literally infuse it with the *prana*, or vital energy, of the divine. The image may now be used for worship, its perfect form having been awakened and filled with divine life-essence. The steps of *puja*, or ritual worship, entail a colorful and joyous showering of God's image with offerings. In what may seem ironic, when all is finished, the image is often so heavily laden with flowers and ornaments that it can hardly be seen. *Thus, the form seems to dissolve before the eyes of the worshippers.* This idea is not lost on the faithful, for as we will see, worship with images entails the experience of God as transcendent and immanent, simultaneously.

"Idol Worship"? Or A Sublime Encounter with God?

Worship of God through the vehicle of the material image is just that—worship of God, the highest God. This worship is through a vehicle that is not only appropriate in its being material, but is appropriate because, according to the nondualistic philosophies, the material world is but a *manifestation* of the highest consciousness. Divinity expresses itself in many levels and forms, not just as an "instructional" device or a

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preliminary, but for God's *lila*, or sheer delight in taking the form.

With intricate detail—far too much to go into here—Hindu scriptures of such schools as the Kashmir Shaiva, the Pancharatra, and the Shri Vidya delineate and justify the movement of the divine consciousness from the absolute, transcendent state as it unfurls itself to create the tangible, material world. Ritual is a means by which the pious can establish and maintain contact with the divine, and indeed, gain a sense of the experience of the divine.

One worships the *ishita-devata*, that is, the "beloved god," or one's personal god, with a name and a distinguishable form. Whether that individual manifestation be ferocious, as in the gloriously horrific Mother Kali, or whether it be playful and alluring, as in the various aspects of the precious young Krishna, the worshiper interacts with and gains experience of the god's formed personality as well as the overarching and all-encompassing flood of divine grace. From here one is transported and can move further along, to a deeper place, or a higher place, a place of divinity that is both formed and that leaves the form behind. Such a movement from one state to the next is designated first as *bahyapuja*, the "external" worship of the material form, which leads to *manasapuja*, or "mental worship," and next to *parapuja*, the transcendental worship beyond form.

It is essential to remember, however, that in such stages a Hindu worshiper never bristles restlessly before the image, thinking that this is but a preliminary to be overcome, a trial scale to run through mindlessly before the real symphony begins. Not at all. Indeed, the transcendent is present right there in the very material form of the *murti*. This is because, as every Hindu knows, the form itself is not the god. This is why it is misguided to call Hindu image worship by the name of "idolatry." God the Highest has been invited to reside in the image—and in order to shower grace upon the devotee, God responds to the call.

In the case of *utsava murtis*, or "festival icons," it is only too clear that the images themselves are not God, but they are only *repositories* of divine essence. The festival images are created of disposable materials—usually once-fired clay. They are infused with divine energy, approached with delight and reverence for the duration of a particular festival or sacred observation, and then they are ritually destroyed: the deity, as

honored guest, is allowed to leave, and the image is joyfully, even boisterously and noisily, transported by truck or on the shoulders of jubilant young men and deposited in a river to dissolve back into the elements, the submersion of the image accompanied by great cries of glory to the god or goddess. Here is the end of the image, but no somber funeral is this; the god has simply moved to a different place—the place of origin—the etheric, unformed space of pure consciousness.

The process of this arrival in the colorful, noisy, and fragrant realm of laudatory song, percussive instruments, incense, flower garlands, offerings of ripe fruits and sweet confessions, followed by the eventual dissolution into the elements demonstrates that what happens to the individual deity on earth is what happens to the individual consciousness of the worshiper: this, too, delights in the material worship as well as in the transcendent place to which it leads. The transcendent and immanent may, from a dualistic vantage point, be construed as separate and unequal, but from a nondualistic view, these are but variegated aspects of the same glorious creation.

What Do the Gods Look Like?

The Hindu image, most especially when expressed in the *chitra*, or two-dimensional painting, is meant specifically to provide a glimpse of the bounteous gods and their divine abodes. Illustrating this article are a few selections of the highly popular lithographic prints. These depictions of the deities are based upon the classical canons for both two-dimensional and three-dimensional images. The components of the pictures comprise a type of alphabet. This visual language as such consists of specific ornaments, colors, modes of dress, posture, seat, attendants, implements held, and ritualized hand gestures. As such, part of the language relates to human understanding. But in a surrealistic twist, other aspects manifest as well: multiple arms and hybrid animal-human forms come to mind. The world of Hindu sacred art is not to be contained easily within any easily classifiable formula. No wonder our usually unflappable Twain found the whole encounter so unsettling.

Images of the gods and goddesses are found everywhere in India, and they provide an object for everyday remembrance of God. Step into any taxicab or scooter rickshaw, tea stall or fabric shop, and in some corner the proprietor will have set up a miniature *puja*, or altar, to welcome the presence and company of the god into his daily activities. Once again, we see that

the deity is welcomed as guest into the human realm, bringing the concentrated brilliance and auspiciousness of the divine into the ordinary.

Ganesha

Lord of Auspicious Beginnings, Ganesha is the well-known god with the body of a young man and the head of an elephant. He represents wisdom and joviality at once. In Plate #1, Ganesha is seated in the center of an image representing Divali, the Hindu Festival of Lights. He wields a metal weapon to destroy illusion, a rosary to tally the rounds of mantra recitation, and a lotus, the pan-Indian symbol of transcendence from *samsara* while yet being rooted in it. He holds a bowl of confections called *modaka*, which are the sweetness that life can offer when blessed by the deity. His lower right hand, held upward and open, forms the gesture of *abhaya mudra*, which means "fear not."

Ganesha here is flanked in the back by elephants, symbolic of wisdom, fertility, and abundance. Here they are pouring water in an act of *abhisheka*, the refreshing lustrations ministered both in religious ritual and in the coronation of the king. The goddess Sarasvati is on our lower left. She is the patron goddess of education and the fine arts, and she is immediately recognized by her white sari, her attendant swan, and the *vina*, the stringed instrument in her arms. Notice that she also holds a book in one hand. On the other side is the goddess Lakshmi, benevolent goddess of abundance and prosperity. Gold coins are flowing in an unending stream from her lower right hand, which is formed in a ritualized gesture known as *varada*, or "granting a gift."

The three gods are seated so as to receive offerings, which are displayed at the lower part of the picture. The offerings, which include a holy book, represent life's blessings of a healthy body, mind, and spirit. The brilliant clothing, the accoutrements, the elegance and the graceful attention of the deities, and the fullness of the offerings—which are given to the gods but will in turn be blessed and distributed back to the worshippers as *prasadam*, or sanctified food—all embody the concept of auspiciousness.

Ganesha has four arms here, as he often does. The most logical reason (if we are to apply logic to the realm of the gods) is that extra arms are needed to do extra work . . . just think how many times you might have expressed frustration at your

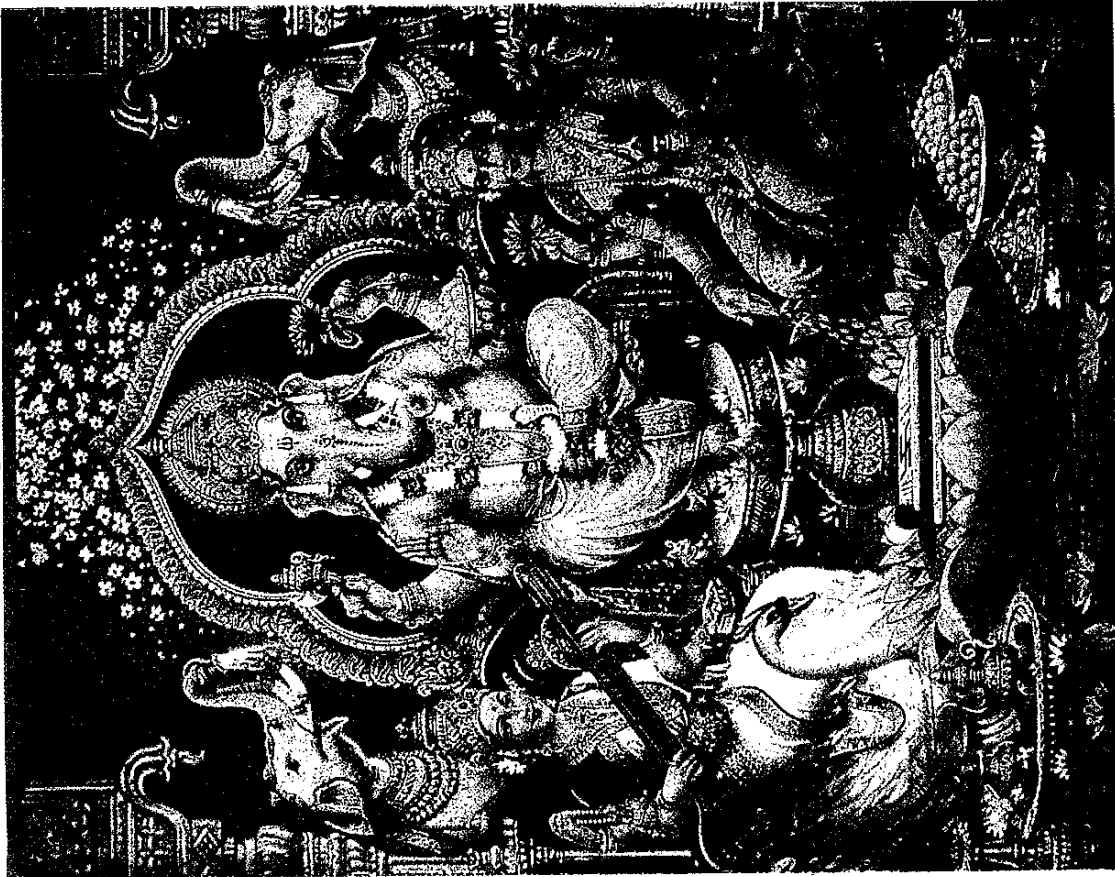


Plate 1: Ganesha-Sri Divali. Courtesy Smith Poster Archive, Syracuse University Library.

own limitations by exclaiming, "I only have two hands!" And although four is often the designated number of arms for many of the gods, there is actually no limit. Sometimes, they have two, most often when the image is of a god and goddess together as husband and wife. In contrast, some of the fierce goddesses, who are usually depicted without a spouse, have many more arms . . . in some cases eighteen, and in others (especially when depicted in Buddhist art), they are said to have "one thousand arms." Art historians point out that such images create a visual impression of the dazzling, unearthly display of energy in motion, powerful and majestic beyond measure.

Kali

If Ganesha represents auspicious beginnings, the goddess Kali is a deity who embodies auspicious endings. Kali is the horrific goddess of death and destruction. In what way can this be auspicious? Kali represents the dissolution of all that is decaying and illusory, giving way to the birth of wisdom. These are the uncomfortable liminal areas, the realm of death and rebirth. Kali wears a garland of skulls and she is adorned with vermillion paste. To view her image is to sink into a vision of black and red. These colors represent the common denominators of death and the ensuing life that flows in blood. Eyes bulging, bright red tongue protruding ferociously, this is the magnificent goddess who is called upon to destroy demons, whether they be the evildoers famous in the sacred narratives or the psychological debilitations that keep one attached to the world and away from the experience and longing for God. She is uncompromised reality, the core of wisdom without constriction or the false sense of niceties behind which the timid hide.

Plate #2, entitled "Kali Devotee," may be considered an embodied form of Kali for worship, a living *murti*. This is a worshiper of Kali from the southern Indian state of Kerala, engaged in an ancient ceremony of indigenous origin whereby the practitioner becomes possessed by the goddess. Here, the energy of the goddess exists in the possessed devotee who has adorned himself ritually to identify with his chosen deity. Using coconut shells to emulate breasts, and elaborate metal headgear to serve as her fangs and terrifying demeanor, this devotee embodies the outrageous aspect of the goddess, one who pushes the devotee past fear itself, who helps the devotee to wake up to the greatness that lies beyond the entrapments of ordinary,

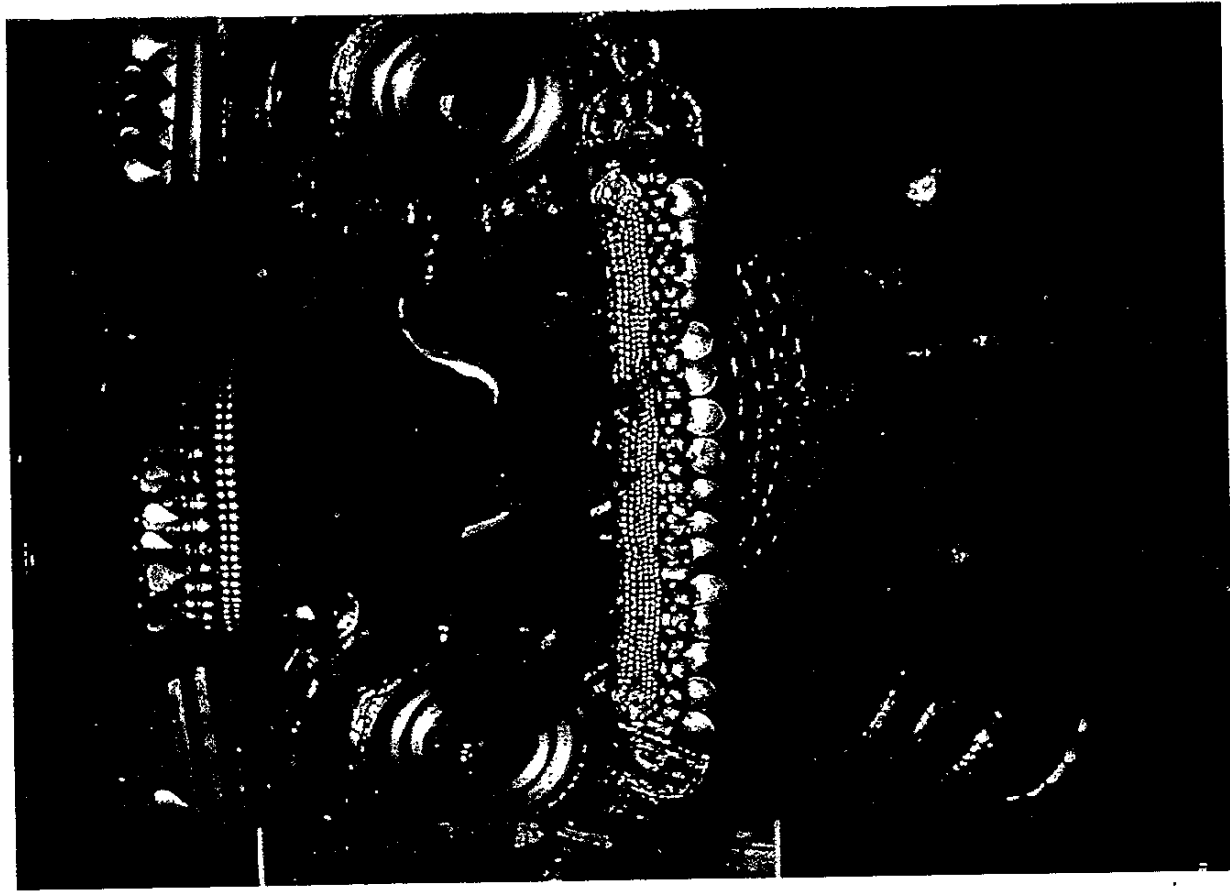


Plate 2. Male devotee dressed as Bhagavati or Vagesvani, a manifestation of Kali in tiger-form. Cheruvathur Muchilot Temple, Kerala. From Ajit Mokerejee, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (New York: Destiny Books, 1988); p. 39.

limited perceptions of reality. It is through this uncompromising portal that one can enter into a state of liberation.

Lakshmi and Vishnu

Not all of the deities, of course, represent beginnings or endings. In the center of Plate #3 are the beloved deities Vishnu and Lakshmi, the god and goddess who preside over the formed creation as the "preservers" of the universe. Here we have a seeming explosion of divine forms and images, a multiplicity of divinity in the world. When the world begins to lose its equanimity or appropriate religious consciousness, these deities enter into the human realm and dwell here in order to restore *dharma*, loosely translated as order and harmony. Vishnu appears in many *avatars*, literally "descents" into this realm, in embodied forms that are sometimes human, sometimes animal, and sometimes a combination of both, each time appropriate to the situation. In every descent Vishnu is accompanied by Lakshmi, who completes the personification of his qualities of *dharma* and auspicious abundance. In this image known as *Ashtalakshmi* and *Vishnu*, the couple is surrounded by the eight forms in which Lakshmi manifests herself, just in this particular creation alone!

It is considered to be highly auspicious to have images of Lakshmi and Vishnu in one's home and to cast one's eyes on them regularly, absorbing their expansive, beneficent qualities into one's ordinary activities. In contrast, images of some of the fierce goddesses of destruction, such as the particularly frightful Chinnamasta, are exclusively for the eyes of yogis and others who have officially severed their ties to the world.

Shiva

We come now to the god of destruction and dissolution, the great god Shiva, who, like the goddess Kali, is fierce and auspicious at once. Shiva is the god of asceticism, of leaving the world behind. He is the primordial yogi, with the symbolism to attest to his status: he bears the third eye on his forehead, seat of meditative insight. He lives at the edge of the world, in cremation grounds and in the frozen snows at the top of the Himalaya. Whereas Lakshmi and Vishnu, the gentle gods of preservation, are garlanded with flowers, Shiva is adorned with a necklace of poisonous snakes. Whereas they wear royal silks and golden crowns, Shiva is clad in the skins of wild animals and smears his body with sacred ash. The crescent moon, symbol of the dimly lit night of mystery as well as the resonance of the sacred syllable OM, rests in his long, matted locks. Also

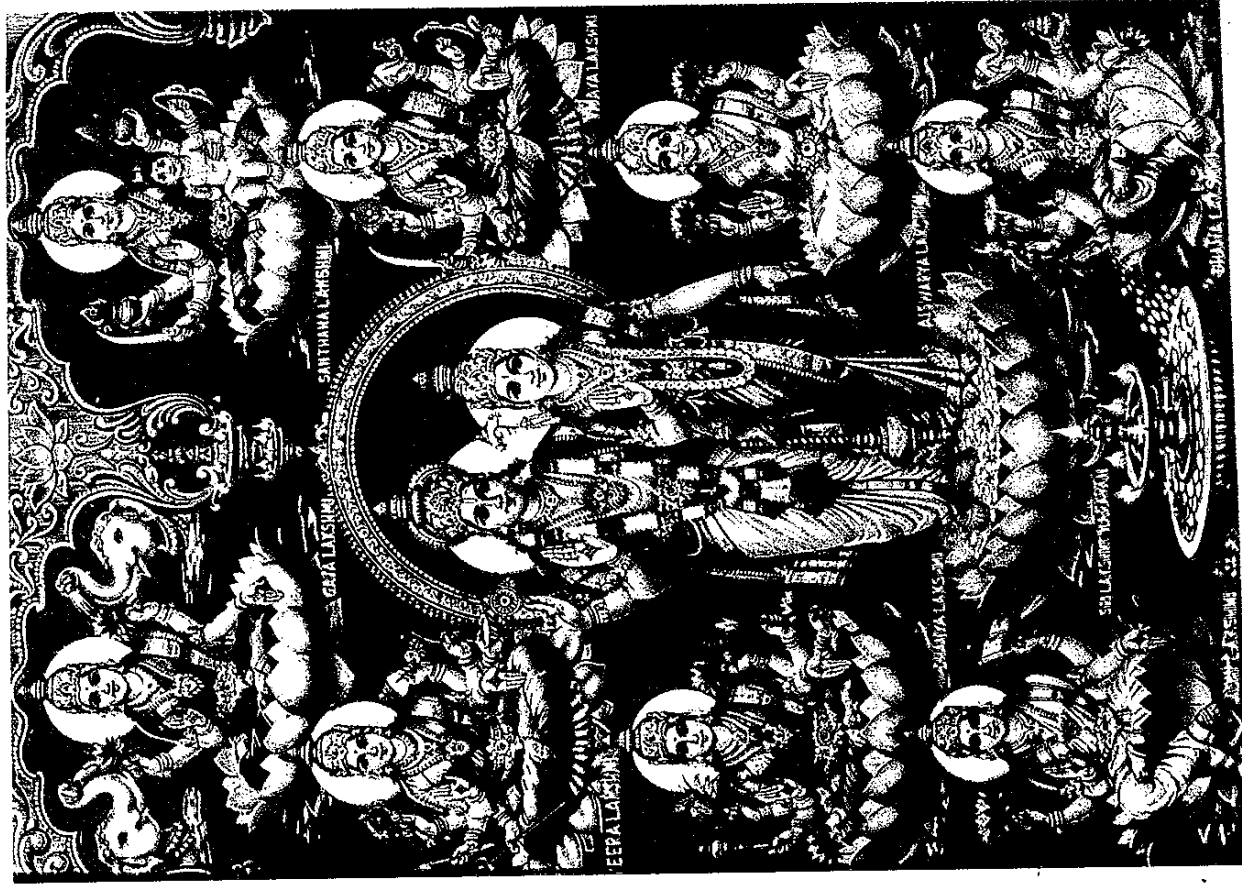


Plate 3. Ashtalakshmi and Vishnu. Courtesy Smith Poster Archive, Syracuse University Library.

flowing from the top of his head is the goddess Ganga, or the sacred Ganges River, whose origin is said to be in the heavens and whose fall to earth is broken by Shiva's beneficent locks. Literally, the source of the Ganges is high in the Himalaya, Shiva's recognized abode of meditation.

Most of the deities are depicted with their accompanying *vahanas*, or "vehicles"—the animals upon which they ride through the heavens and make their way to the earthly realm. Images of Shiva usually include his vehicle, Nandi, and guarding the entranceway to Shiva's temples rests a large, impressive, and sometimes golden bull—Siva's Nandi and the Westerner's reminder of previous admonishments about graven images of golden calves.

If Shiva is the cosmic destroyer, he is also the one to pave the way for the new creation. As such, the great yogi who destroys one's bonds to the world is also the force behind creativity and sexuality; linked with Shiva's asceticism, then, is his essential eroticism. Shiva is often worshipped as the *lingam*, a stone carved in the image of a phallus. The *lingam* is adorned and worshipped as an image of the god, acknowledging the procreative force that follows absolute destruction. And whereas many of the mythic episodes about Shiva accentuate his extreme asceticism, the Hindu scriptures also contain just as many episodes in which he is compelled to leave behind his mountain abode and join the goddess Parvati in marriage. In a perplexing juxtaposition, some of the images of the marriage of Parvati and Shiva depict the confirmed ascetic, clad only in the skin of a wild animal, pictured on his wedding day. The goddess Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya, is arrayed in the dazzling red and golden colors of earthly life and prosperity, the traditional attire of the Hindu bride. The marriage ceremony is a sacrament binding one's official entrance into the world of *nama-rupa*, the world of "names and forms." And yet here is a literal marriage bringing together the immanent and the transcendent aspects of God. The worshiper is reminded of the paradox and ultimately the union between eroticism and asceticism, between life-affirmation and life-denial, between the formed image and the transcendent energy behind it, simultaneously.

Embracing the Paradox

Just as the stories and images of the Hindu gods contain many, often contradictory elements, similarly, in the worship of images there is no conflict, no ultimate paradox, but simply a display of life's variegations, of God's delight in taking on many forms. The gods come to earth and graciously inhabit the images that

are created to house them. Through these the worshiper contacts and participates in the effulgent and transformative energy that is God. In the Hindu world of icon worship, this is no simple-minded idolatry. *On the contrary, the wise gladly embrace this glorious paradox, for it is only through the blessing of a far-reaching mind and expansive heart that one can participate joyously in the worship of a God who allows Himself/Herself/Itself to be revealed in an infinite expression of forms.*

The motif of gods and goddesses changing shape, shifting into versions of one other, even being created from the essence of each other, serves to highlight the notion that ultimately these forms and personalities are simply designations. Their essence is fluid and exists of supreme consciousness. This is why Hindu sacred texts can proclaim that there is one God and yet 333 million gods—both statements attest to the infinitude of the divine and its presence at all times, in all places.

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Constantina Rhodes Bailly

Constantina Rhodes Bailly is an associate professor of Religious Studies at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. She is the author of *Shiva Devotional Songs of Kashmir: A Translation and Study of Utpaladeva's Shiva-stotravali* (State University of New York Press) and *Meditations on Shiva* (State University of New York Press). She is currently preparing a book on the goddess Lakshmi.

Constantina Rhodes, *Invoking Lakshmi* (forthcoming)

Selections for use in REL 110: The Nature of Religion, Hunter College

Introduction

Invoking Lakṣmī

The Goddess Arrives in Delhi

It was autumn in Delhi, that majestic time of year when the sky sparkles a bright blue and evenings resonate with a gentle coolness. A season of delightful reprieve from the summer's heat, autumn is a time to celebrate life's bounty. As its refreshment mediates against all kinds of torpor, many experience this season as an expression of the goddess. Even the name *Autumn* is one of her names.¹ This is a time of movement and excitement, of visiting and of receiving guests. It is therefore no wonder that this is the time to receive the most desirable guest of all, for this is when the gracious goddess visits her earthly devotees and infuses them with her blessings. In particular, autumn is the most auspicious time for invoking Lakṣmī, beloved goddess of beauty, wealth, prosperity, and abundant good fortune.

In every neighborhood, people were cleaning house, some of them also scrubbing the exterior walls, applying fresh coats of whitewash or paint. They were preparing for Dīvālī,² the Festival of Lights celebrating Lakṣmī. Everyone and everything seemed to be in on the celebration. Temples, homes, shops, taxis, and the streets themselves were decorated and made ready for the goddess's arrival. In the marketplaces, strings of tiny electric lights sparkled in the trees and from awnings. When night fell, firecrackers would compete with the sound of devotional music on public loudspeakers.

On the day of the new moon, women decorated the steps leading to their doors with beautiful designs in bright-colored powders, tracing footsteps for the goddess of wealth to find her way into their homes. Alongside the footsteps they placed rows and rows of small clay lamps, and at nightfall, they lit the lamps, their cotton wicks saturated with *ghee*,³ which emitted an exquisite, golden brilliance. These small lamps were also placed up on the flat rooftops, so that the entire house was lit up in a kind of landing pattern for Lakṣmī to follow as she descended from the heavens. With an invitation of such beauty and luminosity, how could the goddess resist gracing these homes with her presence?

I had been invited to attend my first *pūjā*, or ceremonial worship of the deity, in a private home on the outskirts of Delhi. Veena, the woman of the house, was performing a Dīvālī *pūjā*, for which she had set up a temporary altar in a corner of the bedroom. Having spent the past few days in cleaning and preparation, she appropriately began the actual ritual at dusk, when the

¹ Śārādā is the Sanskrit word for autumn and is also a name of the goddess.

² Dīvālī is the vernacular name for Dīpāvalī, a Sanskrit name meaning "rows" (*āvalī*) of "lamps" (*dīpa*).

³ *Ghee* is clarified butter.

lamps are lit to dispel darkness. The central image of worship was a 5" x 7" framed lithograph print of the goddess Lakṣmī, which had been set into a stainless steel bowl filled with puffed rice. Veena lit several sticks of sweet, highly fragrant incense and began to recite prayers and make offerings as she waved a small brass lamp fueled with *ghee*. Here again was that exquisite golden light. She was invoking the goddess, inviting her to enter the home and impart her blessings.

Despite the steadfastness with which she performed the ritual motions, however, there was an impression of mild disorder, imprecision, and distraction: some of the liquid offerings spilled out of their containers, while powdered offerings blew away and onto the nearby bed, staining the bedcover with indelible vermilion and turmeric splotches. Children (hers and the neighbors') were running through the house and out into the lanes. Her husband would chase after them and bring them inside, after which they would wriggle free and resume their gleeful romping and attempting to get into the box of firecrackers. Despite the distractions and having to stop and start several times, Veena continued, nonplussed. It was clear from her relaxed demeanor that all was proceeding well. Although as a visitor I could only perceive the ordinary messiness of life that would somehow stand in the way of drawing down the divine into that house on that night, the hostess proceeded with a calm certainty that this *was* the *pūjā*, with spills, color, ringing bells, and interruptions, for as Veena sang supplicatory prayers to the Mother of the Universe, her own children were beseeching her to please hurry up and give them their sweets and sparklers. This jumbly melange of activities struck me as what the goddess of abundance must stand for -- life, bright and awake, burgeoning, and despite all distractions and possible encumbrances, was ever moving in and around the human realm. This was certainly a far cry from the peaceful feeling of stillness I had expected. But the ceremony was not yet complete.

Toward the close of the ceremony, Veena lit another lamp, this one with camphor, which sent out an initial blaze of sparks and then settled into a diamond-like, piercingly brilliant white light along with an astringent and pungent fragrance. Very suddenly things got quiet. Of their own accord, the children gathered close to the altar, standing still and with an attitude of expectation. I noticed that the street noise had subsided, and the darkening room seemed to spread with light. Within an instant, everything had changed. A deep and peaceful fullness settled over the house. That yogic point of perfect quietude flooded the heart and stilled the mind. I let go of compulsive, dualistic queries: Is Lakṣmī a goddess of the worldly realm? Or a goddess of transcendence?

In that moment where the *pūjā* imploded into perfection, where the supplications from the human realm seem to have succeeded in drawing the goddess into our space, crowding out mundane restlessness with a deep and abundant tranquility, existence within the world and transcendence beyond the world seemed as one. The *pūjā* elicited a point of perfect suspension, a window into the infinite that exists between the movements of coming and going, of past and present, of mundane and holy. What was the cause of that glorious hiatus? When that splendid moment subsided and we began to move about, the first words out of anyone's mouth came when Veena's son Ramesh, all of three or four years old, announced: "*Devī ā rahī hai!*" That is, "*The goddess has arrived!*"

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Part Four

Ceremony

Chapter 7

Invoking Lakṣmī in Ceremony: *Lakṣmī Pūjā*

Creating Space to Receive the Goddess

The ritual of *pūjā*, generally translated as "ceremonial worship," consists of specified actions for invoking and honoring the gods. It is performed in order to invite the deity into our space and to experience -- on some level -- her palpable presence. Sacred songs operate on the mantric level of sound; *pūjā* operates more tangibly in the physical, material world, working through the third dimension to draw the goddess even more fully into the earthly realm. Tradition holds that whether she is worshiped in homes, where laypeople make their offerings with varying degrees of formality, or in temples, where priests offer precise and elaborate ceremonies, the beneficent goddess Lakṣmī receives all offerings graciously. The words contained in the songs of our volume certainly attest to this; the gods themselves are recognized as worshipers of Lakṣmī, and the "fruits" (*phala*) verses enumerate the many types of blessings that gods and humans can expect to receive if the goddess is pleased.

Pūjā is conscious, even hyperconscious action. It consists of specific parts and sequences, which will be discussed below. Hindu *pūjā* engages the natural and physical world in its most splendid expression. The underlying purpose of performing a *pūjā* to any of the Hindu deities is to generate the sacred power of auspiciousness. The attitude of the *pūjā* for each deity corresponds with the essential qualities of that deity. The ceremony is in a sense an embodiment of the deity's divine personality traits and varying expressions of the fundamental essence that comprises all things. The Lakṣmī *pūjā* is performed to arouse the power of *śrī* -- a richness of being that enlivens health, wealth, beauty, prosperity, longevity, happiness, harmony, well-being, balance, glory, majesty, splendor, and luxurious bounty: as we have seen in this volume, the expressions of *śrī* are endless. The devotee consciously sends forth the offering of the ceremony with the subtle awareness that what is being offered is actually the essence of the deity herself. The performance of the ritual draws this quality from the transcendental, back into the realm of human experience. Having been immersed in the timeless essence of the sacred through performance of the ritual, one may then return to the realm of human experience refreshed and better able both to navigate its tumultuous challenges and to savor its beauty.

In performing the Lakṣmī *pūjā*, the worshiper participates in creating a sacred precinct that becomes infused with *śrī*'s essence. In contrast to the joyously piercing clamor of percussive instruments that characterize a Śiva *pūjā*, for example, the Lakṣmī *pūjā* is delivered with a soft and sweet attitude. In order to invite such qualities -- or the goddess embodying those qualities --

into one's presence, the worshiper must take the preparatory steps toward creating an auspicious environment, for Lakṣmī, like all of the deities, is attracted to that which is similar to herself. One summons the goddess by welcoming her into a ritual space that is replete with the abundance of Lakṣmī herself. In the preliminary rituals, even imitation is enough to inaugurate the process of drawing the goddess near. Without the conscious preparation for receiving such qualities, one essentially stalls the process before it has even begun.

To invoke auspiciousness, one must first consciously banish the inauspicious and engage in auspicious actions and ways of being. As we have considered above, for example, Lakṣmī and her "sister" and antithetical counterpart, Alakṣmī, never dwell in the same place at the same time. Therefore, the worshiper who propitiates the deity of auspiciousness must consciously abandon any manifestations of the inauspicious. For example, as the time of the *pūjā* draws near, participants are enjoined to become conscious of their speech -- to avoid gossip, abusive language, and upsetting conversations, and instead to speak gently, and of uplifting, lighthearted topics. This is both a yogic discipline and an initial engagement of Lakṣmī's energy. Sometimes, circumstances call for a separate *pūjā* beseeching the inauspicious Alakṣmī to absorb and remove negative influences before Lakṣmī can be invoked to bestow her auspicious blessings. Usually, however, the preliminary actions preceding the *pūjā* serve this purpose, and Gaṇeśa, remover of obstacles, is invoked to clear the way for the auspicious entrance of Lakṣmī.

The physical preparations for the ritual entail that the worshiper must first have bathed, dressed in clean clothing, and adorned himself or herself appropriately. The clothing need not be new, but it should be "untorn," just as, later, the offerings to the deity must not have been used or in any way "broken in" by humans; the first impressions set onto one's body and accoutrements should be instilled by the goddess herself. Similarly, the goddess must be the first to partake of the ritual offerings. This explains why the ceremonial rice grains will necessarily be "unbroken" (*akṣata*), or "unhusked," why the food offered will not have been tasted, and why the fragrance of the flowers and incense should not have been breathed in by the human participants until after the ceremony.

All *pūjās* generate a flow of cyclical interaction from the worshiper to the deity and back to the worshiper again. In the Lakṣmī *pūjā* the worshiper gathers together but a small portion of that which Lakṣmī gives to the world, and offers it back to the goddess. Lakṣmī *pūjā* features gold coins, ripe, sweet fruits, fresh flowers, sanctified water, fragrant substances, and delectable confections of honey, sugar, and milk-based ingredients -- milk, of course, being the product of the sacred cow, long recognized as an embodiment of Lakṣmī. The atmosphere generated is sumptuous and sparkling, bright with the colors of red vermilion powder, golden turmeric, and fresh green leaves. These symbolize Lakṣmī's life-sustaining power as the flow of blood in the human body, the flow of monetary currency in society, and the flow of sap in all types of plants as they sustain the natural world with nourishment, medicine, shelter, refreshment, and beauty.

When the goddess receives the offerings into herself, ordinary substances such as foods and flowers are transformed into repositories of sacred potency. It is the goddess who alters one's state of consciousness, transforms one's material circumstances, and transmutes the essence of "ordinary" substances. As with other festive occasions, participants are given favors upon their departure. At the end of the ceremony the worshipers receive back the sanctified foods and flowers, which are known as *prasāda*, or "favor." What the goddess bestows upon the supplicant refers not only to the tangible goods at hand -- partaking of the ritual foods, enjoying the fragrance of the flower offerings, receiving the purificatory blessing of the sacred flame by waving the right hand across the *ārati* lamp and drawing its essence across the top of one's own

head, and so forth -- but also receiving her blessings of health, prosperity, and the overall improvement in the circumstances of one's life. Above all, it is the deepest essence of an individual that is touched and expanded so as to receive these blessings and allow them to take root. In one's most profound experience of the Lakṣmī *pūjā*, the noise and vicissitudes of the world become absorbed back into their source; the world's dissonance collapses and leaves a resonance of the goddess's exquisite serenity. From that source, one's circumstances can unfold and begin anew, guided by the beneficent hand of the goddess of prosperity.

The Ancient Art of Hospitality

The performance of *pūjā* reflects ancient Indian customs of hospitality. The simple act of offering a comfortable haven to the traveler after a lengthy journey evolved, long ago, into an elaborate and aesthetically significant art of hospitality, in which both the host and the guest enacted specifically designated and complementary roles. Certain aspects of the ritual, such as the offering of the seat, have roots at least as old as Vedic times.⁴ The motif is patterned upon receiving a guest of royal status. The complementary figure to the king would be the guru, or spiritual preceptor, in that whereas the king holds the highest worldly status, the guru reigns over one's spiritual life. The king's throne and the guru's *gaddi*, or sacred seat, are easily transferable to a designated chair, usually the most comfortable or beautiful seat in the house. Any visitor from afar, as the stories constantly remind their listeners, is potentially a god in disguise.

By opening to accept these actions, the guest respects his designated position as gracious recipient of the host's hospitality. The guest therefore remains immobile while the host performs all of the actions. Such is the paradigm of hospitality that even were this a human guest, food and drink would be borne on trays and then presented to the one being honored; never should the guest even have to reach out and take them for himself. Related to this is the notion that what is offered has been prepared especially for the guest and none other. Further the host does not dine *with* the guest, but watches attentively and affectionately while he partakes of the meal. The underlying principle is that one does everything and takes care of everything for the guest. The host enacts the role of the servant. The ancient Indian etiquette of hospitality maintains clearly designated boundaries between the one who humbles himself to serve and the one who humbles himself to receive.

Although the guest motifs were transferred to the ritualized hospitality toward the gods as a means of invoking them, honoring them, and seeking their blessings, it was understood that the gods do not actually require any of these attendances. As is well recognized in the literature, the gods neither thirst nor hunger, their feet never touch the ground, they do not perspire, they do not cast shadows, and no matter how dusty or dirty the environment might be, they remain unsullied. Devotees, however, participate in the details of the ceremony *as if* the gods needed these things. Certainly, the elaborate forms that *pūjā* may take -- and again, elaborateness is not a requirement, especially in daily offerings -- serve the supplicant as much as they do the deity being served. This is in part due to the aesthetic power inherent in the symmetry, discipline, and beauty of the ritual. The intense and abundant overtures with brilliant colors, aromatic fragrances, and chanting serve to awaken the senses and direct them toward a heightened experience of the deity. The effects of a *pūjā* are to compel the mind's chatter to be still and to move away from the distractions of mundane life, in order to allow the supplicant to encounter divine consciousness.

⁴ Bühnemann, *Pūjā*, 137.

The purpose of *pūjā* is to call forth and receive the presence of the deity. Performed to its highest standards, *pūjā*, culminates with the host and guest exchanging roles. The devoted worshiper now becomes the recipient of the abundant gifts and blessings of the deity. Here, though, there is a departure from exact symmetry, for that which the goddess confers always exceeds what the devotee has offered.

Structure of the Ceremony

The Lakṣmī *pūjā* that we present in this volume is an example of *smārta pūjā*, “*smārta*” indicating an orthodox tradition of worship based on the *smṛti*, that is, “remembered,” or traditional literature of the Vedic tradition, which includes the voluminous lore on deity worship contained in the epics and Purāṇas. Although *smārta pūjā* is in its strictest sense performed by priests, this type of worship does not carry the exclusivity of the Vedic rituals. *Pūjā* indeed has deep roots in the Tantric traditions, and its present form may actually be more “Tantric” than “Vedic.” *Smārta pūjā* therefore has always had a certain degree of malleability, and it is not uncommon for householders to perform these rituals themselves. The Lakṣmī *pūjā* that we present here was compiled by Pandit Rajesh Dixit and published in the *Śrī Lakṣmī Upāsanā*, the same manual for Lakṣmī’s worship that has provided the Sanskrit texts for most of the songs in our volume.

The structure of *pūjā* traditionally contains sixteen *upacāras*, which may be translated as ritual attendances, offerings, or reverent actions performed for the deity. Each ritual attendance is accompanied by the recitation of a verse, usually from the *smṛti* literature. The original paradigmatic structure of the *pūjā* contains sixteen *upacāras* to accompany the recitation of each of the sixteen verses of the *Puruṣa Sūkta* (Vedic hymn to the “cosmic man”). Although modifications developed regarding the verses sung and in the details of some of the ritual substances, the general motifs covered by the sixteen ritual actions continue to adhere to the original structure of the *pūjā*. On the other hand, some traditions, such as the Śrī Vidyā and the Pāñcarātra, celebrate a version of Lakṣmī *pūjā* in which the sixteen *upacāras* are accompanied by a verse of the *Śrī Sūkta* instead of the *Puruṣa Sūkta*.⁵

The entire ritual procedure as presented in the *Śrī Lakṣmī Upāsanā* consists of six preliminary actions, followed by twenty-seven ritual attendances. These adhere to the general format of the traditional sixteen-part *pūjā*, and they can easily be seen to follow the general guidelines of the sixteen ritual attendances (*upacāras*), the main difference being that some of the actions are enumerated with sub-categories. The reader is referred to the Appendix for an outline articulating the correspondence between the two enumeration systems.

We turn now to our text of a Lakṣmī *pūjā*. We introduce each ritual attendance with a brief explanation, which is followed by the translation of its offertory verse.

⁵ This explains why some versions of the *Śrī Sūkta* contain sixteen rather than fifteen verses.

Lakṣmī Pūjā

Text

Preparation and Purification

Prayer for well-being (*Svasti-vācana*)

In the opening mantras, the Vedic gods are invoked for overall well-being (*svasti*) and for the success of the ceremony. These are the ancient deities who are extolled in the earliest written scriptures of the Brahmanic tradition as presiding over the forces of nature. There is very little mention of them again in the rest of the *pūjā*, but their invocation here at the outset creates an important statement just in their inclusion; it lends the authenticity and the power of the *śruti*, the scriptures that were “heard” by the earliest sages and that have their origins in heaven itself. Calling upon the names of these deities constitutes the recitation of a powerful Vedic mantra, thus offering protection in the highest as well as undeniable authenticity and continuity of a sacred tradition. These deities are considered to be intensely potent entities whose identity hovers in the space between the undifferentiated cosmic essence of the universe and its expression as heavenly presences and the forces of earthly natural phenomena. These include, for example, the dawn, the day, the pole-star, rainstorms, and the waters. They dwell in the sound of their *mantras*, and recitation of their names releases their power. Invoking them generates their thunderous presence, stirring up the requisite surge of primal energy to move the *pūjā* into its first motions.

Prayer for well-being:

Om. May Indra, lord of expansive powers, grant well-being.
May Pūṣān grant well-being.
May Brhaspati grant well-being.
May the gods of the universe grant well-being.

Om. May the vital powers of the earth rise up to greet us.
May the vital powers of the plants rise up to greet us.
May the vital powers of the sky rise up to greet us.
May the vital powers of the cardinal directions rise up to greet us.

Om. Salutations to the spirit of fire,
To the spirit of the winds,
To the spirit of the sun,
To the spirit of the moon,
To the Vasus,
To the Rudras,
To the Ādityas,
To the Maruts,
To the gods of the universe,

To Lord Brhaspati,
To Lord Indra,
And to Lord Varuṇa.

Om. May there be peace in the heavens,
Peace on the earth,
Peace in the waters,
Peace in the herbal kingdoms,
Peace in the forests,
Peace among the gods of the universe.
May the peace of *brahman* be unto all.
Peace. Peace. Peace.
Let there be peace, peace, peace.

Purification of the worshiper (*Pavitrīkaraṇa*)

The purification of the worshiper actually begins when the devotee bathes and dresses in clean clothing in preparation for the ritual. At this point, however, there is a further purification in which the worshiper touches his head three times with water while reciting the "verse for the purification of the devotee." This takes the preparation from the gross physical level of the body into the various levels of the subtle body.

Verse for the purification of the devotee:

Whether in a state of purity or impurity,
The one who remembers the lotus-eyed lord
Becomes ritually pure, within and without.

Clearing away disruptive spirits (*Bhūta-śuddhi*)⁶

Bhūta refers to a restless spirit, often the ghost of a person who has suffered a violent or untimely death, or simply a spirit that lingers restlessly on the earth, unwilling or unable to move beyond. A *bhūta* can also be a disembodied being that is maleficent by nature. Either type of entity can obstruct the success of the ritual. *Śuddhi* denotes cleansing or purification. The *bhūta-śuddhi* mantras are recited in order to pacify and/or send away disruptive spiritual influences, clearing the sacred space to receive the auspicious presence of the deity.

The worshiper should clasp a bundle of sacred sweet-grass (*dūrvā*), unhusked rice, and flowers in the right hand, and dipping it into water, he should use it to sprinkle the area while reciting the "verse for the clearing away of disruptive spirits."⁷ Some advise the worshiper also to kick the earth three times with the heel of the left foot during this purification.⁸

⁶ In estoteric *pūjā*, there is a form of preparatory meditation also called *bhūta-śuddhi* that entails visualizing the progressive dissolution (*śuddhi*) of the elements (*bhūta*) within one's body.

⁷ Dixit, *Śrī Lakṣmī Upāsanā*, 15.

⁸ Keshavadas, *Gāyatrī*, 111.

Verse for the clearing away of disruptive spirits:

By the powerful authority of Śiva
Let the lingering earthbound spirits be gone
And the disruptive spirits hereby be destroyed.

Verses for Meditation on Lord Gaṇeśa (*Śrī Gaṇeśa dhyāna mantra*)

Widely venerated as the remover of obstacles and the lord of auspicious beginnings, Gaṇeśa is invoked at the outset of any important enterprise, whether secular or religious. No *pūjā* would be undertaken without first seeking the blessings of the elephant-headed god to ward off negative influences and to ensure a clear path between the devotee and the deity invoked in the ceremony.

Verses for the meditation on Lord Gaṇeśa:

Om. Listen as I offer praise
With the recitation of the twelve names:

Salutations to the one with a beautiful face.
Salutations to the one with a single tusk.
Salutations to the red-hued one.
Salutations to the one with elephant ears.
Salutations to the pot-bellied one.
Salutations to the handsome one.
Salutations to the destroyer of impediments.
Salutations to the remover of obstacles.
Salutations to the smoky-colored one.
Salutations to the commander of the legions of demi-gods.
Salutations to the one with the moon on his brow.
Salutations to the elephant-headed one.

Let us meditate on the god
Who has four arms, a pleasing countenance,
And is dressed in moon-white garments.
May he pacify all forces of disruption.

Statement of Intention (*Saṅkalpa-vākya*)

Although in its most general sense *pūjā* is performed to receive the blessings of the deity in whatever form the deity wishes to bestow them, a specific intention should be verbalized by the worshiper. The statement of intention draws the focal point to a psychological reality and away from a merely theoretical abstraction. It emphasizes the clarity and reality of the worshiper's expectation, and it compels the worshiper to reflect upon his human condition and his relationship with the deity. The statement of intention here does not have a designated mantra or verse, for these words are unique to each devotee.

Verses for Meditation on the Goddess (*Dhyāna Mantras*)

At this point the worshiper recites mantras that describe the deity so as to visualize her -- what she looks like, what she wears, references to some of her beneficent deeds, and so forth. The preparatory segment of the ritual guides the worshiper's consciousness to shift, ever so subtly, from ordinary consciousness to the relaxed, meditative state that is more conducive to reception of the deity. Physical and mental preparations have initiated the process; here, the focus hovers between mental imagery, which serves an intellectual purpose, and the resonance of the Sanskrit syllables as mantras, which serve to create awareness beyond intellectual perception; the mantras here have discursive meaning and yet they transcend that as well.

As has been noted with some of the other songs of praise in our collection, the extraction and inclusion of verses from one song to the next is a feature of this genre of devotional literature, especially where the authorship remains anonymous. Five verses are presented here for meditation on the goddess. It is interesting to note that four of these five also appear in the well-known *Eight Verses Praising Mahālakṣmī* (*Mahālakṣmyaṣṭakam Stotram*).⁹

Verses for meditation on Lakṣmī:

Salutations to you, O Supreme Māyā,
Wellspring of auspiciousness,
Adored by all of the gods,
Wielder of conch, discus, and mace,
O Mahālakṣmī, salutations to you. //1//

Salutations to you, O rider of Garuḍa.
O Goddess, terror of the demon Kola,
Destroyer of all iniquities,
O Mahālakṣmī, salutations to you. //2//

O lotus-seated goddess,
Embodiment of the supreme *brahman*.
O Supreme Lady, Mother of the Universe,
O Mahālakṣmī, salutations to you. //3//

O Goddess clothed in white,
Adorned with a dazzling array of splendid ornaments,
You are the foundation of the world
And its divine mother.
O Mahālakṣmī, salutations to you. //4//

May my home ever be blessed
With the presence of Śrī,
That wholly auspicious goddess
Who presents herself as the divine Lakṣmī

⁹ "Verses for meditation on Lakṣmī" 1, 2, 3, and 4 correspond with *Eight Verses Praising Mahālakṣmī* (*Mahālakṣmyaṣṭakam Stotram*) 1, 2, 7, and 8.

Seated on a lotus,
With lotus in hand,
Bearing a golden urn inlaid with jewels,
Dressed in the most splendid apparel,
Who has eyes like lotus petals,
A slender waist,
And rounded hips that curve like lotus leaves. //5//

Heart of the Ceremony: Receiving the Goddess

Invocation (*Āvāhana*)

Here begins the *pūjā* proper. The devotee invokes the goddess with words of praise.

Verse of invocation:

Om.
O you of the lovely eyes
Who bear the lotus in your hand
And who bear all the gods within your majestic being,
O Goddess, mother of the entire creation,
I invoke you!

Seat (*Āsana*)

The goddess is invited to be seated. In addition to providing comfort to the divine guest, the seat serves to anchor the ritual in time and space with a solid foundation and focal point. It literally establishes the presence of the goddess.

Verse for offering the seat:

Please accept this beautiful lotus seat of brilliant gold,
Resplendently ornamented with magnificent gems.

Water for bathing the feet (*Pādyā*)

Bathing the feet is an ancient custom of hospitality whereby the host receives the honored guest in a physical display of graciously attentive pampering. An important feature of this aspect of hospitality is that the host performs the action for and upon the guest; the graceful pouring of water upon the feet is an intimate and humbling way for the host to receive the guest. Washing the feet provides cleansing and refreshment as well as the ritual purification to remove evil and negative influences that may have been collected on the journey or indeed anywhere that lies outside of the sanctified space. The soles of the feet are believed to be particularly susceptible to the absorption of impurity, whether physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual.

Verse for bathing the feet:

The water for bathing your feet
Has been collected from sites of holy pilgrimage
And is mixed with sandal and other perfumes.
O Goddess,
O you who adore your devotees,
Accept my offering.

Fragrant water (*Arghya*)

Arghya is water into which fragrant and aromatic substances, such as sandalwood paste, have been mixed, and it is offered for refreshing the face and mouth.

Verse for offering the fragrant water:

Accept my gift of refreshing water
Mixed with eight fragrant substances,
And served to you in a vessel of gold.
O Mahālakṣmī, salutations to you.

Pure water for sipping (*Ācamana*)

The goddess is offered pure water to sip as refreshment after partaking of the flavored offerings.¹⁰

Verse for offering the water for sipping:

To the creative energy of the entire world,
Who is lauded by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva,
And the other gods,
I present water for sipping.
O Mahālakṣmī, accept this offering.¹¹

Bathing (*Snāna*)

The ritual bath consists of the pouring of sacred substances over the image of the deity. If the physical image could be damaged in some way by actual contact with the bathing materials, these may be poured over a betel nut or simply offered reverently and poured into a bowl before the image. The first of the bathing ingredients is holy water (ideally Ganges water, which may be substituted with any other holy water or water collected from a river on the day of the *pūjā*).

The other necessary ingredients are known collectively as *pañcāmṛta*, “the five nectars”: milk, yoghurt, ghee (clarified butter), honey, and jaggery (raw brown sugar made from palm

¹⁰ Kane notes that one may offer water for sipping (*ācamana*) after the end of each instance of bathing (*snāna*), clothing (*vastra*), and feeding (*naivedya*). *History of Dharmasāstra* Vol. II, Part II, p. 730.

¹¹ Creative energy: *śakti*.

sap). Some texts and worship manuals advise that these five nectars should be presented in order, so that the oilier substances (due to their milk or butter content) are followed by the more astringent ones, leaving the body fresh afterward and facilitating the final offering of pure water.¹² The milk products are especially significant because these are derived from the sacred cow, itself a form of the goddess Lakṣmī. Further, each of these substances is said to represent a particular aspect of divine power as it manifests on earth. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* notes that yogurt is "power in this world," ghee is "the brilliance of animals," sugar is the "distilled sweetness of plants," and honey is "the sap in plants and trees."¹³ These substances are embodiments of Lakṣmī and therefore they represent not only the goddess's sweet and powerful sanctity that lies at the center of all things in nature, but the tenacity and purity of her vital energy in the world. With each new cycle of life, the goddess transmits her essence as fluid energy from one generation of living beings to the next.

The ceremonial worship of various other deities also includes the five auspicious substances. At every such *pūjā*, as they pay homage by offering these substances, the devotees also pay honor to the substances, thereby also invoking Lakṣmī herself. How much more potent, then, is the worship of Lakṣmī when she is offered the very substances that she embodies; in this sense, Lakṣmī *pūjā* embraces the essence of every *pūjā*, and every other deity worshiped in this way can be seen as a manifestation of Lakṣmī, quintessential embodiment of auspiciousness.

Verse for the bathing:

O Mother of the Universe!
O you who adore your devotees!
Accept for your bath
This auspicious Ganges water
Mixed with the five immortal nectars.

Clothing (*Vastrayugma*)

After being bathed and patted dry, the deity is dressed in fresh, new clothing of a pure material, ideally silk. Traditionally, images of Lakṣmī are wrapped in a red sari with gold borders.

Verse for clothing the image:

O Mother of the World,
I present you with a beautiful garment
Of fine woven fabric.
O Goddess, please accept these stunning new clothes.

Milk-and-honey drink (*Madhuparka*)

¹² *Pūjāprakāśa*, p. 34; qtd. in Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 731.

¹³ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 8.20.1; qtd. in Buhnemann, *Pūjā*, 140.

Madhuparka is a sweet milk-based drink whose most important ingredient is honey (*madhu*). It also usually contains yogurt and cardamom. Serving *madhuparka* is widely recognized as a way to express honor when receiving a guest.¹⁴

Verse for offering the milk-and-honey drink:

O Goddess,
Accept the sweet contents
Of this golden vessel,
A gold-colored mixture of
Yogurt, milk, and honey.

Ornamentation (*Ābharāṇa*)

Adorning the body is regarded as a highly auspicious action, and the visual effect of embellishing the image of the goddess of wealth amplifies the quality of her abundance and luxurious splendor. Furthermore, the wearing of ornaments serves not only to enhance beauty but to form a protective coating over the wearer. Pure gold is believed to act as a reflector against attacks of inauspicious or debilitating forces. As is attested to in the manuals on the sacred science of gems and minerals, each precious gem and metal is valued not only for its beauty but for its inherent potencies as prophylaxis against negative forces, many of which are attributed to the interference of malevolently positioned planets and other astrological configurations.

Of course, as has been stated before, the goddess does not *need* any of this, but rather an image so adorned exudes the commanding and palpable presence of beauty, luxury, splendor, and invincible power.¹⁵

Let us add a word here concerning a difference in the *pūjās* for male and female deities. As noted above, the paradigm for *pūjā* is based upon worship of a male deity, and in the offertory sequences, the, or “clothing” (*vastra*) of the image is followed by “that which is placed after or upon the clothing” (*upavastra*). In the worship of a male deity, the “clothing” consists of an uncut cloth to be wrapped and folded onto the lower part of the body as well as a shawl to drape over the upper part. What follows is the placement of the sacred thread, which is conferred upon males of the upper castes to signify their religious status as “twice-born” (*dvija*).¹⁶

Where ceremony for male deities calls for investiture, the Lakṣmī *pūjā* instead calls for ornamentation (*ābharāṇa*), and instead of the singular placement of the sacred thread there are five

¹⁴ For example, a bride’s father welcomes the bridegroom to his home by offering *madhuparka*.

¹⁵ For further discussion of adornment and auspiciousness, see Bailly, “Ornamentation,” 750-51.

¹⁶ Although some early texts suggest that, like their brothers, young girls received the sacrament of investiture, this is not widely known and in any case seems to have been discontinued well before the worship of Lakṣmī was expressed in the form of the *pūjā*.

independent ritual attendances in which the goddess is draped with various adornments of jewelry, perfumed ointments, and sacred powders, all emblematic of the auspicious state of the goddess.¹⁷

Verse for offering the ornaments:

O Goddess,
Accept these jeweled bracelets.
Take delight in strings of pearls,
Cat's-eye gems,
And precious ornaments of every kind.

Sandalwood paste (*Candana*)

Preparing sandalwood paste is a time-consuming endeavor that requires both patience and a fair amount of physical strength. The wood of the sandal tree is ground continuously in a circular motion, eventually producing a highly perfumed, gold-colored residue. This exquisitely fragrant paste is sometimes blended with other aromatic unguents, as is indicated in the verse below.

Verse for offering the sandalwood paste:

Please accept your anointment of sandalwood paste
Blended with camphor, aloe, and musk.
Salutations, O you who adore your devotees.

Red sandal (*Rakta candana*)

A variety of sandalwood, red sandal is especially significant to the goddess because of its golden-red color. Certain rituals in the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, for example, specify the offering of "a million pieces of red sandal" in order to call forth the presence of Lakṣmī.¹⁸

Verse for offering the red sandal:

Please accept my offering of red sandal
Blended with fragrant essential oils
Of coral tree and sandalwood.

¹⁷ *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra* 66.4 maintains that any ornaments of gold and precious gems offered should be authentic and not imitation (*Ibid.*, 732). Some texts acknowledge that if a person cannot afford to offer clothing or ornaments, he may perform a *pūjā* of ten, rather than sixteen, ritual attendances (Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Part II, 729-31). The point here is that quality is more important than quantity.

¹⁸ *Lakṣmī Tantra* 48.15-17.

Vermilion powder (*Sindūra*)

Used widely to signify the auspicious life force, *sindūra* is a bright red powder that is the quintessential emblem of the goddess. Red is the color of blood, the conduit of *śakti*, the power of the life-force. A mark of *sindūra* on a woman's forehead, or in the parting of her hair, indicates that she dwells in *saubhāgya*, that is, the auspicious state of good fortune, especially in the form of a happy marriage. As part of the *pūjā*, the auspiciousness generated in the ceremony is sealed into the forehead -- seat of the "third eye" of mystical sight -- with the application of the red powder. This seal, called a *tilakam*, is applied both to the image of the goddess and to the participants in the ceremony.

The qualities of transformation and life-energy are not necessarily merely symbolic, for *sindūra* is a powdered form of red mercuric oxide that features in the alchemical traditions of medieval India. In English, *sindūra* is known both as vermilion and as red lead. Red lead is also a common name of *darada*, mercuric sulfide, or cinnabar, extolled in the alchemical traditions of India¹⁹ and China²⁰ for promoting vitality, longevity, and even immortality. Perhaps because it bears similarities -- both alchemical and symbolical -- to mercuric sulfide, *sindūra* is also called synthetic cinnabar,²¹ reinforcing its identification with unconquerable vital energy and the power of transformation.

Verse for offering the vermilion:

O Goddess, with great devotion
I offer this vermilion.
O beloved Goddess,
Accept this auspicious marking
Of bright red vermilion.

Red powder (*Kumkuma*)

Known in English by its Indic vernacular name, *kumkum* is another red powder that is used as a forehead adornment to symbolize the energizing power of the goddess and auspiciousness in general. As such it resembles *sindūra*, although it is constitutionally quite different, for *sindūra* is a metallic powder, whereas *kumkum* is ground from vegetable substances -- either saffron or red turmeric.²²

¹⁹ White, *Alchemical Body*, 247.

²⁰ Cinnabar carries the same significance in the esoteric Buddhist and Taoist traditions of China, where it is called (in Mandarin) *ju-sha*.

²¹ White, *Alchemical Body*, 194-97.

²² Some scholars identify *kumkuma* as saffron. See, for example, Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*; Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*; Chaturvedi and Tiwari, *Practical Hindi-*

Verse for offering the kumkum:

Kumkum is sacred.
It grants every desire.
Kumkum is the embodiment of earthly delight,
Exquisite happiness,
And the auspicious state of a happy marriage.
Accept this *kumkum*.

Perfumed oils and unguents (*Sugandhita taila*)

Pleasant fragrances attract the goddess, for they are manifestations of her essence. Consider, for example, the *Hymn to Śrī* (*Śrī Sūkta*): "I invoke that goddess Śrī, / Who reveals herself through scent."²³ According to *pūjā* instructions in the *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra*, "Unguents should be one or more out of sandalwood, pine tree paste, musk, camphor, saffron, [or] nutmeg."²⁴

Verse for anointing with fragrant unguents and oils:

O Supreme Lady,
Please accept my offering of anointment
With a wonderful mixture of essential oils
And fragrant perfumes.

Flowers (*Puṣpa*)

Ideally, flowers offered to Lakṣmī should be brightly colored and/or sweetly scented, although not so much as to be overpowering.²⁵ The particular flowers cited in the verse below are paradigmatic of any flower offering to the goddess. The devotee should refrain from inhaling their fragrance until after the *pūjā* has been completed, for just as with the other gifts to the goddess, they should be savored first by the one to whom they are offered. At the end of the *pūjā*, these offerings will be distributed back to the devotees as *prasāda*, or blessed favors.

Verse for the flower offering:

Please accept these heavenly blossoms
From the trees of paradise --
Mandāra, *pārijāta*, *pāṭala*, and *ketakī*.
Praises to you!

English Dictionary. Others identify it as red turmeric. See, for example, Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 208.

²³ *Hymn to Śrī* (*Śrī Sūkta*) 9.

²⁴ *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra* 66.2; qtd. in Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Part II, 732.

²⁵ *Viṣṇudharmaśāstra* 66.2; qtd. in Kane, Vol. II, Pt. II, 732.

Sweet-grass (*Dūrvā*)

Dūrvā is a type of sweet-grass regarded as a sacred substance and sometimes venerated as a goddess.²⁶ It is considered to have nutritious and cooling properties. Its use in ceremony as one of the ritual attendances (*upacāra*) is unique to the Lakṣmī *pūjā*. This may be due to its role in the story of the Churning of the Ocean, where it is Lakṣmī who brings forth the golden urn of immortal nectar from its depths. When the anti-gods are about to steal the vessel, the eagle Garuḍa swoops down and grabs it in his talons, and as he flies away, some of the nectar falls to earth, landing on a section of *dūrvā*, thereby charging the grass with sacred power for all time.²⁷

Verse for offering the sweet-grass:

O most lovely and beneficent Goddess
Who arose from the Ocean of Milk
To the joy of Viṣṇu and all of the gods,
Accept this sweet-grass,
Now and evermore.

Incense (*Dhūpa*)

Dhūpa is a soft, gummy, and extremely sweet-smelling tree resin that is set upon coals and burnt as incense. In more recent times, *agarbatti* ("incense sticks"), formed by rolling and pressing the powdered aromatic essences onto a thin sliver of wood, is also burnt as a fragrant offering, although the traditional *dhūpa* is considered to be of greater purity and potency.

Verse for offering the incense:

The lord of the forest
Yields this highly perfumed incense
Whose fragrance charms the hearts
Of all of the gods.
O Goddess, accept this fragrant offering.²⁸

Small lamp (*Dīpaka*)

This is the offering of a small bowl-shaped earthen lamp (*dīpaka*) with a single flame, fueled with ghee to which camphor has been added. Also called *dīpa*, this is the derivation of the name of the festival of lights, Dīpāvalī, which refers to the "lamps" (*dīpa*) spread out in "rows" (*āvalī*) to attract Lakṣmī and lead her into one's home.²⁹

Verse for offering the small lamp:

²⁶ Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. *sub voce*.

²⁷ Narrative cited in Courtwright, "On This Holy Day in My Humble Way," 45.

²⁸ *Vanaspati*, literally "lord of the forest," is a type of tree.

²⁹ As noted in the Introduction, Dīpāvalī is also known by its Indic vernacular name, Dīvālī.

This lamp of camphor and ghee
Dispels darkness and delights the heart.
Please accept this light, O Supreme Queen.

Food (*Naivedya*)

The simplest food offerings consist of fruits, unrefined brown sugar, and puffed rice. The verses here indicate attention to aesthetic sophistication as well, with a meal containing the "six savors," (*ṣaḍrasa*), which are sweet (*madhura*), sour (*amla*), salty (*lavana*), pungent (*katuka*), bitter (*tikta*), and astringent (*kasaya*).

Verse to accompany the food offering:

O Goddess,
Accept for your enjoyment
This delectable meal
Prepared with the six exquisite savors.
O Goddess Lakṣmī, salutations to you!

Refreshing water for sipping (*Ācamanīya*)

As in "pure water for sipping" (*ācamana*) above, the goddess is offered water to sip. This time, a small amount of cooling camphor has been added, appropriately astringent for clearing the palate after a meal.

Verse to accompany the water for sipping:

I offer water, cool and clear,
Enhanced with refreshing camphor perfume.
Accept this water for sipping, O Great Queen.

Betel-nut confection, or paan (*Tāmbūla*)

Tāmbūla is a confection in which the astringent nut of the betel palm (*Areca catechu*) is mixed with other ingredients such as cardamom, camphor, nutmeg, clove, saffron, almond, and coconut, and folded in a fresh, green betel leaf upon which has been spread a thin layer of *cuunam* (a white paste of lime, or calcium hydroxide). This delicious mixture is chewed after a meal to refresh the palate, aid digestion, and sweeten the breath.³⁰ It is widely known by its Indic vernacular name, *paan*.

Verse for offering the paan:

Graciously accept this confection of *paan* --
Areca nut, cardamom, camphor, and clove
Mixed in an aromatic blend
And folded together with betel-nut leaves.

³⁰ Various texts cite as many as thirteen necessary ingredients of *tambula*. See Kane, *History of*

Fruit (*Phala*)

Here we may detect a subtle change in the *pūjā*'s focus. With the offering of fruit (*phala*), the attention begins to shift slightly away from the deity and toward the results (*phala*) to be obtained by the devotee as a result of the ritual actions. This is a pattern that we have recognized in the songs of praise, where glorification of the deity is followed by the verses articulating the fulfillment of the devotee's desires.

Fruits that are round in shape, succulent, and of bright color are best suited as offerings to Lakṣmī. The coconut is often called *śrīphalam*, meaning "Śrī's fruit," or "auspicious fruit." It may be adorned with red powder (*kumkuma*) and sacred ash (*bhasma*), and set with banana leaves upon an urn (*kalaśa*) filled with water as a representation of the goddess; the waters in the belly-shaped pot (as the coconut itself) are reminiscent of the amniotic fluids of a pregnant woman or of the wide, round earth containing the life-yielding seas.

Verse for the fruit offering:

Through the offering of fruit
Everything comes to fruition,
Even the three worlds,
Complete with the animate and inanimate.
By offering this fruit,
Let me obtain my heart's desires.

Gold coin or money (*Dakṣiṇā*)

As with all the other offerings in the *pūjā*, the devotee presents the goddess with a gift that she has already actually provided, so that it may be blessed by her and returned back multifold. The offering of gold typifies the invocation of the goddess of wealth. As the songs elsewhere in this volume attest, Lakṣmī has long been recognized as manifesting in the form of gold coins and in the precious element of gold itself, honored as much for the purity of its constitution as for the beauty of its dazzling radiance. In modern times *dakṣiṇā* may also take form as any type of money or currency, although gold, with all of its resonant meanings, is still considered ideal for the *pūjā* offering.

Verse for offering the gold coin:

Gold is the very seed of fire.
Born from within the depths of Lord Brahmā,
It therefore bestows the fruit of endless merit.
O Goddess, grant me peace.

Waving of lights (*Nirājana*)

A somewhat more extensive offering than that of the offering of the "small lamp" (*dīpaka*), the lamp used here is usually made of brass and contains five small cup-shaped indentations into which are placed hand-rolled cotton wicks soaked in ghee. The worshiper grasps the handle of this lamp in his right hand and waves it before the deity in a circular, sweeping motion, creating brilliant streams of light. When ghee fuels a fire, it casts a flame of penetrating luminescence and exquisite beauty.

As in the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*), fire is a form of the deity and constitutes a conduit between the heavens and the earth. Like the auspicious flame of the Vedic fire, the flame offered

in *pūjā* is regarded as an embodiment of Lakṣmī. So too does Lakṣmī inhabit the fuel for this flame, as ghee is a perfectly distilled product of the sacred cow, herself a form of Lakṣmī.

As has been discussed above, the multiple components of the *pūjā* may be modified according to individual circumstances. Waving the lights, however, is the one indispensable segment of any *pūjā*. In the vernacular languages the waving of lights is called *āratī*, and so central is this ritual segment that *āratī* may constitute a ceremony unto itself.

Verse for the waving of lights:

This lamp has been prepared with loving devotion.
O Supreme Lady, please accept its light
And allow it to pervade the four directions,
Dispelling the darkness of all the worlds.

Circumambulation (*Pradakṣiṇā*)

Pradakṣiṇā means literally “toward the right.” Here the devotee circumambulates the sacred image by positioning the right (i.e., auspicious) side of his own body toward the image while walking around it in a clockwise direction.

Verse for the circumambulation:

Whatever evils may have been committed --
Even the taking of a priest’s life --
The residues of these actions will be destroyed
With every step around the sacred center.³¹

Handful of Flowers (*Puṣpāñjali*)

In distinction to the offering of flowers above, here the flowers (*puṣpa*) are cradled within the folded hands (*añjali*), itself an honorific gesture of greeting and hospitality. The cupped hands containing the petals are held upward and open, and then the palms slowly move apart to release a graceful shower of petals before the image.

Verse for offering the handful of flowers:

Tenderly I offer this handful of flowers --
Ketakī, citrus, jasmine, and more.
Accept these sweetly scented blossoms.
O Goddess, praises to you.

Farewell (*Namaskāra*)

In a complementary action to the opening invocation, the devotee now brings the formal part of the *pūjā* to a close by offering farewell to the honored guest. Just as the guest was invited to enter and fill the space within the sacred boundaries, so too are those boundaries acknowledged and dissolved at the conclusion of the ceremony as the goddess is released to

³¹ Brahmanicide (*brahmahatya*) is considered the most heinous crime, incurring terrible karmic repercussions.

return "home." The form of the goddess that has attended the ritual now departs from circumscribed space and time as she expands back into her undifferentiated, infinite being. For this reason, some texts refer to the final part of the *pūjā* as *visarjana*, meaning dissolution back into the source.

Although her entire essence is never fully contained by the *pūjā* or by any human ceremony or activity, the goddess allows a part of herself to manifest within the confines of human space and time. In so doing she transforms the realm of the *pūjā* into a sacred space in which time stands still as ordinary human activity is suspended. The *pūjā* is performed as much to experience the sanctified presence within that timeless framework as it is to savor its lingering resonance throughout the ordinary activities that are to resume.

Verse for the farewell:

Salutations to you, O Beloved of Viṣṇu.
O you who bestow boons on all of the gods,
If you have been pleased with these offerings,
Then grant us your favor, again and again.

....

Appendix: Outline of the *Lakṣmī Pūjā*

Following is a list of the ritual attendances (*upacāras*) for the heart of the *Lakṣmī pūjā* as presented in *Śrī Lakṣmī Upāsanā*, edited by Pandit Rajesh Dixit. This edition does not enumerate the verses and ritual attendances of the *pūjā*. This is most likely because the attendances in this version are not linked with the *Hymn to Śrī (Śrī Sūkta)* and therefore need not amount exactly to sixteen. In this appendix, I have numbered and categorized the list in order to illustrate how its components reflect the paradigmatic sixteen-*upacāra* pattern of *pūjā*.³²

1. Invocation of the deity (*Āvāhana*)
2. Offering the seat (*Āsana*)
3. Water for bathing the feet (*Pādya*)
4. Fragrant water for refreshing the face (*Arghya*)
5. Pure water for sipping (*Ācamana*)
6. Bathing (*Snāna*)
7. Clothing (*Vastrayugma*)
8. Milk-and-honey drink (*Madhuparka*)
9. Adornment
 - a. Ornamentation (*Ābharaṇa*)
 - b. Sandalwood paste (*Candana*)
 - c. Red sandal (*Rakta candana*)
 - d. Vermilion powder (*Sindūra*)
 - e. Red powder (*Kumkuma*)

³² This being said, it should also be noted that other texts offer slight variations from this list as well.

10. Perfumed oils and unguents (*Sugandhita taila*)
11. Plant offerings
 - a. Flowers (*Puṣpa*)
 - b. Sweet-grass (*Dūrvā*)
12. Incense (*Dhūpa*)
13. Small lamp (*Dīpaka*)
14. Food and monetary offerings
 - a. Food (*Naivedya*)
 - b. Refreshing water for sipping (*Ācamanīya*)
 - c. Betel-nut confection, or *paan* (*Tāmbūla*)
 - d. Fruit (*Phala*)
 - e. Gold coin or money (*Dakṣiṇā*)
15. Waving of lights (*Nīrājana*)
16. Farewell³³
 - a. Circumambulation (*Pradakṣiṇā*)
 - b. Handful of flowers (*Puṣpāñjali*)
 - c. Farewell (*Namaskāra*)

³³ According to several texts and worship manuals, circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*) and farewell (*namaskāra*) are often included together. For list of these, see Kane, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 729.

INTRODUCTION

Snake Does Not Bite Man; Snake Bites What Man Thinks¹

We are like prisoners in a cave, staring grimly at its walls, upon which we perceive moving shadows. They are the shadows of objects, which—invisible to us—are passing behind our back and are lit by a great fire outside our field of vision. We do not turn around to explore the source of these shadows, and because of that we are convinced that the shadow images before us are the real world of sensory perceptions. Yet, if one of the prisoners were able to muster the strength and courage to leave the cave, he would discover the actual objects, the cause of those vague shadows. If he left the cave altogether, he would—after rubbing his smarting eyes—behold the sun. Were he to return to the cave after such an overpowering insight into the illusory nature of his world of shadows, no one there would believe his fantastic tales. He would forthwith experience an intense aloneness and consider it his task to cure his fellow beings of their blindness and demonstrate to them the shadow nature of their world. However, the question is whether such an insight can only be gained by someone who has himself ventured out of the cave.

This famous parable relates to the theory of cognition and comes from Plato's *Republic*. It contains a much quoted but rarely heeded directive for the world of science. The principles of the theory of cognition contained in Plato's Parable of the Cave also apply to the basis of shamanic training and we shall follow them in our analysis of the latter.

Who is this man that stands up, turns around, and leaves the cave in order to confront these shadow creatures? Could he be the shaman summoning his spirits? The medicine man, looking "through" others with his spiritual sight? Or the magician flying through the air and leaving his half-dead body behind?

The shaman's view of the world leaps across our conventional ideas about time and causality, contracts space telepathically, and subscribes to communicating with all that is. It considers the individual as being

harnessed to a universal energy field of magic, in which even the most fleeting thought causes the whole universe to tremble, the spoken word kills your neighbor, and common sense is annihilated by ecstatic communion with the environment. Many people feel that a world view according to which man is able to influence the earthly realm of the corporeal by the use of entities from the Beyond is too far removed from everyday twentieth-century thinking and reasoning to merit serious consideration. In an age characterized by an unshakable faith in science it has become the task of anthropology to provide a rational explanation for such wayward and illogical notions and concepts.

The "perverse" upside-down physics of the shamanic universe—in which time is stretchable, space is solid, matter is transparent, and conventional manifestations of energy are replaced by invisible subtle forces—cannot be grasped by our customary mode of perception. Nevertheless, all tribal societies as well as our ancestors—and cultures of both the Old World and our present world—did at one time subscribe to the idea of such a universe. Our modern Western culture forms the only exception to this general rule. Its determined scientific exploration and experimentation has confined itself to what is observable within three-dimensional space. In other words, it has concentrated itself exclusively on a reality accessible to a system of logic based on purely sensory perceptions.

The experiences of the shaman, on the other hand, are genuinely trans-
psychic. Nevertheless, they can be repeated by anyone capable of summoning up sufficient courage and self-discipline to overcome our limited intellect and our perceptually restricted normal awareness, because beyond this "standardized" awareness there exists a whole spectrum of expanded modes of perception. The ascendant scale of experience, revealing new forms of being at every level, has always been a metaphor of growing insight.

Two special factors have strongly influenced Western civilization: the first of these is the idea—also shared by Nietzsche—that we are alone in a hostile universe; the other is the notion that in the last resort life is meaningless. The shaman, on the other hand, speaks of the vitality of all that exists and of a global relatedness to all beings and phenomena at every level. To him the universe is pervaded by a creative essence which not only transcends normal existence but lends to it an inner cohesion.

The shaman is part of the age-old tradition of the Perennial Philosophy—the mystical teaching of the unity of all things and all beings. In the realm of magic everything is interrelated; nothing exists in isolation.

Here rules the principle of *pars pro toto*. This level of consciousness, like a gigantic telephone exchange, affords access to all other levels of awareness. All mystical paths are agreed that such a way of experiencing requires a suspension of normal awareness and of rational thought by means of special techniques of mind training. An empty mind allows an alternative way of being and affords access to the existential level of transpersonal experience.

Since the dawn of the so-called Age of Enlightenment and the subsequent industrial revolution there has been growing opposition to the idea that psychic experiences can make a genuine contribution to explaining what human life is about. A widespread aversion to theological thought, to the notion of an inner world based on Christian principles, and to divine revelation, has steered our culture toward a one-sided view of what life itself is and what it is about. Objective observation of the factual and material has continued to gain ground, and as a result, the psyche has come to be forgotten. Our materialist attitude has thus caused us to "pour out the baby with the bath water." We have expelled Psyche from our earthly paradise.

Let us not forget that psychology, in its early days, found it extremely difficult to establish itself as a recognized field of knowledge capable of presenting, or at least postulating, an inner world subject to recognizable mental structures and mechanisms. Today, psychology finds itself confronted by what it has rejected—either in an attempt to defend its territory or out of fear that it might be considered unscientific—namely the need to recognize altered and heightened states of consciousness.

Western thought finds itself in a crisis situation and is trying to shake off its self-imposed manacles by finding its way back to the primordial. In this process the shaman and the metarational sphere of the religious, with their expanded structure of consciousness, have an important role to play. For that reason our growing interest in primitive religions is no longer confined to those areas which hitherto were held to be academically and anthropologically "acceptable."

Of course, there have always been social groups, cults, and philosophical fashions that have adopted for themselves the ideas of exotic cultures, or what one might call an alien lifestyle. However, all too often such attitudes went hand in hand with a naive hedonism, covert ethnocentrism, and abstruse cultural syncretism. Our modern interpretation and understanding of religious ideas is by no means free from remnants of traditional dogmatism and social pathologies. Nevertheless, the urge toward a pure inner experience, or what is thought of as true spirituality, presents us with

an opportunity to at least partially free ourselves from religious collectivism, superstition, and sanctimoniousness.

Although religion is a living experience, which ultimately cannot be written about, this book is an attempt to write about spiritual awareness, because science and religion are increasingly approaching each other and may even shake hands in the foreseeable future. When this happens Albert Einstein's statement that "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind" will no longer be topical. Science and religion can be united by the realization that life is an adventure in consciousness. Einstein considered all scientific theories to be free inventions of the human spirit. Conversely, to someone experiencing the world spiritually, all states of consciousness are free creations, limited only insofar as they represent aspects of cosmic unity.

Within the imperialist framework of Western civilization tribal societies are subjected to discrimination and isolation. We accord them marginal status and our attitude toward them is often somewhat condescending. Their unique characteristics are frequently described in psychopathological terminology. By simply ignoring them we reduce their status to one of quasi-nonexistence. Frequently they are the victims of genocidal policies. Their members are labeled as primitives. Biologists tend to look upon them as evolutionary relics. Sociologists see them as cultural abnormalities. To the psychologist they may be a prae-rational species, to the economist an underdeveloped society. As far as military strategists are concerned they are nonexistent, and well-fed tourists see them as romantic and exotic travel book images. Yet despite all this, their healers and medicine men exercise an enormous fascination for the people of the so-called civilized world.

The shaman, too, tends to be seen as a kind of trick artist, a psychologically disturbed person, characterized by all the irrational excesses of a predominantly non-Aristotelian view of the world. As such, he has always been the strongest possible challenge to the interpretative addiction of Western academics interested in the Theory of Culture. This is because the shaman is seen as an intolerable bogey by any ideology limited to such basic tenets as "normal" awareness, three-dimensional logic, and strength of ego.

The history of the exploration of shamanism is the story of a conspiracy against nonrational, nonobjective, and non-Cartesian thought. To the "enlightened" mind, the medicine man, the trance medium, the visionary, and the sorcerer have always been the archenemies of common sense. The learned scientists, in their conceit, look upon the shaman as a monstrous product of human superstition. In short: Any intellectual movement deal-

ing with this "orphan" of science runs the risk of wielding the double-edged sword of scientific ruin, if it refuses to treat the subject from the point of view of behaviorist sociology or other naively-materialistic concepts, which are academically recognized and acceptable.

Fortunately, research into shamanism has ceased to be a peripheral discipline confined to exalted academics. The basic values of Western thought are becoming somewhat shaky and threadbare. As a result of this new ideas about the nature of consciousness are rapidly gaining ground, and the shaman has become a focal point of their attention. It is almost as if a king who had been banished for his folly were reclaiming his realm. Shamanic experiences bring us once again closer to the sacred dimension of nature, and profane science, sacred inspiration, and genuine wisdom are beginning to unite, giving birth to a new kind of metarational science. In other words, the gaping wound of duality is beginning to heal.

This book deals with the experiences of supernormal or paranormal people who, through their voluntary exposure to tremendous hardships and great dangers, have catapulted themselves into the world of the super-conscious. This can provide us with a more comprehensive view of human existence once we have overcome the limitations of our mundane ego.

Shamans always hold a prominent status within their tribal communities. In fact, they are the central constellation of their society, the focal point of the religious, political, and social community. This book is an attempt to present a positive and constructive explanation of the shaman's view of the world—an explanation from which not only every psychiatrist but in fact anyone in search of self-completion and ego transcendence can learn a great deal. The theoretical repertoire for this investigation comes, in the main, from a new scientific orientation, one that has lost its specifically Western character, because it gives full recognition to the psychological and philosophies of other cultures and strives to bring these into harmony with our modern knowledge. This new scientific orientation is known as Transpersonal Science.

For those who consider it beneath their intelligence to concern themselves with anything but realistic problems, the study of exotic people, particularly of "primitive" magicians, will of course not merit the attention of our present civilization, dominated as it is by the idea of progress. Nevertheless, we are witnessing today a growing interest in magic, the occult, and the extrasensory. The very reason these things are being given more and more attention is that the latest findings of orthodox science appear to be not unrelated to these hitherto neglected fields of study.

INTRODUCTION

Shamanism and similar mysterious areas of research have gained in significance because they postulate new ideas about mind and spirit. They speak of things like vastly expanding the realm of consciousness. They do so at a time when Western thought finds itself in a general crisis and traditional models of thinking are being questioned.

The traditional premises of the natural sciences and our ethical and moral codes of value seem to be no longer adequate; their restrictive apparel is coming apart at the seams, and through the gaps we can perceive aspects of the shaman's world. If modern science wishes to avoid an increasing alienation from these new insights and realities it cannot afford to ignore them. We have begun to explore the darkest corners of the human mind, and many ideas belonging to the primitive and primordial are coming to be looked upon as progressive and as extremely significant for the future of mankind. The saints, shamans, and yogins are exposing the shortcomings of our Western mentality, and many notions that up to now were considered primitive and naive have turned into challenges that will have to be faced for the sake of our further cultural development. If we do not succeed in integrating that which we have suppressed or crowded out for so long, the dark shadow hovering over our mechanistic and materialistic lifestyle will become ever more ominous.

In fact, our culture needs a great deal more than a changed lifestyle. In the Western mind, thought-structures and the relationship between consciousness and matter are badly out of balance, so that our world has become wholly pervaded by a materialism that is threatening to squash us to death. We are in a state of materialistic hypertrophy, and our eventual self-destruction would in fact be no more than the logical consequence of our attitudes.

Here is what the Indian shaman Lama Deer says on this subject:

Only human beings have come to a point where they no longer know why they exist. They don't use their brains and they have forgotten the secret knowledge of their bodies, their senses, or their dreams. They don't use the knowledge the spirit has put into every one of them; they are not even aware of this, and so they stumble along blindly on the road to nowhere—a paved highway which they themselves bulldoze and make smooth so that they can get faster to the big, empty hole which they'll find at the end, waiting to swallow them up. It's a quick comfortable superhighway, but I know where it leads to. I've seen it. I've been there in my vision and it makes me shudder to think about it.²

Suffering Kills, Suffering Enlivens: Sickness and Self-Healing

Western culture and medicine have declared total war on sickness and death: on death because it signifies the end of our earthly existence, and on sickness because it impairs our enjoyment of life. We look upon sickness as bad, something to get rid of as quickly as possible, to put an end to. We see it as something invading us: a virus, a bacillus or whatever, and so we experience it profoundly as an alien process that incapacitates, paralyzes and destroys our body internally, as an unnatural state of affairs that should be suppressed by every conceivable means. In short, sickness and death are the gargoyles of our civilization.

Sickness to us is a blemish, a dirty spot on the self-deceiving mirror of our technological megalomania. Suffering and sickness are seen by our culture as something that emerges from a source hostile to the body, and so our fight against sickness, death, suffering, and physical pain is felt by us to be completely natural. Our static view of the world abhors any kind of change, except perhaps economic and technological. In particular we resent any alteration of consciousness and ontological change.

If we were able to understand sickness and suffering as processes of physical and psychic transformation, as do Asian peoples and tribal cultures, we would gain a deeper and less biased view of psychosomatic and psychospiritual processes and begin to realize the many opportunities presented by suffering and the death of the ego. Our long and continuous battle against death and sickness has so deeply taken root in our consciousness that even modern psychology has felt compelled to take up the cudgel against physical weakness and dying. Consequently, psychic and physical suffering have remained unacknowledged as a means of altering consciousness and as forces and mechanisms of transformation and self-healing.

In recent years a general revaluation of consciousness—that essence which pervades all our actions in life—has taken place, accompanied by a more positive attitude towards states of altered consciousness. Science has thus begun to reassess the sacred knowledge of past cultures and traditional societies which do not regard sickness and death as primarily evil and hostile, but acknowledge their positive internal dynamism. For these traditional cultures sickness, suffering, and death are manifestations of the body's inherent wisdom, to which we only have to surrender to reach areas of perception capable of revealing the true basis of our earthly existence. They look upon life in the Beyond and on death as a way of regenerating and recovering from our earthly existence. They also see sickness as a process that cleanses us of the bad habits we have accumulated by our false attitude to life. To die and to suffer a severe sickness are part of the basic experience of the shaman's path. This does not mean that every shaman has to undergo this kind of initiation—there are several other possibilities—but in the later stages of shamanic development they are a means of further transformation. We therefore have to let go of the prejudices we have held for generations and of our pessimism towards pain and suffering. We must learn to look death in the face and come to understand sickness as something resulting from an inner imbalance. Only then will we discover its true meaning in the context of our existence. Sickness is a call for self-realization, self-development, and in extreme cases—as the following narrative shows—a variety of shamanic initiation.

On his travels through Siberia, the Hungarian explorer Vilmos Diószegi collected many reports about shamanic vocations experienced as a result of sickness. Once he asked Kyzlasov, a former shaman of the Sagay tribe from Kyzlan on the river Yes, how he had acquired his powers. Kyzlasov reacted with a stony silence. But then his wife began to tell her husband's story:

How did he become a shaman? Sickness seized him when he was twenty-three years old and he became a shaman at the age of thirty. That was how he became a shaman, after the sickness, after the torture. He had been ill for seven years. While he was ailing, he had dreams: He was beaten up several times, sometimes he was taken to strange places. He had been around quite a lot in his dreams and he had seen many things. . . . He who is seized by the shaman sickness and does not begin to exercise shamanism, must suffer badly. He might lose his mind, he may even have to give up his life. Therefore

he is advised, "You must take up shamanism so as not to suffer!" Some even say, "I became a shaman only to escape illness."¹

Sunchugasev, another shaman who was present, added:

The man chosen for shamandom is first recognized by the black spirits. The spirits of the dead shamans are called black spirits. They make the chosen one ill and then they force him to become a shaman.²

Suzukpen, a former important shaman of the Siberian Soyot community near the Suy-Surmak River, narrated the following about his long illness and his calling to shamanism:

It has been a long time. With two of my brothers, the three of us went to hunt squirrels. Late at night we were crossing a mountain, going after the squirrels, when suddenly I saw a black crow right in the middle of the road.

We were advancing in single file. I was the first. I came nearer, but the crow kept crouching in the middle of the road. It stayed right there and waited for me.

When I reached it, I threw some snow toward it from a branch. It never moved.

Then I hit its beak with my stick.

Kok-kok. The knock resounded loudly.

What was all this? What was going to happen to me? Because the night before—before seeing the crow—I had already felt miserable.

Next day I went back to where I had seen the crow. Not even a trace of it was to be seen, anywhere! Although the others, that is my brothers, had seen it too.

From then on, from the time I hit the beak of that crow, I became very ill. My mind was deranged.

I have been suffering for as long as seven years.³

Among the Siberian Soyot most prospective shamans become ill—girls between the ages of ten and twelve and young men at the age of twenty to twenty-five. They suffer from headaches, nausea, and loss of appetite. When a shaman is called to attend them he says that one of the mountain spirits wants to turn the sick one into a shaman. One shaman by the name of Sadaqpan from the Ulug Dag region was ill in bed for a year prior to his initiation. He suffered from a heart condition, frequently screamed out in pain and behaved like a madman. He was thirty years old at the time. The Soyot call the time during which a spirit torments a future shaman "albys."

This period frequently remains a blank in the shaman's life; he cannot remember what happened. He gabbles confused words, displays very curious habits of eating and sings continuously.

The son of a shaman called Sandyk from the area near the Sisting-khem told how his father experienced his call to shamanism:

At first, my father was sickly; he had a weak heart and so suffered from attacks. That is why people thought he might start practicing the shaman's art. A spirit appeared to him, or rather two spirits: Säräl čoydu and Tämür qastaj. The first one was what we call a "great spirit" (Ulu azar). Near the Khamsara lived a famous shaman of the Aq čódu tribe, called Amyj or Taqqa. He was brought to see my father and told him, "On the fifteenth of this month you will become a shaman." Amyj was a great shaman.⁴

Among the Siberian Tofa, too, shamans become sick before their initiation and are tormented by spirits. A shaman called Anjataj suffered for three years from headaches and pains in his arms and legs. In his dreams the spirits asked him to become a shaman. He slept for three days in a row. When he felt better he followed his calling. The shaman Vassily Mikailovic of the Amastayev clan, who was initiated at the age of eighteen, was so dangerously ill that he could not rise from his bed for a whole year. Only when he agreed to the demands of the spirits did his health improve.⁵

Franz Boas has recorded the experiences of a Kwakiutl Indian, who became a healer after having always doubted and been critical of shamans. One day he went out hunting with some others, paddling in a canoe along the coast. He saw a wolf on a boulder which jutted out from the rock face. The wolf was rolling around on its back and scratching its mouth with its paws. To everybody's surprise the wolf did not run away as they came closer but appeared to be very trusting. There was a deer bone stuck in its bloodstained mouth; it looked at the hunters as if it expected help from them.

The young hunter soothed the wolf, saying, "You are in trouble, friend. Now I shall be like a great shaman and cure you, friend. I will take out your great trouble and set you right, friend. Now reward me, friend, that I may be able, like you, to get everything easily, all that is taken by you, on account of your fame as a harpooner and your supernatural power. Now reward my kindness to you, friend. Go on! Sit still on the rock and let me get my means of taking out that bone." Later he dreamt about this wolf which appeared to him in the form of a harpooner. It told him where the seals

were to be found and assured him that he would always be a successful hunter.

As time passed, he always managed to bring home a good kill. One day other members of his tribe found some crates full of food and clothing that did not seem to belong to anyone. But the contents of these crates had been contaminated with smallpox (perhaps intentionally by white settlers). All his hunting companions died and he was lying among them without hope when two wolves came trotting along and began to lick him. They vomited foam all over his body, which they then licked off again, only to vomit more foam over him. They continued to do this until he felt stronger. Then he recognized the wolf he had once saved.

Restored by the wolves, he continued to roam around with his brother wolves. One day, however, his wolf friend pressed its muzzle against his chest bone and vomited all its magical force into him. He fell into a deep sleep and dreamt that the wolf changed into a human being and told him that he would now be able to heal the sick, to project energy that makes people ill, and to catch souls. When he awoke he was trembling all over. Now he was a shaman. It felt good and he was all the time in a sort of delirium and sang the four sacred songs the wolf had bequeathed to him.⁶

Here is a somewhat similar story about Lebi'd, another Kwakiutl Indian. Lebi'd was ill for a long time, three winters in a row. When he finally died it was bitterly cold outside. The snow and the storm continued unabated so he could not be buried. Again and again the people had to postpone the burial ceremony. Suddenly he was heard singing a song, and the wolves that began to gather around his corpse were howling with him. Then the people knew that Lebi'd had become a shaman.

He followed the wolves into the forest, and although the people looked for him they could not find him. On the second day, a song could be heard from far off. In the meantime his house had been cleaned and all were waiting for his return. They had started a fire in his hearth, and the people beat the drum three times. Then Lebi'd appeared, stark naked. He sang a sacred song:

I was taken away far inland to the edge of the world,
by the magical power of heaven, the treasure, ha, wo, ho.
Only then was I cured by it, when it was really thrown into me,
the past life bringer of Nau'alakūmē, the treasure, ha, wo, ho.

Lebi'd danced and danced and when all the people had withdrawn and

only the other shamans remained, he began to relate what had happened to him, as is the custom.

When he died, a man had appeared to him and invited him to go with him. He had risen to his feet and had been surprised to see his body lying on the ground. They had run far into the forest and soon entered a house where he was given a new name by a man called Nau'alakūmē, who had transferred his shamanic power to him by vomiting a quartz crystal over him. Singing his sacred song, he had caused the crystal to enter him (Lebi'd) through the lower part of his chest bone. That is how he had become a shaman. The wolves, meanwhile, had changed into humans. As Nau'alakūmē sang, he pressed Lebi'd's head, first with his left hand, then with his right, and finally with both. Then he passed his hands all over Lebi'd's body and shook the illness out of him. He did this four times.

All the other creatures present then took off their wolf masks and approached his dead body. As Nau'alakūmē breathed his breath into him, the wolves licked his body. Before that, they had caused his soul to shrink to the size of a fly. His soul was then reintroduced into his body through his head. Immediately after that, his body came alive again. He started to sing a sacred song and—this time in his physical body—set out with the wolves into the forest where Nau'alakūmē taught him not only how to cure illnesses, but also to send out sickness against others. He had also prophesied that Lebi'd would always dream about him and that he could come to him for advice whenever he was in need of it.⁷

These examples of how two Kwakiutl Indians experienced their calling feature an encounter with helping spirits in animal form—in both cases wolves, who were actually humans in disguise. The wolf vomits his magic strength into the Indian who—as is often the case in an altered state of consciousness—becomes euphoric. In most cases the experience of being resurrected after terrible torments, sickness, and near-death is accompanied by a feeling of euphoria, because the suffering has annihilated all former characteristics of the personality. The sickness is a cleansing process that washes away all that is bad, pitiful, and weak. It floods the individual like a raging river and cleanses it of all that is limited and dull. In this way the sickness becomes a gateway to life. In all cultures people who have a near-death experience encounter beings that represent the resurrection of life. These beings bestow life; they are bearers of divine power. After the sickness—providing it was sufficiently severe and frightening—a new life, a transformed existence, begins.

Lebi'd's story shows another typical NDE characteristic. As he "dies" and

leaves his body, he is met by a being from the Beyond and taken to a "house"—symbolic of a transcendent state—where he is not only given a new name to confirm his inner transformation, but quartz crystals—symbols of transparency, illumination, and magical power—are placed into his chest. The life-giving spirit splits off these crystals from himself and spits them out, thereby allowing Lebi'd to share the nature and the living strength of the spirit.

What happens next reminds one very strongly of methods of magnetopathic treatment, the laying on of hands by which negative energy—the illness—is stroked away or literally shaken out of the body. This practice is common to psychic healers the world over. The restored Lebi'd is now the possessor of higher knowledge. The wolves and the life-bringer accompany him to his dead body and cause his soul to reenter it. Thereafter the life-bringer is Lebi'd's helping spirit who will stand by his side whenever he heals anyone. Lebi'd became a shaman with the help of the essence of life itself, supported by wolves representing the forces of the animal realm. He became a Chosen One, capable of seeing life and nature undistorted, because the mask of earthly ignorance and delusion was removed from his eyes.

A comparable experience is that of the Paviotso shaman Reno who dreamt that he visited the realm of the dead. Often, when dreaming of places in the Beyond, he felt weak and miserable. For a whole year he was close to dying. During his dreams his body became as rigid as a board, and the souls of the dead came to steal his soul. All this he related after his dream journeys. He began to realize gradually that he was meant to be a shaman and that he had to accept the power. However, his health did not improve until his father, also a shaman, healed him by tremendous efforts which almost cost him (the father) his life.⁸

Reno, then, was brought close to death by terrible sufferings. His body became cataleptically rigid, as often happens in a deep trance, and the souls of the dead were out to steal his soul. This occurred several times during his long sickness. We may assume that he acquired basic knowledge of shamanic ways of seeing during his journeys to the Beyond.

On the Indonesian Mentawai Islands, the calling to shamanism is also preceded by a sickness—in this case malaria—sent by the heavenly spirits. The person destined to become a shaman dreams that he ascends to heaven or goes into the forest to look for monkeys. If the spirits abduct someone chosen for shamanism to heaven he is given a beautiful new body like that of the spirit beings. After his return to earth, the spirits help him

with his healing. In this way a new seer is born, known as a Si-kerei, someone who possesses magical powers: "seeing eyes" and "hearing ears."⁹

At this point we might properly ask whether the sickness is sent by the heavenly spirits themselves or whether it should be seen as a byproduct of a person's spiritual growth, of a process aimed at revealing to the sick initiate the heavenly—respectively, his inner—world. Be that as it may, in many tribal cultures the initial impetus towards transformation comes either from heaven or from the underworld, because that is where you are given a new body—the spirit body of the beings in the Beyond which equips the initiate with their knowledge and powers and enables him to transcend matter, space, and time.

Among the Zulus someone destined to become a shaman (Inyanga) suddenly becomes ill, behaves in a curious manner and is unable to eat normal food. He will only eat certain things. He continually complains of pain in various parts of his body and has the most incredible dreams—he becomes a "house of dreams." He is quickly moved to tears, weeping at first softly to himself and then loudly for everyone to hear. He may be ill for several years before he sings his first great song. When that happens, the other members of the tribe come running and join in. Now everyone is waiting for him to die, which might happen any day. The whole village finds hardly any sleep at night, because someone about to become an Inyanga causes a great deal of unrest. He hardly sleeps. And if he falls asleep, he soon wakes up and begins to sing even in the middle of the night. He may get it into his head to climb onto a roof and jump around like a frog, shaking himself and singing. His helping spirit keeps whispering into his ear and promises him that he will soon be able to give advice to those that come to him. He can hear the whistling of the spirits and converses with them in the language of the humans. Often, however, he does not immediately realize what they are trying to tell him.

At this point it is still unclear whether he suffers from a sickness that will turn him into an Inyanga, or whether he is just crazy. If the people think that he is destined to become a shaman they say, "Ah, now we can see. It's in his head." The helping spirit (Itongo) is at first perceived rather vaguely by the sick person, who cannot properly understand it. For that reason, the other members of the tribe must help him to disentangle what he has seen and heard. Soon the Itongo will say, "Go to so-and-so and he will give you medicine." After that the initiate improves. When the helping spirit finally promises to stand by him he says to the sick person, "It is not you that will talk to people but we will tell them everything they need to know, when-

ever they come for advice." If the relatives of the sick man do not want him to become a shaman they summon another recognized healer and ask him to appease the spirit. In that case the spirit may leave the man but in all likelihood he will be plagued by sickness for the rest of his life. Even if he does not become an Inyanga, he still has higher knowledge and the people say of him, "If he had become a seer he would have been a great seer, a first-class seer."¹⁰

We shall now relate the story of James, a Zulu, who unexpectedly left the Mission Station because he felt very weak but did not want to be treated by the Mission doctors as he feared that he might be sent to a place for the insane. So he went back to his native village. The first signs of his sickness consisted of a tingling and drawing feeling that spread from his toes and fingers, through his arms and legs, to the whole of his body and made him feel as if there were a heavy weight on his shoulders.

But it is not that only; but now there are things which I see when I lie down. When I left home I had composed three songs, without knowing whence they came; I heard the song, and then just sang it, and sang the whole of it without ever having learnt it.

But that which troubles me most now is that there is not a single place in the whole country which I do not know; I go over it all by night in my sleep; there is not a single place the exact location of which I do not know.

I see also elephants and hyenas, and lions and leopards, and snakes and full rivers. All these things come near to kill me. Not a single day passes without my seeing such things in my sleep.

Again I see that I am flying, no longer treading on this earth.

He was then asked whether he still believed in the Lord. He answered:

No. To do so is death to me. If I try, saying "Let me pray," it is as if I summoned all kinds of death to come and kill me at once. The Lord's tidings are plucked out of me by this disease. It alone has now the dominion over me.¹¹

The Mundu mugo, the shaman of the Kenyan Kikuyu, receives his calling and his spiritual support from God (Ngai). It is however assumed that he has an inborn disposition for healing. The impulse for the initiation as a Mundu mugo arises from a sickness characterized by dramatic dreams, hallucinations, inability to concentrate, weak eyesight and abnormal forms of behavior. At the same time his family is visited by a series of misfortunes

and accidents. If another Mundu mugo then describes all these signs as meaningful, the initiation is confirmed and publicly sanctioned.

This is followed by the initiation ceremony. If the novice is poor and cannot afford the expensive festivities involved, a ritual is nevertheless performed to relieve his suffering and to accord him the status of an "unconfirmed" Mundu mugo. If he is rich and can pay for the appropriate festivities, he becomes a fully recognized Mundu mugo. Thereafter he specializes in particular skills such as prophecy, diagnoses of illnesses, knowledge of herbs, restoration of the fertility of women, unmasking of sorcerers, or curing mental illness.¹²

According to Harvey, the calling of Korean shamans expresses itself in various physiological disturbances, conspicuous forms of social behavior, outrageous activities, impoliteness, and a lifestyle that inverts traditional cultural values. For instance, the prospective shamaness may wear winter clothes in summer, bathe in cold water in winter, reveal secrets which are taboo to mention, or begin to tell the fortune of anyone who happens to be passing in the street. This illness is known as Sinbyong, "caught by the spirits" or "the spirits have descended," and may be accompanied by visual and auditory hallucinations. At first the relatives find it difficult to establish whether such a woman is really mentally deranged or whether they are dealing with a vocation for shamanism, because in many cases the initial symptoms are practically indistinguishable. The Koreans believe that the spirits visit especially those whose maum (heart or soul) are "split" and upon whom a tragic fate has been bestowed.¹³

In Korea, shamans (Mu dang), 60,000 of whom are at present organized in a professional association (the number of nonregistered shamans is estimated at over 140,000),¹⁴ are no longer accorded a high social status but find themselves on the lowest rung of the social ladder, together with prostitutes, shoe menders, soothsayers, Buddhist monks, and dancing girls. Many more women than men feel called upon to become a Mu dang, although there are some men or hermaphrodites who feel attracted to shamanism. On the Korean mainland, 90 percent of practicing shamans are women; on Cheju Island, up to 60 percent. The behavior and dress of male shamans is extremely effeminate.

The calling for shamanism occurs in three ways:

1. By birth into or adoption by a Mu dang family
2. By Mu dang apprenticeship
3. By a spontaneous feeling of vocation

The most frequent case, the psychic experience of a calling, begins with a sickness that cannot be cured by customary methods of treatment. The person concerned hears voices, speaks in tongues, can only absorb liquid nourishment, and grows as thin as a skeleton. Bouts of depression and a manic compulsion to dance until unconscious alternate. The sick person goes on long walks into the mountains or to the sea and has dreams in which helping spirits give instructions and reasons for founding a new cult. The novice shaman is overcome by visions of the native pantheon of Gods or may acquire his objects of power by suddenly falling to the ground. After a tragic event such as the death of a relative, an epidemic, famine or economic ruin, a person may become a Mu dang apprentice if the Buddhist monasteries, to which the mentally ill go to be cured, are unable to alleviate the symptoms of the sickness. In such cases the spontaneous calling is followed by an apprenticeship, extending over several years, with an older and experienced Mu dang.¹⁵

We would like to illustrate the genesis of this sickness with reports about the calling of two Korean shamanesses:

Mrs. Lee Kum Sun's boyfriend died at the age of twenty, which greatly distressed her. Shortly before that, her parents had arranged for her to be married to her present husband but her dead boyfriend kept appearing to her in her dreams. At the age of thirty-two she began to see him in her dreams continually and developed the first signs of her sickness. One day she dreamt that she ran barefoot and completely naked to the foot of a mountain where a white-bearded man appeared to her and promised her health and good fortune. At the age of forty she was initiated by an old shamaness. After that everything went well and her health was restored.

Mrs. Oh Un-sook disliked her husband from the very beginning. After several years, unusual symptoms developed. She lost her appetite, was unable to eat meat or fish, only drank cold water, and developed headaches. She spent most of her time alone. These symptoms lasted about ten years. When she was forty years old she dreamt of thunder and lightning and of a pillar of light that struck her head three times. Thereupon three old men from heaven appeared to her in a dream. One day she saw a vision of a great general riding on a white horse who approached her. Thereafter she dreamt many times that she went to bed with this general. At the age of forty-seven she was initiated as a shamaness and all her symptoms disappeared.¹⁶

In one of these two shamanesses the calling was triggered by the tragic

loss of a lover, in the other by an unhappy marriage. Psychologists would no doubt say that these are clear examples of a desire to escape an unsatisfactory reality. However, such a conclusion would be somewhat premature. We must not overlook the fact that an unhappy marriage and the death of a lover are traumatic experiences which can provide fertile ground for entering an altered state of consciousness. Traumatic shock can cause the collapse of psychic structures, whereupon a more subtle and paranormal sensitivity begins to grow from the ruins of normal consciousness. Lee Kum Sun met a white-bearded old man—the archetype of wisdom—and Oh Un-sook had a vision of a Korean cultural hero—also a symbol of wisdom and strength. Moreover, Oh Un-sook shares the General's bed—a further pointer to her intimate connection and fusion with the transpersonal. At the same time this love affair reminds one of the type of spirit wedding discussed in a later chapter.

Oh Un-sook's vision of a pillar of light also reinforces the impression that we might be dealing with an illuminating manifestation which afforded her contact with the Beyond and heavenly beings. These two simple narratives indicate that we may not be confronted by abstruse creations of a deviant mind but rather a high form of intuitive insight.

Eduardo Calderón, a Peruvian healer (*curandero*), began to be plagued by disquieting dreams and visions in his childhood:

During my youth from more or less the age of seven or eight years I had some rare dreams. I still remember them. I remember dreams in which I flew, that my ego departed from the state in which it was, and I went to strange places in the form of a spiral. Or I flew in a vertiginous manner: sssssssss, I departed. I tried to retain myself and I could not. Strange dreams, strange. I had these until the age of more or less twelve or thirteen. . . .

I have seen things as if someone opens a door and the door is closed. I have had nightmares, but not ordinary ones. I have seen myself introduced through a hole in the air, and I went through an immense, immense void. I have felt numbness in all my body as if my hands were huge but I could not grasp. I could not hold up my hand.¹⁷

He began to follow his call to serve mankind at an early age. However, his ambition to study medicine was frustrated by the poverty of his family. So he had no other choice than to earn a living by the use of his artistic talents.

At the age of twenty-one he developed a typical shamanic illness that modern medicine was unable to diagnose or treat therapeutically:

In Lima I was studying fine arts and suddenly I began drinking and spending everything on drink. I came down with a rare sickness. It happened that on one occasion I saw a cat on my left shoulder. It was enough that with that impression of a cat everything that I did was overturned . . . and I lost the power to hold things in my hand and to stand up. I completely lost all my strength. I could not hold myself up in a standing position and walked like a sleepwalker, according to what they tell me.¹⁸

Eduardo's family had faith in the health abilities of curanderos and called in a woman healer conversant with the properties of herbs. She gave Eduardo a mixture of juices extracted from plants, whereupon he vomited up a dark brew despite the fact that he had not drunk any other liquid. He immediately improved. On the basis of his experiences during his sickness he decided to become a healer. He supported himself by working as a longshoreman and by producing pottery at home. At the same time he became the apprentice of a local curandero. He also studied with various shamans in Chiclayo, Mocupe, and Ferrnate in northern Peru. For several years he acted as assistant to these curanderos until finally his teacher in Ferrnate pronounced him fully qualified.

He was twenty-eight years old at the time and had served four years as an apprentice shaman. He swore never to misuse his powers and to apply them only for the benefit of mankind. Eduardo considers shamanism to be a simple matter of "seeing," a skill or trade anyone is capable of acquiring providing he regularly trains himself in it. It is however open to question whether such training and practicing alone will ensure success, because Eduardo—as his life history shows—was called to his trade by a higher power. Moreover, we must not exclude the possibility that he inherited certain shamanic propensities because both his grandfathers were shamans.

From a description given by Sieroszewski we can gain an idea of the liberating and healing qualities of the shamanic seance when the shaman himself feels stricken and debilitated by illness. The Yakut shaman Tüspüt, who was critically ill for more than twenty years, could only find relief from his suffering whenever he conducted a seance during which he fell into a trance. In the end he fully regained his health by this method. However, if he held no seances over a long period of time he once again began to feel

unwell, exhausted, and indecisive.¹⁹ In general, the symptoms of an illness subside when a candidate for shamanism enters a trance. The same phenomenon was observed by Shternberg in the case of a Siberian Gold shaman that even his colleagues were unable to cure. Only when he learned how to enter a trance state did his illness leave him.²⁰ Similarly, Sanchev mentions a shaman who at first refused to follow his calling but was forced by illness to consort with the spirits and hold seances, which in the end led to his recovery.²¹

The story of the Yakut shaman Uno Harva also features a relief from illness once he agreed to take up shamanism:

I became ill when I was twenty-one years old and began to see with my eyes and hear with my ears things others could neither hear nor see. For nine years I fought against the spirit, without telling anyone what had happened because I feared they might not believe me or make fun of me. In the end I became so ill that I was close to death. So I began to shamanize, and very soon my health improved. Even now I feel unwell and sick whenever I am inactive as a shaman over a longer period of time.²²

Adrian Boshier describes the illness of Dorcas, the daughter of a Methodist preacher, who is now a recognized Zulu shamaness (*sangoma*). For three years she was bedridden and during this time could only absorb small quantities of food and drink. At night she left her body and visited distant places; in this way she traveled everywhere. Even the white doctors were at a loss. Then one night her dead grandfather appeared to her in a dream. He said he would enter her body and continue his work on earth in this fashion. Being a devout Christian she did not agree to this. After that, other shamans appeared in her dreams, scolded her, and called upon her to become one of them. These visions became more and more frequent, passing before her inner eye like pictures on a cinema screen.

One night several famous *sangomas* came to her bedside. Chanting a song, they seriously advised her to submit and make a shamanic headress for herself. She still failed to understand what was happening and wanted to be cured by ceremonies and rites of the Apostolic church. She was taken to a river to be christened. They guided her into the water, and just as they were about to submerge her she was lifted up by a gigantic snake under her feet—her grandfather! Her mother then took her to an aunt who was herself a shamaness. Soon many other healers and shamans assembled, beating their drums and exhorting her to get up and sing. She then danced and

sang hour after hour. That was the beginning of her training, and from then on she followed the instructions of the spirits.²³

A refusal to follow the call leads to unnecessary suffering. The South American Guajiro shamaness Grazierla, for example, was asked by her helping spirits to travel with them to the other world. But she says:

I do not like traveling to these distant places. My spirits often invite me to go there, but I prefer not to go with them. Sometimes I say to them, "I do not want to go with you." Whenever I turn down such an invitation I develop a fever and become very ill. That is my punishment. Then I must chew manilla to get better again. I receive many invitations.²⁴

Every sickness is an attempt at healing and every healing an attempt to escape from the everyday neurosis of ordinary consciousness so as to arrive at a more subtle and, in the last resort, superhuman form of perception. The sicknesses that arise as a result of a calling are surely the highest form of illness—a sacred illness which by its power makes it possible for mystical and metaphysical insights to arise. As we have seen, this frequently happens without regard to the feelings and wishes of the chosen one who, in most cases, is not aware of the fact that his body is undergoing an initiation. To resist such a process of transformation is a natural reaction to that which is unaccustomed, mysterious, and without limit. The initiate struggles both against his pain and suffering as well as the future social functions he will have to perform as a shaman, which all too often will deprive him of the possibility of leading a normal everyday life.

Resistance to psychophysical change and a disintegration of the normal structure of existence has always been part and parcel of the transformative process. Because of this, it forms at least a partial aspect of every rite of transformation. Rejection of the new and unknown is a standard human response. True, existence itself is change, but the leap from three-dimensional to multidimensional perception and experience is the most fundamental change. To reach a translogical form of knowledge or realm of wisdom, celestial beauty, and spiritual essence is one of the most ancient experiential goals of mankind.

The central issue raised by this chapter is therefore: Why do we have to become ill before we can accept a new insight? Why is the entry into a more comprehensive level of experience so frequently marked by sickness or, one might say, a cleansing process? Purification plays a prominent role in the life of all communities that are close to nature. While our culture

attaches primary importance to physical cleanliness, other cultures still have knowledge of psychic and spiritual methods of purification which might well be compared to our psychotherapeutic techniques. We see life as a relatively uniform and continuous process marked by merely peripheral changes, whereas so-called primitive cultures tend to see personal development as a series of leaps from one mode of existence to another. This is clearly shown by the traditional rites of passage conducted not only at birth, puberty, and death but especially at the breakthrough from everyday existence to a spiritual dimension, as experienced by religious adepts—the leap from the human to the superhuman.

The important stages in a person's life are connected by periods of inner purification so that the individual, being properly prepared and in a clear state of mind, undistracted by customary thought processes and memories, may progress to a new and unburdened existence. This purification may take many forms: either purely physical such as vomiting, perspiration, fasting, pain, fever, and cleansing of the body with water, or intense psychic isolation during which the memory of the constitution of one's ego is shed; extreme exhaustion which disrupts the regular functioning of the organism and the psyche; and actual sickness which brings internal obstacles and defilements to the surface and, indeed, expels them, thereby producing a heightened sensitivity for the process of being—a sensitivity that ultimately enables the shaman to diagnose and heal the illnesses of others.

Frequently the shaman enters a patient's state so thoroughly that he himself experiences the symptoms and pains of the illness and, in this way, acquires special knowledge as to its cause. There are several reports about shamans who went so far as to take a patient's illness upon themselves in order to destroy it. In the course of their painful existence, many shamans have physically experienced countless illnesses and are therefore conversant with a wide range of physical and psychic reactions.

Modern Western medicine might consider it superfluous, even somewhat obscure or eccentric, for a healer to involve himself so intensely in the process of an illness. Nevertheless, the logic of doing so can hardly be doubted. It is based on the premise that someone who has himself experienced and overcome the pain and suffering of an illness, will best be able to diagnose and effectively treat it. Western medicine, of course, rejects the image of the wounded healer, the sick doctor who has cured himself. It places too much stress on the purely technological manipulation of the pa-

tient and has therefore become increasingly alienated from the actual experience of the patient's condition.

If we wanted to summarize the effect of a long psychosomatic sickness on a shaman, we would have to say that the essential criterion lies in his talent to enter into an intensified exchange with reality, thereby transcending the material demarcations between objects and people. It lies in the very nature of the shaman to perceive the pulse of the universe in himself and others and, by going along with it, to influence and change it. His approach is based on empathy and unity with actual life-forces and therefore is inimically incompatible with the dichotomies and codified differentiations of a materialist philosophy.

A sickness that is understood as a process of purification, as the onset of enhanced psychic sensitivity giving access to the hidden and highest potentials of human existence, is therefore marked by very different characteristics than those ascribed to pathological conditions by modern medicine and psychology—namely, that suffering has only negative consequences. According to the modern view illness disrupts and endangers life, whereas the shaman experiences his sickness as a call to destroy this life within himself so as to hear, see, and live it more fully and completely in a higher state of awareness.

The symptoms of shamanic sickness are in most cases confused, undefinable, and follow no known pattern. Moreover, physical, psychic, and social reactions are closely interwoven. Particularly noticeable are forms of behavior that reject, and even deride and ridicule, accepted customs and standards. Initiates become holy fools who systematically put the world on its head or indulge in unworthy, shameful, and perverse behavior incompatible with established morality.

The fool exposes the limitations of human criteria, confronts us anew with the undefined nature of our cosmic existence, leads us backstage to make us aware of the artificiality of our cultural values, and then shows us a world without limit, because it is neither categorized nor ordered in accordance with artificial opposites. The sick jester removes these opposites, tears down external and internal barriers and causes us to tumble head over heels from our tailor-made world of lines and demarcations into a more comprehensive and holistic dimension that has no beginning or end.

We have seen that often not only the shaman himself but his whole family are visited by misfortune, as for instance in the case of the *kikuyu* or the Korean shamanesses. In Siberia, too, the relatives of a shaman are

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"sacrificed" as soon as signs of shamanic sickness appear in a member of the clan. The effects of the call to shamanism are wide-ranging, and sacrifices have to be made for that call.

The Koreans talk about a "bridge of people" (*indari*) that comes into being when a member of the family is chosen to be a shaman and another member has to die as a result of this. They refer to this process as "spanning a bridge over a human being" (*indari nommunda*). A God has "entered into" the shaman and, in return, demands another human life. However, if the clan is willing to submit the member destined to become a shaman to the requisite ceremony of initiation as soon as the first symptoms of obsession or sickness manifest themselves, *indari* is not inevitable. But most families are unwilling to have a shaman in their circle, so the *Indari* phenomenon occurs quite frequently. According to the investigations made by Cho Hung-Youn, *indari* occurs on average seven or eight times in every twenty cases of shamanic vocation.²⁵

Frequently we find a combination of sickness and out-of-body experiences. The suffering drains the organism of its will to live, whereupon consciousness feels itself freed of the body and sheds it like a lifeless container. The dying are led to far and distant places. "There is not a single place the exact location of which I do not know," says the Zulu shaman James. Again and again we are told, "At night in my sleep I go everywhere." The Peruvian healer Eduardo flies "into the air through a hole," and Dorcas, the Zulu sangoma, leaves her body at night to fly through space.

If the near-death experience deepens, the person concerned establishes contact with supersensible entities. The journeyer enters a world which presents itself to him symbolically in many different ways: as "a house of life," a "wise old man with a white beard" or a spirit animal that transmits a new understanding of life to him. Sometimes the spirits furnish humans with a body in their own image, as is reported by the natives of the Mentawai Islands, or the bringer of life—as in the case of Lebi'd—vomits a crystal into the adept which fills him with supernatural strength.

His journeys to the Beyond often take the shaman to what he calls "the edge of the world," which we can take to mean the limits of human existence. Equipped with qualities normally found only in spirits or spirit animals, and made sacred by his contact with wise men and bringers of life, the shaman now truly has "eyes that see and ears that hear." He now has "a split soul and a split heart" or feels like "a house of dreams." The sacredness of the world has given him power and thereby has chosen him,

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sometimes against his own will, to act in accordance with his expanded knowledge of being and to introduce this knowledge to our human world. He has been caught by the spirits and must serve the spiritual world.

Rituals of Dismemberment and Bone Displays in the Underworld

To my left I saw an angel in bodily form . . . its face so fiery that it seemed to belong to the highest of angels, who appear to be all flame; they must be the ones we call Seraphim. . . . In its hand I beheld a long golden spear at the point of which a small flame seemed to flicker. I felt as if the angel pierced that spear several times through my heart, that it penetrated to my bowels, which were extracted when the spear was withdrawn, leaving me all aflame with an immense love for God. The pain was so great that I had to groan, but the sweetness that came with this violent pain was such that I could not wish to be free of it, to be content with anything less than God. The pain is not physical but in the mind, although the body partakes of it to a high degree. The ensuing caressing between the soul and God is so sweet that I implore God to allow anyone to taste it who may think that I lie.

—Saint Theresa [Underhill 1928]

Initiation always signifies death and resurrection. This is as true of the rites of passage marking the entry to a new phase of life as it is of shamanic initiation. The former life must be destroyed and erased. During the rites of puberty performed in tribal cultures, the initiates, after their period of isolation, often speak a new language when they return to the village, or they have lost their memory, forgotten their previous existence. That is why they are given new names and in some cases have to be

reintroduced to the rules of their culture. During their initiation shamans may also acquire a secret esoteric language that brings them into contact with higher powers. They converse with each other in this language, which is not understood by the other members of the tribe. This sacred speech as well as sacred songs, sacred objects of power, sacred symbols, and sacred drugs make the initiate part of the magico-religious universe.

The period of initiation strips the shaman of all his social and mental habits as well as his religious and philosophical ideas. To use a more graphic expression: he is skinned, his bowels are torn out, and as happened to Saint Theresa, the flesh is cut from his bones. He is literally chopped into pieces, cooked, grilled, or fried. Eskimo shamans must be able to see themselves as no more than a skeleton before they may accommodate the transitoriness of our egocentric world. Tibetan yogins are said to meditate upon death in charnel grounds until they experience a decomposition of their bodies and perceive themselves as skeletons. For that reason many yogins use human bones as ritual objects and the skirts of Siberian shamans are embroidered with a skeleton.

In many traditions the spirits of the underworld not only take the body of the initiate apart in a most gruesome way—they also put it together again, but in a curious manner which endows the person subjected to such a dismemberment with superhuman powers. Such “bone displays” lead to a heightening of the spiritual state, a liberation from the blind causality of everyday life. Bone displays are thus a source of the true life and represent a mystical rebirth.

Traditional Western psychology, however, does not want to know about such matters as the death of the ego; the pain and suffering entailed in it are too enormous. The psychotherapeutic patient, too, does not wish to endure such suffering; nor would the therapist be able to provide adequate support. Modern psychologists consider the bone displays and experiences of dismemberment described in this chapter to be archaic experiences of the soul, which are so brutal that no modern patient could be expected to endure them. But a critical and truly healing experience cannot be brought about by either psychoanalysis or the clearing up of ego disturbances, social conflicts, mother complexes, or by any other fashionable humanistic group therapy. True transcendence calls for a willingness to suffer a genuine death of ego and not merely an imaginary death experience, to which we might perhaps be willing to submit.

The experience of dismemberment presupposes either an intense psychic crisis or a near-death experience, in which the return to life remains

uncertain. Of course, the extinction of the "I" may reach different levels of intensity. As in the case of all transpersonal experiences, themes of the ego death can be discerned even in dreams or daydreams, albeit only in extremely diluted form. The shaman's is an ego death that may miss reality by no more than a hair's breadth. We are not referring here to a mytho-poetical imagination of death in the form of allegories and archetypes. The death experience of the shaman is a dangerous walk on a tightrope between this world and the Beyond. It is not a hallucinatory pseudodivision of death.

Many shamans were critically ill, socially unacceptable, and psychologically confused over periods of several years; during their time of suffering their body and psyche adjusted themselves to an alternate mode of perception. This continuous biopsychic process of transformation often culminates in experiences of dismemberment, which represent the zenith and turning point of inner change toward a spiritual state of being. The experience of dismemberment is only one of many possibilities of gaining access to the paralogical world of the transpersonal. Journeys to the Beyond, contact with animals and spirits of the Beyond, visions, and the acquisition of objects of power are other effective ways of exploring the limitless realm of consciousness.

To us the experiences of the shaman may often appear exotic or mythical, but we should remember that death/rebirth experiences have occurred at all times and are the source of every form of spirituality and religion. Christ died in agonizing pain and thereafter rose from the dead. Mohammed traveled to the Beyond. Tantalus killed his son Pelops and offered him as food to the gods, who thereupon caused the youth to regain life by cooking him. Similarly, many European mystics and even some of our contemporaries have emerged from the experience of dismemberment in a rejuvenated and newborn state. We are here confronted by a transpersonal principle of the highest order, a principle that represents the very core of all mysticism and introspection.

Our first example is of Chikō, a Japanese priest, who was seized by unworthy feelings of jealousy for the saintly priest Gyōgi, upon whom the emperor had lavished special favors. Soon after that Chikō fell sick and told his disciples that, if he were to die, they should wait nine days before cremating his body. Soon after, he died as expected and his disciples, according to his instructions, locked his body in a room. When they opened the door at the end of nine days, they found that he had come to life again.

He said two messengers had come for him, and together they walked

along a road to the west which led to a golden palace with two awesome figures on either side of the entrance. But the fearsome guardians allowed them to pass and told them to take the road to the north. Soon Chikō began to feel a scorching heat burn his face although he could not see any fire nearby. Then a pillar of red hot iron appeared before him. "Clasp that pillar," the messengers ordered. Chikō did so and all at once his flesh was burned away, so that only his skeleton remained. The messengers came back after three days with brooms and brushed the iron pillar, crying, "Come back to life, come back to life."

Chikō revived and they continued their journey northward until another pillar rose before them, even hotter than the first, and this time made of brass. Once again the messengers ordered Chikō to throw his arms around the pillar. He did so, and again all his flesh was burnt away. Again the messengers returned after three days and conducted their ritual of revival.

After Chikō had been revived a second time, they continued their journey northward and came to a fiery cloud—so hot that birds fell down dead from the sky. "What is this place?" Chikō asked. "The Avici hell where you are to be burned," the messengers replied, seizing him and hurling him into the fire where he remained for another three days until they returned and brought him back to life.

When, on their way back, they reached the golden palace, the two guardians by the gate told Chikō that he had to endure these torments to wipe out his jealousy of Gyōgi Bosatu. After he had recuperated from his ordeal, Chikō visited Gyōgi and confessed his former jealousy. He was forgiven and thereafter led an exemplary life.¹

This dramatic death experience features several themes of the Beyond: the way to the west, the guardians at the entrance to the other world, torments of hell, and the spiritual messengers. Its central theme is Chikō's destruction by heat and fire. Only his skeleton remains—a symbolic indication that he has reached a higher level of consciousness. He rises from the fires of hell just as the phoenix rose from the ashes: reborn and cleansed of bad feelings and intentions. He is now able to resume his duties in a purified state. The fire has literally burned away all evil and represents a universal motif of the restoration of balance and purity. Whether fire itself is no more than a symbol of transformation or whether, over and above this, it represents an actual biochemical process that is experienced as inner heat—similar to Kundalini energy—will have to be left to future physiological investigation. We hope that such research will give us exper-

imental access to the experiences of the shaman by the use of acknowledged scientific methods.

In Indonesia the shaman must also allow his body to be torn to pieces before he can serve the spirits. The Dayak of Borneo has his head severed from the body during initiation. Then the brain is removed from the skull, washed, and reinserted, so that the future shaman will have a clear and undisturbed mind. However, it is only after the spirits have blown gold dust into his eyes that he becomes a seer and perceives the world of the Beyond. His heart is pierced by an arrow to arouse in him compassion and gentleness toward the ill. During the actual Dayak ceremony, a coconut is smashed above the initiate. This may well be their way of demonstrating the "spiritual brain surgery" in a visible manner.²

As we can see, the psychic dismemberment results in a clear mind, enhanced perception, greater capacity for compassion, and true gentleness toward our fellow beings. It would seem that only self-borne suffering will stimulate true tolerance and genuine compassion.

/Garugu //Khumob,* the highest ranking medicine man and sorcerer of the South West African Hain //om, suffered a severe sickness before the age of sixteen. He almost died. It started in his knees and rose relentlessly through the rest of his body. Several times he fainted, and for a short time his soul ascended to //Gamab, the supreme deity. The sickness subsided when he reached his sixteenth year and was trained as an herbal healer by his uncle, who was a great shaman.

One day when he was alone in the bush /Garugu //Khumob heard cawing sounds and a woman appeared to him. Her name was Khaendaos, and she had been sent by //Gamab. She declared her love for him and asked him to take her as his wife. /Garugu //Khumob resisted her invitation by saying he would prefer to marry a human woman. He would not even be swayed when Khaendaos promised to bear him four children. She then became angry and gave him a beating. She was stronger than he and rummaged for four days in his innermost soul and finally dismembered his body. She took his soul with her to //Gamab's abode. After five days she brought it back and /Garugu emerged from a deep unconsciousness. He was wearing a headband, and on his chest and back sat the four children of Khaendaos. While he was unconscious he came to the World Tree where the souls of unborn children and the dead abide.

*The oblique strokes (/ and //) represent clicking sounds typical of the language of some African tribes.

At home the brother of /Garugu's mother asked him, "Was it Khaendaos who dismembered you thus?"

"Yes."

"Was it raining when this happened?"

"Yes."

"Did it burn like fire?"

"Yes."

"I see you have four children by her."

"Yes."

After this experience he began to work as a healer of his own free will. He keeps the four children in a container which he always carries with him when he conducts his healing ceremonies. Khaendaos protects him against alien spirits, but for this he must pay her. If he annoys her she seizes him by the throat and almost strangles him.³

Initiations by a female being who declares her love for the initiate and later becomes his protecting spirit follow the pattern of the spirit wedding, in which a human being and a celestial entity become united, whereby sexual polarity transcends two levels of existence. There can be no doubt that this is one of the reasons for the acquisition of special powers as a result of such a process. In our narrative /Garugu //Khumob is also dismembered, his spirit bride rummages in his soul, and even takes it to the highest deity. His sickness evidently brought //Garugu very close to death, as a result of which he traveled to the Beyond to the source of wisdom, where he came to the World Tree symbolizing the ultimate unity of cosmological levels or forms of existence. He is given a spiritual bride and four powerful spirit children—an almost unique treasure of mystical experience when one considers that /Garugu was only sixteen years old.

The apprentice shaman of the Ammassalik Eskimos (eastern Greenland) sets out for the mountains of the mainland after rubbing his whole body with a special kind of seaweed. In the mountains he looks for a large grinding stone with a flat surface, against which he then rubs a smaller stone. Crayfish and other crustaceans are often placed between the two stones. Hour after hour, day after day, the apprentice rubs the small stone in a circular manner against the grinding stone, fasting all the while, whereby his power of concentration is increased. Every summer he resumes his lonely practice. After a certain period, according to tradition, a bear rises from the sea. The bear is so emaciated that all its ribs can be seen (the skeleton theme). It devours the apprentice alive, but only to vomit him up again. Thus the initiate "dies" or loses consciousness.

Soon after the bear has spit him out he awakens, his bones are once again covered with flesh and blood, and his clothes come flying toward him. He stands there fully dressed. He continues fasting and rubbing the grinding stone every summer until he has accumulated a sufficient number of helping spirits. During this period of training and initiation, the apprentices are taught a special language by the spirits—the secret language of the shaman. All of this training is carried out in secret. Neither the neighbors nor his own family should know of it until the apprentice, after ten to fifteen years of such practices, one day asks his family to extinguish the lamps because he wants to hold his first ceremony for summoning the spirits.⁴

The continuous rubbing of stones against each other may be seen as a simple way of inducing a trance. Monotony, loneliness, and repetitive rhythmic movement join with the desire to encounter a helping spirit. This combination is so powerful that it erases all mundane thoughts and distracting associations—just as the crustaceans placed between the two stones are obliterated. In the same way the spirit bear then devours the apprentice, tearing him to pieces with its teeth. The fasting is another important factor. It strengthens the power of concentration and weakens the body, or rather sensitizes it, because in the absence of digestive and metabolic processes it is more readily inclined toward the desired goal. The normal rhythm of mind and body is disrupted, and consciousness is pervaded by the monotonous circular movement of the arm and the continuous sound of two stones grinding against each other. Ultimately, the sense of ego pales and dies. Its death is due to the absence of any kind of stimulation, any kind of reference point by which to grasp the world.

The polar bear then arises from the sea and devours the body of the initiate. His ego is wiped out. As the bear gnaws every shred of flesh from the bones, the consciousness of the initiate is cleansed and purified, which is the ultimate aim of all spiritual experience and the basis of every form of shamanic power and concentration. The rubbing of the grinding stone, by its very simplicity, demonstrates to us the basic mechanism of arriving at an altered state of consciousness.

But the framework of our ego is not only broken by monotonous mechanical activities. In many tribal cultures nature herself plays an important role. During his initiation, the apprentice is often cut off from his fellow beings. He seeks the loneliness of the mountains, the forest, or the tundra, where he completely surrenders to the sacred powers of plants, animals, and rocks. To live in complete harmony with nature, to learn its

ways and become conscious of its greatness and power is an inherent characteristic of initiation. So we should not be surprised that a bear or other animal—rather than an abstract deity—acts as a bridge to higher consciousness. However, this kind of “shamanic psychotherapy”⁵ is only of limited significance for our own culture, because we no longer have any contact with bears or wolves. We know of no Western medium using animals as helping spirits. In any case, the dissolution of the ego does not necessarily have to be experienced in every culture as a process of dismemberment.

On the other hand, we should not see this dismemberment as a mere reflection of the behavior of the hunter who also dismembers, disembowels, flocks, and eats animals. In the past, many ethnologists were inclined toward such an interpretation which is no more than a purely superficial and accidental analogy, because the experience of psychic dismemberment is a universal transcultural and transpersonal symbol. That the initiate is often dismembered by animals is an aspect of the specific lifestyle of particular tribal communities.

The Iglulik Eskimo shamans have to see their own skeleton. The North Alaska Eskimos speak of a “worm test.” Worms eat the flesh of the adept, whereby he is internally cleansed and begins to glow. A similar belief is found among the Aivilik Eskimos. In western Greenland the apprentice permits all sorts of worms to drain his blood until he becomes unconscious. This method is said to produce highly gifted shamans.⁶

It has been reported that the initiates of the Saint Lawrence Islands Eskimos fall prey to madness for five days during which they take neither food nor drink, but nevertheless become as strong as a bear, so that not even ten grown men can restrain them. During the training the candidate is sick and confused, but not really mentally ill. The other members of the tribe are well able to tell the difference. He remains in the open, away from habitations of the tribe, out on the tundra, exposed to wind and snow, to receive from the spirits and the forces of nature his shamanic knowledge and powers. Without sleeping, he beseeches the spirits, asking them for “the power to bring the dead back to life.” In the course of his lonely wanderings, the initiate five times breaks the bones of a bird which he has to restore to life again⁷—a clear indication of what he will later have to endure himself.

The lonely struggle with the forces of nature, during which one is at their mercy for better or worse, is a requirement of shamanic training, because only when the apprentice becomes aware of his smallness and help-

lessness, when he becomes modest and humble, can his spirit blend with these tremendous forces. An awareness of the interwoven mystical unity of nature is an essential experience during initiation and of the shamanic view of the world in general. Exposed to wild animals and the stormy elements, deprived of sleep and food, his thoughts constantly directed toward the spirits and the sacred, the shamanic apprentice—once his ego identity has collapsed—experiences himself to be one with the world, the universe, nature, animals, and plants. The experience of a transpersonal self is the reward. He now represents the bridge between the world of man and the world as such, the sacred existence revealed to those who are willing to be dismembered and thereby shed their former human nature.

Among the Australian Arunta the person destined to become a medicine man seeks out a cave inhabited by the Iruutarinia, the spirits of the ancestors who lived in Alcheringa, the Dreamtime. He lies down at the mouth of the cave and sleeps until one of the spirits appears, piercing him with a spear through the back of the neck until the spear emerges at the mouth, perforating the tongue. This perforation of the tongue does not heal and is accepted as a physical sign of a medicine man. How the hole in the tongue comes about is unclear, but in any case it is big enough to put one's little finger through it. The spirit ancestor then pierces the head of the initiate with a second spear, sideways from ear to ear.

The initiate is taken into the cave, where the Iruutarinia operate on his body, taking out the organs and replacing them with new ones. He awakens in a state of madness, but this disturbed phase does not last very long. He is returned to his tribe by the ancestors and thereafter has the gift of seeing the spirits. In addition, he owns a collection of Atoongara (stones given to him by the ancestors) which he projects into the body of a patient during healing ceremonies in order to fight the evil forces within the body.⁸

During the sacred Dreamtime, the material limitations and physical restrictions of ordinary people do not exist. The novice returns to his primordial state by contacting the spirits of the ancestors. He thus gets a taste of the sacred nature of being, of a timeless age, accessible to anyone who knows how to open himself to it. To be in the company of these ancestral spirits is an experience of such transcendental force that it could be said to be tantamount to death or self-annihilation.

Upon his return to this world, the novice is mentally disturbed and has difficulty readjusting to his human environment. Catapulted out of sacred space, he gets the standards of earthly life all muddled up and only gradu-

ally succeeds in reassembling this nonsensical mosaic. He enters our world from the timeless world of the "eternal now" where the space/time continuum is magically present. He is therefore unsure of himself and behaves in a socially and mentally abnormal manner. Yet this is the way a medicine man is born. The sacred Dreamtime has turned a man into a healer.

The Corroboree poets of the Australian Unambal receive their inspirations, songs, and dances through their contact with the dead of the underworld, the Shadows or Bangumnas. These helping spirits protect the poet, show him the way to the other world and return him to his body after the journey to the Beyond. If such a poet loses or neglects the contact with these spirits, a therapeutic ceremony is held; all the men of the tribe unite to restore the severed connection to the dead ancestors. They crouch around the Corroboree poet, who lies on the ground, and massage his body until he goes into a trance. His soul (*jajaru*) sets out to seek the spirits of the dead.

If the poet meets such a spirit (who, in turn, was dispatched to look for the poet), he says that he lost his way in the underworld as well as all his songs. The spirit, who may be the dead father of the poet, then helps him; he calls many other spirits who chop the poet's soul to pieces. Each spirit takes one of the pieces to the underworld, where the soul is reassembled. The poet is now once again able to travel to the Beyond where he can collect songs and chants, which he teaches to the members of his tribe.⁹

Similar to the Corroboree poets, the Northwest Australian Ungarinyin have a devil doctor who is initiated by Agula, the shadow skeleton of the dead. This initiation takes place quite unexpectedly, such as when a prospective devil doctor is walking around in the bush. There is thus no long and difficult period of initiation. The skeleton spirits cause him to become "silly along head," they drag him to the spirit realm, take his brain out and replace it by a new one which renders him capable of seeing the Agula himself. They, too, teach him songs—Corroborees—which he communicates to the members of his tribe and which are passed on to many other tribes. These dream Corroborees play an indispensable role in the life of the aboriginal community. At the same time, however, they are subject to fashionable trends and are periodically renewed.¹⁰

Dismemberment, exchange of internal organs or the brain, and the introduction of crystals into the body of the initiate are metaphors of inner change; allegorical and culturally oriented symbols for an introspective, psychic rebirth. Shamans from all traditions emerge with great regularity from this process of transformation chanting or singing. One is led to

conclude that it is easier to communicate intuitive experiences by music¹⁰ poetry than in the words of everyday speech.

If the connection of the Corrobóree poet to the spirits of the underworld has been severed, it becomes necessary for him to reexperience the sacred. A therapy takes place. While in a trance, he is dismembered by the spirit of the dead and put together again in order to refresh, sanctify, and heal the memory of the other world. He returns from this experience with a new dream Corrobórees, the ultimate purpose of which is to acquaint the other members of the community with the atmosphere and nature of the underworld so that people who lead lives that are restricted by the framework of the material world may experience a richer existence.

We have seen that the extinction of ego consciousness is described by a great variety of cultural metaphors. In South Australia, the passage from life to death, and to rebirth, is brought about by the rainbow snake, which connects the cosmological level of heaven and earth like a rainbow. The initiate is swallowed by it, and so begins his journey from the earthly to the heavenly realm. All cultures see heaven as an expression of that which is higher and more exalted, and there is hardly any tribal tradition that does not make use of heaven as a symbol of transcendence and heightened insight. The same applies to the realm situated below the earth—the underworld. For the modern researcher into consciousness, heaven and the underworld, or being swallowed by the rainbow snake, are expressions of an altered state of consciousness.

The medicine men of the Australian Yulalai take a boy selected to follow their profession to a tribal burial ground, tie him down and, at short distances around him, light some fires of fat. One novice reported that after he had been left tied down, a big star fell beside him and from it came an iguana—his totem—which ran all over him and then went away. After that a snake, the hereditary enemy of the iguana, crawled on him, frightening him. Next, a huge figure came and drove a yam stick right through his head, placing a sacred stone in the hole made by the stick, with the help of which much of the initiate's magic was to be worked in the future. Then came the spirits of the dead, chanting songs full of sacred lore related to the art of healing. He was away from his tribal camp for about two months and was not allowed to become a practicing medicine man until he was some years older.¹¹

In Dampier Land and in the area around the Lower Fitzroy River medicine men are created by Rai spirits who slit open the initiate's body and hang up his entrails as well as his lungs, heart, liver, and kidneys. His body

placed over an earth oven with magical cooking slabs of stone. Later his entrails and organs are replaced and the body is closed up again. Thereafter he can fly through the air like a bird and travel to the innermost regions of the earth. Magical stones are placed into his navel and between the eyes and ears. The Rai also equip him with the "inner eye" that enables him to transcend time and space.¹²

In southern Australia medicine men are "made" near a large water hole associated with a great snake known as Wonambi. The initiate is taken to the water hole by a doctor (*kinkin*). After he has departed from the tribal village he is mourned for as someone who has just died, because he is going to be "cut into pieces." At the water hole the initiate is blindfolded and given to the monstrous snake who swallows him whole. He spends an undefined period of seclusion inside the snake and is finally spat out again. In the course of a later ceremony, the "doctors" once again dismember the initiate symbolically. He is made to lie full length on his back and said to be dead. The head doctor proceeds to break his neck, dislocates his wrists and joints at the elbows, knees, and ankles. A black stone is used to "cut" these parts of the body during this rite. In actual fact the operator does not amputate these parts but makes a scarlike mark with the stone. The doctors insert a maban shell into each cut, as well as into his ears and the angle of his jaw, so that he will be able to hear and speak to everything—spirits, strangers, birds, and animals. More shells are pressed into his forehead so that he can divine and see through anything, and into his neck so that it may be turned in all directions. His stomach is also filled with maban to make him invulnerable to attack by any weapon. He is then "sung" back to life by the *kinkin* and revives. On arrival in the main camp a further test is held. All the fully initiated men, at the order of the head *kinkin*, throw their spears at the postulant. They glance off him though, because he is full of maban, the sacred shell. He is now *kinkin* and can practice his profession.¹³

The best known examples of dismemberment come from Siberian tribal communities. Among the Buryat the shamanic apprentice is visited by the Utcha, his shamanic ancestors. They take his soul (*amin*) to heaven and place it before the assembly of the Saajiani, who torment him in a horrible fashion, poking around his belly with knives, cutting whole chunks of flesh off him, and throwing them about. During these tortures the shaman can hear his heart beat, but his breath subsides and his skin becomes dark blue. The spirits cook his flesh to "ripen" it. The initiate acquires his inner knowledge during this procedure and thus becomes conversant with the rules of shamanic wisdom.¹⁴

Among the Tungus shamanic ability or potential is passed from one generation to the next. When the spirit of a dead shaman selects a successor from the people within his clan, it is said, "He was found by a former shaman." The dead shamans then train the neophyte. They abduct his soul, dismember it, and grill its flesh over a fire or on a spit.

Here is how the shaman Semyon Semyonov describes his own dismemberment:

When I shamanize, the spirit of dead Ilya (a brother, who was himself a shaman) comes and speaks through my mind. I was forced to become a shaman by my shamanic ancestors. Before I began to shamanize, I lay ill for a whole year. I became a shaman at the age of fifteen. The sickness that forced me to become a shaman caused my body to swell up and I frequently fainted. When I began to sing, the sickness usually passed away. After that, my ancestors made me into a shaman. They set me up like a wooden pole and shot arrows at me until I became unconscious. They cut the flesh off me. They separated my bones and counted them. My flesh they ate raw. When they counted my bones, they found that there was one too many. Had there not been enough bones I could not have become a shaman.¹⁵

Another shaman called Pyotr, who was mentally disturbed for three years, also had to suffer dismemberment. His sickness was marked by alternating phases of convulsive chanting and complete apathy toward his environment. Sometimes his convulsions were so strong that he had to be tied down. After all this suffering, he showed signs of shamanic gifts at the age of twenty-five. Because his soul was brought up in the lower world, on the twelfth level of the shaman's tree, his animal mother, who cares for the egg containing the shaman's soul, traveled to the middle world to dismember his body. In this way Pyotr won his helping spirits. His main helper is a dead female relative but he may also call upon a bear and a wolf.¹⁶

A shaman of the Avam Samoyed was seized by a gigantic blacksmith in the underworld and torn into small pieces. His bones were boiled for three years in a cauldron until all the flesh fell off them. The blacksmith fashioned the shaman's head on an anvil, instructing him at the same time how to heal people. Later the blacksmith reassembled the bones, covered them with flesh, and gave him new eyes to make him see better. His ears were pierced with the intention of making the conversations of plants audible to him.¹⁷

When the shaman of a clan of the Siberian Evenk dies, his soul (*chargi*) travels downriver to the clan territory of the spirits of ancestral shamans in order to inform Mangi, the oldest of the dead ancestors. Mangi then orders the spirit of the ancestral shaman, whose turn it is to reenter life, to travel upstream and choose a suitable young man or maiden from among the members of the clan. The person chosen is overcome by intense apathy or, in desperation, escapes into the forest. He must give up all work and becomes emaciated. His soul journeys to the mountain of the shamanic ancestral spirits, to the roots of the shaman tree. There he is swallowed by his animal mother, to be reborn as an animal. In other words, the animal mother creates an animal double which later becomes his protecting spirit and lives in an isolated tree in the vicinity of the clan's abode. The shaman himself is dismembered and reassembled by the animal mother.¹⁸

It should be noted that the shaman tree stands on a mountain so that its topmost branches reach into the upper world, while its roots go down into the underworld. The trunk represents our earthly realm, the middle world. Near the roots live the spirits of the shamanic ancestors and the animal mother. In the middle world we find humans, and in the upper realm the as yet unborn clansmen in the form of birds. The motif of the animal mother and the birds shows that the origin of the clan and mankind as a whole is perceived as lying in the animal realm. That is the reason why all myths speak of a primordial connection between humans and animals.

The World Tree manifests a threefold cosmography; all three levels of existence are sacred by virtue of the whole tree being so. In many myths this World Tree standing on the World Mountain is also the center of the world. It thus symbolizes both the World Axis and the world as a whole. The connection between shamanism and the World Tree may appear strange and incomprehensible to the modern mind, but the theme of such a World Tree can also be found in psychotherapeutic data. The Tree offers itself to our consciousness as an ideal symbol for a connection between all cosmological levels and, in one form or another, forms part of the description of the world in all cultures. We might ask ourselves whether such poetic images do not, in many respects, appeal to our feeling and intuition to a much greater degree than the rational and abstract geographies of the soul developed by modern psychology.

In many cases shamans become healers after a ceremony of dismemberment. The Yakut, however, say that a shaman can only cure those illnesses whose evil spirit has partaken of the shaman's flesh during initiation. It is

indeed the case that many practicing shamans can cure only those illnesses they themselves have experienced. If, during the ceremony, the spirits devour the leg of the shaman he will later treat diseases of the leg. During the actual dismemberment, his flesh and bones are divided among the spirits themselves. If there is not enough flesh for all the spirits, the shaman will not be able to heal all illnesses. Any illness, the spirits of which did not partake of the shaman's body, may only be treated once by him.

It is also said that a shaman's power is related to the intensity with which he experiences his dismemberment. According to the Siberian tribes, important shamans are only cut to pieces once or not at all. Mighty shamans, on the other hand, are dismembered several times. There is a saying, "He was dismembered thrice—he is a great shaman." Only those that have sacrificed themselves and have experienced all the phases and symptoms of the various illnesses have a true calling to become healers. After his resurrection the newly ordained shaman is to be surrounded by innocent maidens and boys. This again shows that shamanic illnesses and the dismemberment ceremony are seen as a process of purification, from which the shaman emerges newly born and untainted by the mundane concerns of human existence.¹⁹

Vilmos Diónyósi has recorded the dismemberment experience of Sunchugasev, a former Sagay shaman:

The candidate loses consciousness while sick. During this time he presents himself to the shaman-ancestor of his clan. When he gets there, they seek his excess bone. They cut up his whole body into pieces, they separate the heart and the lungs and examine each piece by the light. Meanwhile he sees himself cut up, he sees as his whole body and his viscera are being measured, while they are looking for the excess bone. . . .

They chopped me up and then threw me into the kettle and I was boiled. There were some men there: two black and two fair ones. Their chieftain was there too. He issued the orders concerning me. I saw all this. While the pieces of my body were boiled, they found a bone around the ribs which had a hole in the middle. This was the excess bone. This brought about my becoming a shaman. Because only those men can become shamans in whose body such a bone can be found. One looks across the hole of this bone and begins to see all, to know all, and that is when one becomes a shaman. . . . When I came to from this state, I woke up. This meant that my soul had returned. Then the shamans declared: "You are the sort of man who may be-

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come a shaman. You should become a shaman, you must begin to shamanize."²⁰

The motif of the excess bone is fairly common among Siberian tribal communities. In the absence of a more profound explanation, we might say this excess bone implies an anatomy different from that of ordinary humans and thus expresses the special status of a shaman. As he looks across the hole in this excess bone, other worlds are instantly revealed to him. His abnormal anatomy symbolizes a correspondingly different mode of existence that transcends the average. Such a hole or orifice is also a very widespread theme of entry into another realm, as for example, the holes leading to the underworld or to heaven, as well as the long, dark tunnel so often mentioned in near-death experiences.

As in the case of all shamanic experiences, the actual psychic transformation is described with concepts and images taken from the material environment. For that reason, many theoreticians maintain that "primitives" are unable to separate material reality from psychic reality, and that this allows us to conclude that the mental formation of tribal cultures is inadequately developed.

Psychic transformation, however, cannot be conveyed by language alone, so it would certainly seem more appropriate to borrow concepts from the everyday world than to construct a new and complicated psychological terminology. Many cultures are intuitively aware of this and therefore describe the internal by the use of metaphors borrowed from the external world.

Seen in this way, the excess bone with its hole, the introduction of crystals into the body, or the boiling and grilling of the initiate's flesh are very descriptive and impressive images of mental states. Images that go beneath the skin. The scenes of dismemberment follow a transpersonal symbolism to be found in many cultures. What is being described is the extinction of accumulated knowledge and the collapse of the ego. But the images used to convey these processes are taken from the material world we know and understand. We have tried to free these shamanic metaphors from the sphere of the exotic and irrational to which traditional anthropology has banished them, and to show that they represent psychic motivations common to all mankind. Conventional psychology, because of its self-imposed scientific strictures and its unwarranted fear of that which cannot be measured, has so far refused to recognize these motivations.

The experience of physical dismemberment does not require an elabo-

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rate interpretation—it is an expression of inner healing, of a psychic cleansing process and of an ecstatic peak experience rather than an experience of destruction, as the shamanic images might at first sight lead us to suppose. True health, we are being told, can only be achieved through destruction, followed by reconstitution and reformation. The subsequent rebirth is experienced as an inner liberation from entrenched habits and standards. No matter whether we speak of a “rebirth” or a “resurrection,” these words are just concepts pointing to a psychic and psychosomatic reanimation that grants us a second existence after we have been “dismembered” and so brought back to the primordial state. This second existence is marked by forces and powers that are much more complex and integral than those of ordinary men, of those that are born only once and not allowed, during their one life, to return to the sources of primordial wholeness and cosmic unity.

The Song of Power: Joy, Joy, Joy!

Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like an ice floe sailing here and there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thought can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps and his heart throb. Something, like an abatement in the weather, will keep him thawed up and then it will happen that we, who always think that we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves—we get a new song.

—Orpingalik, A Netsilingmuit Eskimo¹

By the image of an ice floe being moved by the current, Orpingalik provides us with a very beautiful metaphor for the dissolution of our rigid thought patterns and of our ego structure. This “flowing force” or, as we might call it, the “experience of flowing” arises in all forms of heightened emotional engagement, extreme fear, unbearable pain, and in moments of ecstatic joy or mystical bliss. It can thus be said that peak experiences as well as acute depressive states can bring us to the point at which we enter this whirling “current” of power.

Orpingalik uses a further impressive image when he says that “something like an abatement in the weather” will cause us to thaw. While cold and ice will cause the pores to contract, thoughts to freeze and feelings to cool, the Eskimos, during the summer, experience a reawakening of all

their human sensibilities. Orpingalik expresses this by saying, “. . . and then it will happen that we, who always think that we are small, will feel still smaller.” Western man, on the other hand, tends to reject the idea of his own insignificance with great determination. However, this feeling of insignificance and smallness in comparison to universal phenomena is essential for any kind of mystic inspiration or an ecstatic peak experience. Our psyche is so paradoxically constructed that we can rise from the deepest depression with renewed life strength, like a phoenix from the ashes—with a song that tells of the sources and places of power pervading the universe.

When we have made ourselves small, by shedding our socialized ego like an old winter pelt, we can share the joy of creation and come to know “the love of all things,” as is spoken of by shaman Avá-Nembiará, quoted below. A characteristic of ecstasy and enlightenment is an indescribable feeling of bliss, of cosmic joy at the unity with the higher self, the helping spirit of nature. The Eskimo shaman Aua, in an altered state of consciousness, encountered a “shore spirit” and thereafter would call this spirit helper by singing:

Joy, Joy,
Joy, Joy!
I see a little shore spirit,
A little aua,
I myself am also aua,
The shore spirit's namesake,
Joy, Joy!

“These words I would keep on repeating,” he recalls, “until I burst into tears, overwhelmed by a great dread; then I would tremble all over, crying only, ‘Ah-a-a-a, joy, joy! Now I will go home, joy, joy!’”

Then I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song, with only room for the one word: joy, joy! And I had to use the full strength of my voice. And then, in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight, I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way.²

If such an experience is barely comprehensible for one to whom it hap-

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pens, it is even more so for rational science, because of its tendency to get caught up in metaphors and superficial descriptions. The song of power may well be the true song of life—a direct expression of all joy in existence and of vitality. Ecstasy is our enthusiasm about the mystic unity of all things and beings. It is a feeling of being able to surrender to the waves of our existential “ups and downs” without trying to control them, and free from the fear-ridden egoism of our rational psyche.

There are many ways of singing a song and many reasons for doing so. We can sing a song as we might read a book, just reading the lines, as it were. Or a song might rise spontaneously in our hearts, as a kind of improvisation to praise a blessed moment. Yet again, a song or melody can be born in us, almost half-consciously, as a result of profound concentration. Such is the case with the great composers. We can hear a song in a dream or feel it rise in us quite unexpectedly at a time of leisure and relaxation. It may also happen that we discover a song in ourselves after a complete psychic or physical collapse—a song that reflects our own state and acquaints us with the archetypes of the soul. Finally, we may receive a song from beings in the realm of the dead, from spirit animals, or dead relatives in the course of a journey to the Beyond. These various ways of acquiring songs of power are representative of different levels of consciousness. The song becomes more powerful and effective with the gradual dissolution of our ego.

The same applies to visions which may come to us in a harmless dream or during a near-death experience. Western science believes that shamanistic phenomena can be explained by psychological categorizing and thereby blinds itself to the reality of a continuum of levels of consciousness of varying degrees of intensity. It assumes that the dream revelations of a patient, or the pathological symptoms of a neurosis, are comparable to the process of shamanic transformation. Such an attitude reduces the shaman to the level of traditional Western ego psychology and judges him by its criteria. While these phenomena show certain similarities, they occur on different levels of consciousness. When this is taken into consideration it will be seen that the shaman towers high above the neurotic patient dealt with by Western psychotherapy.

A song is not simply a string of words to which a melody has been added. Rather, it is the expression of a psychosomatic and spiritual transformation which makes the shaman into a representative of another physical dimension—I say “physical dimension” because, in the last analysis, the shaman is capable of influencing our physical world, albeit in an acausal

The Song of Power

and nonmaterial way. His transformation has practical consequences. We can seldom say this in the case of psychiatric patients that have been cured.

The Bella Coola shamaness Sikwaxlelix, in her song, submerges herself in the “place of power”:

Sky moving
as they sang
spirits sang of salmon
Sky waving
up and down
spirits singing
I was drowning
in the basin
the place of power
for curing
Spirits tossed
eagle down
to the surface
I rose singing
He pulled me out
the one who saves
those struck
by spirit power
I gazed deep
into the face
that gave me power
as a shaman
He stood up
in the center
in the center
of power
Spirit standing
in the place
of petrified
power
Sky moving
as they sang
spirits sang of salmon
Sky waving

up and down
spirits singing³

In her "place of power" Sikwalklelix hears the salmon song of the spirits, who cause the sky to rise and fall in waves like the sea. This place of power is the domain of transpersonal existence. Here man is connected to a source of power which, in the earthly realm of normal consciousness, is manifested as magical expertise and the knowledge to heal. It is a place charged with energy; in fact, energy would seem to be its very nature. Anyone who gets in touch with such a place can salvage something of this energy and bring it to our realm of existence. This "something" transcends the causal mechanics of our world. Sikwalklelix uses allegory to describe the indescribable. She speaks of a basin (of water). As is well known, water is a symbol of transformation, spiritual purification and, in fact, of the primordial source of insight. The power of the spirit raises Sikwalklelix from the primordial ground of Being and a song rises to her lips.

Immergence in the spirit realm or the spirit, the true source of shamanic knowledge, results in a heightened sense of reality, because a person thus immersed breaks through the congested channels of perception of our everyday consciousness. And through our "gaze into the face of power" the sacred song of liberation, mentioned by so many shamans, comes into being.

Isaac Tens, a Gitskan Indian shaman, had twenty-three such songs that he acquired in a trance state, during which he entered a house where he met his two uncles—both former shamans—who sang them to him. To him, this "house" was what the basin of water was to Sikwalklelix and the great ocean or river to Uvavnu. The symbolism can take many forms, because any place in the universe is suitable for the revelation of the sacred. There may be what we might call archetypal places of initiation, but in the last resort any place, element, or form can be a bearer or vehicle of initiation into the realm of the spirit and of power. Isaac Tens acquired his power in an isolated house on a great plain:

When getting ready for the songs, I fell into a trance and saw a vast fine territory. In the middle of it a house stood. I stepped into it, and I beheld my uncle Tsigwee who had been a medicine man (halaait). He had died several years before. Then another uncle appeared—Gukswawtu. Both of them had been equally famous in their day. I heard them sing many songs. While they were singing, a Grizzly ran through the door, and went right around. Then he rose into the air

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above the clouds, describing a circle, and came back to the house. Each of my uncles took a rattle and placed it into one of my hands. That is why I always use two rattles in my performances. In my vision I beheld many fires burning under the house. As soon as I walked out of the house, my trance ended. From then on, I sang those chants just as I had learned them in my vision.⁴

A song of healing power may also be acquired directly from the realm of the dead, usually from a dead relative or shaman, but also from indefinable, amorphous, or mythical beings who bestow the song of power upon the initiate.

Let us illustrate this by an example from the Paraguayan Avá-Chiripá tribe. A shaman of this tribe, Avá-Nembiará, journeyed in his sleep to the realm of the dead, where his grandfather presented him with a song of healing and revealed to him the secret of the ladder connecting heaven and earth. Avá-Nembiará observed the dances of the spirits from a mountain-top in the Beyond and heard their songs. Later, as a test, he was asked to cure a dead man lying by the roadside. He succeeded in doing this by the use of his newly acquired songs. He was astonished by their unexpected power of healing. His training continued, however, after his journey to the Beyond, because his celestial helpers continued to instruct him in the use of medicinal herbs.⁵

The song of power forms the central focus of the religion of the Papago Indians, but there are several ways of acquiring power. The first consists of taking a scalp in war. This scalp, however, is used by the Papago warrior only as a preparation for his "dreaming" the song of power. War, the killing of enemies and the taking of scalps affect the consciousness of the warrior to such an extent that he subsequently "dreams" a song of power. After their return from the warpath the scalp hunters live for a while in quarantine outside the village. A protector is assigned to each warrior during this period. This wife of the warrior also spends sixteen days in isolation, while he sits throughout motionless in one spot, his arms crossed and his head bowed towards his chest. Fasting and isolation soon cause a song to rise within him, whereafter nothing can prevent him from singing.

The Papago will accept songs of power cast in the simplest possible language, even if such a song differs only by a few words from that of the warrior's father or uncle. His song serves the warrior for the rest of his life as a magical and therapeutic means of healing. On the seventeenth day of the period of isolation a great fire is lit, around which the members of the

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tribe dance. The warrior is now presented with a basket by his protector, in which he places the scalp, known as "the prisoner." This scalp is thus treated like an imprisoned spirit, and the warrior thereafter has scalp power.

If a warrior is unable to take a scalp, but still wishes to have the possibility of "dreaming" a song, he kills an eagle and then fasts and dreams for a period of four days. In his dreams an eagle comes to him, not as a bird, however, but in its original human form and sings to him. In this way the young warrior is given clear information about the path of his life. One such warrior "dreamt" that he would become a gambler, a socially accepted occupation among the Papago and, true enough, he never lost whenever he gambled thereafter. Another dreamt of becoming a runner, and became one. If a warrior is dissatisfied with his dream, he kills another eagle the following year and waits for a new song. After the four-day fast all former killers of eagles gather to sing a song for their new brother.

The third way of acquiring power is an exhausting four-day pilgrimage to the Gulf of California for the purpose of fetching salt, which the waves of the ocean deposit on the rocks. The pilgrims set out toward the south, which the Papago refer to as the direction of suffering. The deprivations and exertions of the journey, together with the ritual commands to be observed, and the sight of the vast expanse of the ocean are so overwhelming for the Papago, who are a desert people, that they receive supernatural revelations on arrival at their destination. Before the journey begins, a hereditary priest sings sacred chants and performs a ritual to "make the pilgrimage safe." The initiate must perform his pilgrimage four times in consecutive years. In the past it was done on foot. Today the pilgrims ride on horseback. When they rest they lie with their head in the direction of the Pacific Ocean so that its power can draw them on.

During these salt pilgrimages many wise sermons are preached, in which the end of each sentence is marked by the words being pronounced at an unusually high pitch. As the speaker approaches the magical part of his sermon and begins to converse with the gods, the flow of his language is distorted into a sound not unlike that of an old car engine. On the afternoon of the third day, the group of pilgrims arrives at a legendary waterhole at the foot of Mount Pinacate. At first, however, everyone avoids contact with the water and joyfully rushes instead to the top of the mountain. The sight of the ocean from there transposes the pilgrim into a state of bliss, and they reach out for the ocean with their hands so as to take some of its power into themselves and then rub their hands along their bodies. Then they go to drink,

and set out for the final twenty-four-hour lap of their journey, during which they do not stop for rest. These last hours are almost like a race; the salt pilgrims ride throughout the night, on and on toward the world ocean.

For a desert people that knows no brimming waterholes and no great rivers filled to their banks, the encounter with the ocean is a sacred experience. Famished and weakened by the stress of the journey, the pilgrims wait for a vision. When they have scraped the salt off the rocks and loaded it onto their horses, they wade into the shallow water and offer a sacrifice of corn flour to the ocean. Now, in rapt suspense, they wait for signs of the divine from the depths of the ocean. Many of them behold a sea coyote gliding on the surface of the water in a curious fashion. Other pilgrims will run along the beach for hours on end and then perhaps discover the power of healing in a cranny between two rocks, or a swarm of cranes will call them up into the sky to have a race with them.

After such visions the neophytes are in a purified and sanctified state. On the journey home they will not touch their body, and each one of them walks alone to avoid physical contact with others. They know they are all charged with power. They must not turn to look at the ocean lest it call them back. Upon their arrival in their village they fast for sixteen days and entreat the gods for further visions and songs. Only then are they considered to be mature warriors that may be fully integrated into the community.

Women also have the possibility of acquiring the song of power, but not by going on a salt pilgrimage or by "dreaming" such a song in some other way. They withdraw for four days during their time of menstruation. Like the eagle killers or the scalp hunters, they construct a simple shelter and avoid all contact with the opposite sex so as not to weaken their magical powers. If they wish to receive a vision or a song they will undertake a fast as well.

The Papago Indians have thus developed an impressive range of ceremonies by which any member of the tribe may strive to obtain a vision or a song of power. Life-and-death battles, the killing of an eagle, the strenuous salt pilgrimage, and even isolation and fasting during menstruation: All these aesthetic practices—providing they make extreme demands on the body and, as a result of additional fasts, consciousness becomes receptive—are considered to be suitable for presenting the initiate with a vision or a song of power. Pilgrimages and isolation during menstruation are universal practices by which aspirants endeavor to make contact with higher powers and to gain access to the hidden resources of human con-

sciousness. The fact, however, that the Papago have incorporated even war and the taking of scalps into their sacred framework is an indication of the high level of their psychic integration.⁶

Psychic development and the regeneration of life are always accompanied by song, dance, rhythm, or the experience of joy. The song of the shaman arises from deep psychic purification and emptying. Emptiness and purity are also the cornerstones of an ancient therapy. Western society is beginning to rediscover. A song born of inner harmony is a spontaneous expression of psychic and spiritual clarity.

The "song of power" lies dormant in us. It is awakened by great physical or existential suffering and then spontaneously bursts forth from within us. In the last analysis all transpersonal experience slumbers in us, buried under thick layers of habitual and ego-oriented psychological processes. Heightened concentration and sharpened attention can act like a drill boring toward the center of our personality. In this way successive layers of ego are penetrated until the higher self, or what we might call the transpersonal dimension, is reached. The parings and shavings brought to the surface by this drill are only a small part of this extensive realm of the psyche, but they can give rise to a song or vision which deeply transforms us by making us aware of another reality.

The language of that other reality is poetry, whereas ordinary consciousness speaks in prose which is often hard, unmelodic, mechanical and calculated. The song of power, on the other hand, is lyrical—a spontaneous rhythm freely unfolding without intervention of the will. In the company of his spirits the shaman finds himself in a place of petrified energy, at the very center of power. Here poetry is the only appropriate language, and the song of healing expresses continuous reality, because the place of power is also the place of healing, wholeness, and the holy.

The shaman submerges himself in this sphere where he is healed, and salvages part of this healing wholeness for our world. Having been made a bearer of power by the mere contact with this higher realm of consciousness, he is now able to allow others to partake of it. The song of power expresses a transpersonal experience and can thus develop into a song of healing. It is holy, because it comes from the very core of that which pervades everything. In ordinary language we might say that the peak experience, the trance state, egolessness, or meditative absorption are in themselves health-giving and healing, because they bring the highest potential of consciousness within the reach of human awareness.

The song of power speaks in the language of the transpersonal dimension.

sion. Such songs or poems are not *about* something—they *represent* something. Because even metaphorical language is inadequate for the description of a true state of altered consciousness, only a melody and the vibrations of musical sound can convey to us something of the flavor of unconditioned consciousness. Attempts to understand the meaning of transpersonal song by the methods of traditional science are of necessity paradoxical, for when we are in the centre of power and feel the song rise within us, we are in no way inclined to talk about it. Although there has always been a connection between the intellect and intuition, they are like the front and reverse sides of a coin, so that their eyes can never meet.

According to Abraham Maslow peak experiences and states of ecstasy are a biological need of man. This is also true of song, no matter whether profane or sacred. A song expresses our longing to attain an integrated level of experience; it wants to reach out, beyond the limitations of the material world, and bring all things into harmony. A simple song is just as capable of doing that as the healing song of the shaman. The ordinary song remains personal, whereas the song of power penetrates the unfathomable. If all the participants at a spiritual gathering sing together, they thereby bridge their individualities and weld themselves into a group. The shaman, by his song, establishes a connection between the material world and the realm of the spirit. He places a ladder against the sky, climbs the cosmic tree, hauls himself to heaven along the cosmic rope, or transcends the separation of the spheres in mystical flight.

Transpersonal experience cleanses. Spiritual dismemberment, life-threatening sickness, or pervasive pain make it possible for our consciousness to arrive at important psychic insights which culminate in an expanded view of the world. Thus humankind, with every pore of its being cleansed, is hallowed and resurrected.

We can see this happening in the case of the well-known Eskimo shamaness Uvavruk. During a vision, a celestial ball of fire enters her body and customary reality is suddenly transformed into pulsating vitality. Freed from their material ballast, all her feelings unfold spontaneously and unhindered. In such a state the joy of life pervades us, and every fiber of our muscles and nerves joins in a single shout of ecstasy, a great song of liberation. Such songs are a spontaneous response to the newly forming psychophysical constitution; the "song of the heart" is an unprompted psychic process. It announces our entry into a personal paradise, our arrival at a state of balance between the conscious and the superconscious. Knud

Rasmussen heard the story of Uvavnu's initiation from a shaman called Aua.

One evening she had gone out to pass water. It was a dark winter evening, and suddenly a shining ball of fire showed in the sky. It came down to earth, directly toward the place where Uvavnu sat. She wanted to run away, but before she could do so she was struck by the ball of fire. She became aware all at once that everything in her began to glow. She lost consciousness and from that moment on was a great summoner of the spirits. The spirit of the fire ball had taken up residence within her, and it was said that this spirit consisted of two parts. One part was like a bear, the other human; the head was human, but it had fangs like a bear.

Uvavnu came running into the house, half unconscious, and sang a song which since then has become her magic formula whenever she has to help others. As soon as she began to sing, she became delirious with joy and all the others in the house also were beyond themselves with joy, because their minds were being cleansed of all that burdened them. They lifted up their arms and cast away everything connected with suspicion and malice. All these things one could blow away like a speck of dust from the palm of the hand with this song:

The great sea has set me in motion,
Set me adrift,
Moving me as the weed moves in a river
The arch of sky and mightiness of storms
Have moved the spirit within me,
Till I am carried away
Trembling with joy.⁷

The idea that a song can become a spell of magic, a powerful formula for healing, a last refuge when life is threatened by sickness or danger, no longer seems so wayward when we see singing as an expression of an inner loosening of the fetters of rational thought. Suffering extinguishes habitual memory structures, dismantles the subdivisions of our unconscious and, on the rubble of our personalistic view of the world, opens our eyes so that we may become aware of unsuspected vastnesses and holistic connections and relationships. The freed consciousness then rises from the ruins of our small-minded ego view and transcends three-dimensional limitations and mechanical one-sidedness. That which once existed separate and only for itself is now perceived as being connected with all other

things—the world is governed by acausal contacts, mysterious synchronicities and the laws of paradox.

Just as Sikwalxlel sees heaven move up and down like waves to the rhythm of the spirit's song, so Uvavnu is moved by the air currents in the vault of heaven. Her feelings and heaven, in fact, are one and vibrate with the sound of creation. To describe her experience Uvavnu, too, uses the image of a mighty ocean or river, in which she allows herself to float like algae; passive, surrendering, swimming in the stream of power. Poetry and melody reflect a higher consciousness freed from conditions and value judgments. The only remaining emotion is one of joy.

Uvavnu's initiation began with an experience of light. She felt illumined inside herself by a ball of fire. But such an illumination or enlightenment is not without its dangers. The spirit emerging from the ball of fire has a human head but the fangs of a beast of prey. This spirit tears the veil from the eyes of the initiate. It represents both enlightenment and the destruction of old habit structures: it gives and takes at the same time. Uvavnu glows with ecstatic joy, her innermost psyche awakens, and is carried away by the wonder of pure being. Whether such an illumination can be compared to the samadhi of the Hindu or the kensho experienced by Zen monks must remain uncertain, because we do not know enough about the inner experience of Eskimos. One thing, however, is certain: Euphoria and bliss are clear indications of the experience of transcendence.

We have seen that the apprentice, in the case of many shamanic initiations, spontaneously breaks into song after his transpersonal experience. According to the findings of modern research, people who had near-death experiences heard what they described as music of the spheres, sounds of indescribable beauty that pervaded the whole atmosphere. In fact, the atmosphere itself appeared to be pure sound. It would seem, then, that in an expanded realm of consciousness all the structures of existence manifest as, and are themselves, musical sound. The experience of the environment as a vibration of sound, like other synaesthetic experiences, is a well-known phenomenon of altered states of consciousness. The reason why the sound of celestial beauty is frequently encountered in the transpersonal realm might well be that our deconditioned consciousness is a synaesthetic world, in which the divisions between form, color, sound, smell, and taste are not as rigid and impenetrable as they are in our world.

What we are trying to say is this: After a journey to Heaven or an initiatory death, something of the Beyond continues to cling to the shaman or

medium. They bring back this "something" to our world and thereby become microcosmic symbols of that higher dimension. The shaman's song is capable of reuniting him with this higher realm of consciousness and, at the same time, gives him the power to heal and prophesy. He embodies the cosmos and is an incarnation of the celestial world, a representative of higher powers which act through him, because he was once part of them; he has "been there." Furthermore, the repetition of his song is a way of recalling and reliving this experience. It is an echo of the music of the spheres at the human level.

This, however, is only a partial explanation. Song and music undeniably are the most ancient means of bringing man into harmony with himself, his environment, and nature. Psychologists are increasingly recognizing the healing power of rhythm and melody and use them therapeutically. And if a song or melody reaching us from without is capable of healing, why should not the wisdom of our body, in an endeavor to heal, produce its own song from within? Perhaps the shaman's song of initiation and transformation is the quintessence of his efforts to find the way to higher levels of consciousness, a sign of the resolution of an extended inner struggle to overcome the self, to gain transpersonal insight. If, as we have seen, the song of power is a song of joy, this surely must be the joy at being reunited with our higher nature.

Inspired song, the song of power, is a worldwide phenomenon of the process of psychic deconditioning. Moreover, song and chant play an important role in the context of the sacred. The shaman frequently makes use of chants and ceremonies to put his listeners into a receptive state. They hear his song and are no longer caught up in mundane problems and preoccupations. The creation of new songs and the feelings of cheer and happiness that spread when we sing together are important harbingers of sacred intoxication.

The alteration of ordinary consciousness, with all its rational reservations and its "ifs" and "buts," does not occur all of a sudden. It requires careful preparation, so that song and ceremony offer themselves as eminently appropriate bearers of the sacred. With many shamans, music and song have become second nature. They use their songs to accompany ceremonies and to prepare the participants for the arrival of the spirits. Apart from that, the shaman himself has need of the enthusiasm and expectant tension among the participants in order to put himself into a trance. However, we should not forget that a basic difference exists between his personal song of power and his public ritual songs.

The former Siberian shaman Kokuiev—interviewed by Vilmos Diószegi—was forced by an extended illness to become a shaman. For more than three years songs streamed from within him until, consumed by his sufferings, he finally agreed to follow the shaman's path. Diószegi assures us that Kokuiev became a totally different person. His whole experience of life expanded, and he perceived his world to have a new structure. This is not surprising if we consider the shaman to be a mediator between two different realms or dimensions of consciousness. In the following we reproduce Kokuiev's narrative about his illness and transformation, in the course of which a spontaneous song, streaming forth from within, became his song of healing and at the same time led to his recovery:

I also became ill when I was about to become a shaman. First my head began to ache, then my hands. Around the full moon my head was splitting with pain. I had been ailing for about three years. In the meantime the spirits came to visit me. While I slept, my tongue was chanting. It chanted like the shamans do. But I did not know anything about it. When I awoke, my mother and father and my sister told me, "You were chanting shaman songs." After such occasions I always felt better for a few days. After three or four months the sickness overpowered me. My head was aching all the time, and when I slept my tongue was chanting shaman songs again. It went on like this, alternating every three or four months, for three years. One keeps suffering and suffering. When you want to rest or sleep, your tongue would be chanting. One does not know anything about it, because really the spirit is chanting. But not all spirits chant equally well. Some chant beautifully, some chant hideously. The great spirit chants best. I was twenty-seven years old when I heard him chant. The little one, the little spirit used to come to me. He had flown into my mouth and then I used to recite shaman songs. When I had no more strength left to suffer, finally I agreed to become a shaman. And when I became a shaman, I changed entirely. Because being a shaman turns one into quite a different person.⁸

Not every sickness is a call to shamanism and not every spontaneous song is a song of power. If the experience of suffering is to lead to a profound change of personality, certain personal and psychic dispositions towards this must be present. The shaman's sickness does not occur by accident. Its true cause lies in the psyche of the shaman himself. And through this sickness part of the struggle that takes place within the person is externalized. Although we can take the temperature of a feverish patient

with a thermometer, this tells us nothing about the specific biochemical processes that are its cause. Similarly, the symptoms of a shaman's sickness are only a sign of changes taking place at a deeper psychological level. The actual nature of these changes is often a mystery to the prospective shaman.

Franz Boas describes the illness of a young woman of the Kwakiutl Indians, which did not lead to a shamanic transformation. The girl had been feverish and could not stop coughing. As time went on, her body wasted away until she was only skin and bones, and her relatives feared that she was close to death. So they placed her into a small hut and left her there undisturbed, except that her father visited her every day to ask whether a dream had spoken to her. When she was so weak that she could no longer raise her hands and appeared to be on the point of death, a song suddenly came from her lips. This song circled her small hut four times and then returned to its mysterious place of origin. The following night the song was heard again. This continued for four days, and in this way she received four sacred songs which cured her illness, but did not give her any power to heal others.⁹ It is therefore important to distinguish between songs of personal healing and liberation and songs that turn the person concerned into a shaman or healer.

Husko, a shamaness of the Japanese Ainu, for example, at about fifteen years of age started to feel every day at midafternoon a strong desire to sing out loud about anything which came into her mind. At the same time it seemed to her that a strong wind was eddying inside her body. Her elders told her that she was feeling the desire to perform shamanistic rites. Her first actual performance of a rite did not come, however, until she was thirty-eight years old, when her daughter drowned in a lake. At the sight of her daughter's dead body caught in a fishnet, she lost consciousness and was carried back to her home. Here she regained consciousness, but her body started to shake vigorously. Those present gave her the necessary equipment with which she performed her first rite. Not until her son died several years later, however, did she perform the rites regularly.¹⁰ Two great shocks were thus required to force Husko to penetrate deeper into her psyche, despite her basic disposition toward shamanism. Only through suffering do we learn to appreciate our world and make an effort to uncover the hidden causes of illness and pain. What else are wisdom and insight if not the result of the gradual abandonment, at various levels, of the illusion of an individual self?

It is, of course, not only the content of the song that effects the healing.

Its rhythm, too, transports the shaman back to the place of his initiation—a place that does not correspond to any actual or even hallucinatory topography. Rather, the song is a sign of a capacity for consciousness and experience more embracing than discursive or rational thought. This capacity produces insights and healing processes which go beyond the mechanical principles of cause and effect. Through the rhythm and words of his song the shaman establishes an empathy with the sacredness of the present, as a result of which his supersensory ability to heal and predict is spontaneously released. That is why song and chant are traditional means of magic and ancient psychology—a primordial method to raise consciousness to a higher level of perception.

To round off our picture we would like to mention that sound and music, according to many esoteric traditions, have a profound psycho-physical effect. We know today that certain tonal frequencies can kill or physically damage a human being and that some animal species kill their natural enemies by emitting high pitched notes, just as a Japanese Samurai will use a scream, pitched at a certain level, to paralyze his opponent. In Indian philosophy, certain tonal correspondences are ascribed to the chakras, and the whole universe is seen as a manifestation of graded vibrations or tonal sequences. Many yogins believe that chanting such sequences can give access to occult powers. Throughout India the ancient mantra OM is considered to be the primordial sound of creation, and the Buddha, too, has spoken about an inner sound and inner hearing.

Modern science speaks of matter coming into being as a result of densified vibrations of light and sound.¹¹ This has led to renewed interest in the creative power of sound and tones, the knowledge of which is part of many ancient spiritual traditions. The Sikhs speak of Naam, the Christians of the Word (*Logos*), the Hindus of Nada Brahma, and the theosophists of the Voice of Silence. It remains to be seen what contemporary science will call it.

Ascending the World Tree

In many Siberian communities the World Tree plays an important part in shamanic initiation. Among the Gold Eskimos, the ascent to heaven is the high point of an initiation ceremony. The shaman father (teacher) climbs a birch tree, circling its trunk nine times.

This climb is symbolic of the soul's ascent to heaven. Each circling of the trunk represents the passing from one realm to the next, and those present at the ceremony are given detailed information by the shaman concerning the nature of each realm. The shaman then descends in the same fashion, circling the trunk in reverse direction. Then the new shaman and others previously initiated climb the tree in succession.

In a variant of this ceremony (in the Balagansk region) the shamanic candidate is carried on a felt mat along a row of birch trees nine times, from east to west. Then he climbs each of these birches, circling the trunk nine times, and calls the spirits from the top of each tree. His teacher simultaneously circles that tree on the ground.¹

The World Tree—the *axis mundi* connecting heaven, earth, and the underworld—is seen as an opening or channel to other realms of being. Along it, gods and beings of the Beyond descend to earth and the souls of mortals rise to heaven. This cosmic axle holds the universe in balance and at the same time is its center. The World Tree is a symbol of cosmic experience. However, because of the limitations of language and conceptual thought, this symbol conveys only a vague idea of all this—a two-dimensional picture of a multidimensional continuum. The *axis mundi* can only be known intuitively and mystically; it defies rational description. Even poetic language, with all its subtle intimations, cannot help us here. All archetypes, the World Tree included, are merely allegories of a higher mode of perception, externalizations of a transpersonal reality. The experience of passing from one level of existence to another, of entering other

psychic dimensions, is therefore described either as a descent into the underworld or as an ascent, along the Tree of Life, to heaven. If we want to describe or speak about processes of psychic transformation—and this even extends to emotional and mental experiences in general—we are forced to make use of metaphors derived from our material world. In all cultures the Unconscious makes use of such images as trees, ropes, etc. to convey to the ordinary mind the idea of overcoming cosmological levels.

World Trees, World Mountains, or World Pillars are symbols that enable spirits to come to our world, shamans to reach other cosmic realms, or the dead to encounter the supreme deity, as the Indonesian Dayak believe. Among the Eskimos and the natives of Central Indonesia and in other cultures the center post of the house is considered to be the World Axis along which the spirits descend. Others believe that souls, shamans, or healers ascend to the realm of the spirits along ladders, ropes, or cords.

The shamanic gurus of the Nepalese Bhujel, as they sing and drum, have a vision of a particular pine tree in the forest and direct other members of the clan to find it. In the forest, this tree is stripped of all branches except for a tuft at the top, and then taken back to the center of the village where it is erected upright in a hole. During a further ceremony, the guru transmits his ecstasy to his pupil, who proceeds to climb the tree. The guru then shouts "Ho!" nine times and the pupil, with each shout, slides part way down the tree trunk until he touches the ground.²

Among the Magar, the shaman also climbs a tree. He is blindfolded during his ascent. This is to indicate that the journey to the realm between heaven and earth is purely visionary. He brings back knowledge and prophecies from the Intermediate Realm.³

After his initiation in a luminous cave, the Australian Kurnai medicine man Tanklins was placed into the crown of a tree by the village elders. Thus he became a mulla-mullung. He later found himself lying under the tree with shining objects of magic in his hands.⁴

The narratives of two Siberian shamans, Kizlasov and Sunchugasev, show the significance of the Cosmic Tree even more clearly. First Sunchugasev:

On the way to the ancestral shaman, the shamans arrive at the "wealthy birch tree" in the neighborhood of their own mountain and their own water. They rest at its foot and examine its *tamgas*, or brands, placed upon it by the shamans because, as a rule, all the shamans, descendants of the ancestral shaman, place their own mark-

ings upon this golden-leaved birch tree of richly intertwined branches. The ones who get their power through the spirit of the mountain, or through a sickness, have no such symbols. If a member of a family is about to become a shaman, the tamga of the dead shaman of the same clan revives. It becomes clearly visible on the trunk of the birch again. At such times they usually say (that) someone of the clan will soon become a shaman.

Then Kizlasov took up the subject:

When the shaman goes to the chief shaman, that is, to the family ancestor, he has to cross the *ham saraschan harazi* mountain along the way. On the top of that mountain there is a pine tree; its trunk resembles a six-sided log. The shamans carve their symbols into it, between the edges. Whoever places his markings, his tamga, upon it, then becomes a real shaman. It happens sometimes that when a certain marking "falls down," it disappears from the tree. Then its owner dies. After resting at the foot of this tree, the journey is continued.⁵

The "wealthy tree" on the mountain is beyond doubt the World Tree—the cosmic axis. The shaman, by carving his signs and symbols into the bark of the tree, becomes united with its principal elements, that is to say, with heaven and earth. He also partakes of the fertility of creation, because the tree is also a symbol of life and of initiation. By carving his name into the tree and vividly calling to mind the names of the shamanic ancestors, the newly initiated shaman shares the sacredness of the tree and acquires additional spiritual power. Henceforth, he—like the tree—will be at the center of the world, i.e., the zenith of his psychic power.

The Buryat and the Central Asian Altai erect a young birch tree and carve nine notches into the lower end of its trunk, where there are no branches. These notches serve the shaman as steps during his ascent. Whereas the Buryat and Altai believe that the World Tree penetrates all three realms—heaven, earth, and the underworld—the people of the Siberian Gold tribe have a separate World Tree for each realm.⁶

The Tungus of the Lower Tunguska believe in a World Tree known as Tuuru, which grows in heaven. On this tree are nests which contain eggs—the souls of shamans. The closer such a nest is to heaven the stronger will be the shaman emerging from it. Shamans that come from nests halfway up or near the bottom of the tree will have only average or small powers. The eggs are hatched by a great bird that appears to the sha-

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man three times: at birth, during the dismemberment of his body, and at his death.⁷

All creation arises within and from a central point, which in symbolic language is known as the Navel of the World, the Sacred Egg, the Hidden Seed, the Root of Roots, the World Pillar, the World Tree, or the World Mountain. The latter may also be represented by a pyramid, ziggurat or stupa. All these are symbols for the center of the world. It might be said that the existence of so many World Trees and equally numerous tree cults is somewhat illogical because it implies an equal number of world centers. Such an argument, however, is based on a misunderstanding that arises from confusing the visionary experience of the Center with an actual geographical center. The Siberian shaman knows, of course, that the tree he climbs during his initiation is not an actual World Tree but a spiritual symbol. On the other hand, there are tribal cultures who believe in a holographically structured universe in which every place, every tree—and in fact every human being—is considered to be the center of the world. This belief gives rise to a universe sacred from every aspect, a universe in which each detail represents and incorporates the whole so that everything is related to everything. The cult of the World Tree thus reveals a cosmos of mystic union. The world resembles a “primordial sphere” containing innumerable centers in which the Sacred is omnipresent.

The World Tree is also the Tree of Life and represents fertility, regeneration of life and immortality. Whoever climbs it ascends to real life, and the higher he climbs the more comprehensive will be his experience of cosmic unity and of the interconnectedness of all life. The vision of the World Tree grants us new life because by experiencing the cosmos comprehensively we are able to break through the limitations of ordinary consciousness. We experience the creative energies of Being, the secret of fertility and growth.

Regenerated by our vision of the Creative and vitalized by our experience of other realms of existence, we descend from this World Tree in a state of ecstasy and bliss, as if reborn. Our view of existence has been expanded, as has our compassion toward and empathy with the world. Having beheld the hierarchies of the heavens, we have become visionaries, seers, and shamans.

from Kalvest, Shamans,
Healers, & Medicine Men

13

CEREMONIES OF HEALING

The angakoq serves as an interpreter between Sila and mankind. Sila's leading qualities are those of healing sickness or guarding against the illwill of others. When a sick person desires to be cured, he must give away all his possessions, and is then carried out and laid on the earth far from any dwelling; for whoever would invoke the Great Spirit must have no possessions save his breath.

—IGJUGARJUK,
an Eskimo spirit-conjurer
(Rasmussen 1927, 82)

What is a ceremony? We should stop thinking of ceremonies as fixed rituals that consist of meaningless and empty repetitions of verbal formulae, along with rigidly patterned gestures. This description might be accurate for ceremonies of the great religions, but it is not accurate for those of tribal cultures. These ceremonies are entirely different. They are intensifications of all the senses through music, chanting, dance, and movement. The attention, so diffused in normal states, focuses on a single point, the needle's eye of consciousness. Pushing it, drumming it, singing it through that hole into another dimension in which space and time, the fundamental categories of human experience of the world, possess a different quality—that is the work of the ceremony.

In addition, shamans are great actors. They combine myths, stories, current crises, and journeys to the beyond. In comparison with shamans, our modern actors are feeble figures. The self-alien-

ated present forms of drama were developed out of the decay of spirit rituals, and they have become exercises in which the consciousness of the players is not altered and in which the spectators take no active role. Where our modern theater is personal, shamanic ritual is transpersonal, and shamanic drama a transpersonal art form. The healing or conjuring ceremony is not an entertainment for viewing, not a prelearned repetition; it is a drama of life, indeed life itself.

The psychology of the tribal ceremony is that of revivification, rejuvenation, symbolic therapy. The traditional elements of tribal cosmology are reinvigorated, ritually anchored in the unconscious. But this is not done, as is widely assumed, through mere fixed repetition and religious drill. Rather, participants or patients are drawn into a spiritual atmosphere, and their consciousness takes on trancelike qualities. And it is just in this state—on a transpersonal level of existence largely free of ego—that the archaic cosmos makes its mark on them most effectively. Shamanic learning means—when will the followers of the cult of reason realize this?—taking in data in an altered state of consciousness. By comparison, our cultural theater is a degenerated way to attain spiritual and societal identity. The dramatic, the dramaturgical structure of a ceremony is not an end in itself but is the means to an end, to evoke an altered state of consciousness in the healer, in the patient, and in the spectators. Primal drama involves a revolution in the experience of reality, a radically transformed space-time experience, a heightened, archetypally and transpersonally oriented level of perception, a reworking of cognitive conditionality to the level of a spatially and temporally elevated overview of existence. The altered state of consciousness is the crowning achievement of the dramatic-ritual, initiational-visionary process.

Ceremonies work through symbols. This might seem primitive to us, but symbols make clear the polarities, forces, and relationships of existence. Symbols remain the most effective way for humans to express the abstract forces of nature.

The attainment of inner balance, or inner purification from imbalance, from conflicting forces, brings about the restoration of health and *joie de vivre*. The inclusion of societal, ecological, and cosmological forces is indispensable for this definition of health. It

may seem strange to Westerners, who note the symptoms of illness and make a corresponding diagnosis. But our spiritual horizon ends where the actual causes of illness begin. Western symptom therapy is actually a bastion of discrimination against the shamanic way of healing. Our deficiency is our narrow etiologic understanding, the reduction of the illness to the immediate focal point of the illness, the concretization and reduction of disease to its material, physical manifestation. This is, generally speaking, an expression of our materialistic worldview.

Inner purification comes from sweating, the use of incense, dancing and singing over a long time, and solitude, in which the malaise of the world and its culture falls away. Becoming a shaman is, in the last analysis, nothing but an extension of inner purification. The more transparent the inner world, the more transparent the outer, and the greater the power of magic. *Purification, transparency, and magic* are the core words of shamanism and of the spiritual world as such. Also part of inner purification is the loss of speech, the dying away of the conceptually encapsulated world. Speechlessness is the sacred language of shamans. When we go mad and the order of our categories degenerates into schizophrenic gibberish and its meaning is lost, we become purified of external determinations due to all kinds of cultural and worldly one-sidedness. We will see that the psychotherapy of the future will be the purification therapy of "primitive" cultures. Consciousness lies at the center of this therapy. Consciousness is the *axis mundi* of the inner and outer worlds.

The supreme principle of being is the change back and forth between accumulation and emptying, between filling up and purging. All shamanic phenomena can be explained in terms of the primordial pair, space and emptiness. The greater the emptiness, the greater the shaman, the curing power. To a great extent, our culture emphasizes accumulation, enrichment, storing up; other cultures have elevated emptying to the ultimate goal. Though we may possess the discipline of getting more, others possess that of having less. There is a parallel here with the primal subatomic ground. The latest microphysical research shows that energy—that is, also matter—is apparently generated spontaneously out of nothingness, resulting in the development of the material world. Is it possible

that the shaman seeks out emptiness so he can draw fresh knowledge and energy from it?

Investigations of shamanism and healing generally fail to take into account the key point: that there is a shamanic psychotherapy, and that there are successful cures. Apart from anecdotes and marginal observations, however, there still have been no ethnomedical investigations of cure results. Why not? "Shamanic therapy is pseudotherapy," we are told, or more genteelly expressed, "it is faith healing! Whoever believes in the healing process will be cured!" This is a strange piece of rationalism, but this leaves aside explanations of how, biologically and psychologically, such cures take place. The label "faith healing," an expression of helplessness, does not constitute an attempt to understand shamanism. Indeed, it is the conventional way to attempt to discredit it. Nor do concepts of social and psychosomatic healing explain anything; they too are appeasements. Faith healing is not a concept that is based on great masses of ethnological knowledge. On the contrary, behind this image is a massive absence of research. No one has yet taken the trouble to investigate shamanic healing scientifically. We remain in the anteroom of knowledge, content with academic speculations.

Shamanic healing has many facets, which we may describe as (1) sociopsychological, group therapeutic, psychohygienic; (2) suggestive, psychoanalytic, psychocathartic; (3) transpersonal, ego-transcending; and (4) paranormal, spiritistic, transmaterial. This book treats primarily the last two aspects. They represent the high point of knowledge and action in the career of shamans. In truth they are the farthest-reaching methods of therapy, and they are the ones that make shamans shamans.

But shamanic ways of healing will remain alien to us if we try to relate them to the modern concept of illness. Shamans are individualists, not academic physicians. They draw their knowledge and healing procedures from the realm of transformative experience, which is highly singular and unique. This is why many shamans have the vocation to cure only certain illnesses. Manuel Thomas of the Yuma tribe expresses this:

A doctor gets his power for one sickness specially, that power may be good to cure other things, but he will not be so good for them. The

visit to Avikwame that the doctor makes when he is asleep gives him a general knowledge and power for curing. But for really great power he has to perform a cure of the disease while he is there. A few doctors have had many good dreams and are very powerful for many sicknesses. When a man is sick he gets the best doctor for his sickness that is around. If he is not so good, the doctor will send him on to another and he will get moved around until he is cured or dies. The Yuma are not angry if a doctor cannot cure, they are sorry his power is not so good and go to another. They do not try to hurt a doctor if the sick person dies unless they are sure it is witchcraft. (quoted in Forde 1931, 183)

Moreover, the intensity of the healing power, the source and working of which remain largely unknown, depends on the person of the healer. Healers use the inherited procedures of their cultures. Unlike our contemporary doctors, they are idiosyncratic people, very much self-contained, individualists and loners who draw on their own personal experience. Thomas recounts the following about himself.

I had my dreams first when I was quite young [about twelve years old] but I did not try to cure until I was an old man. I remembered them quite clearly always and never forgot anything in them.

If I hear of a sick person something tells me whether his illness is one I would be good for. This may happen even if I have not had a dream and power especially for his sickness. If I feel right I know that if they come for me I will be able to cure the man. When I have a good feeling I am very strong and light inside and any other doctor who works on the sick one usually fails. The patient and his relations know too, for I seem to draw the sick man to me. Always, I think, I have been asked to cure when I felt strong for it, and on these occasions, I am always successful. When I am called to go to the sick man I have a different (i.e., special) feeling, it is like being back on the Mountain. There is some fluid in me which I have drawn from the air and I do not mind walking a great distance. I do not know how far I have traveled. When I work on the patient it does not tire me at all and it makes me very happy. Generally I can cure very quickly then, maybe in a few hours or in a day or two. . . . But I do not always know how things are going to be. Sometimes I do not feel really good until I begin

to cure. Other times, I lose a lot of strength when I start to work on the patient and it does not go well. (quoted in Forde 1931, 184)

The best-known and most widespread form of healing is sucking the harmful germs out of the patient's body. This procedure is reinforced by massage and by blowing on and stroking the body. In the course of this treatment, various disease-causing objects are drawn out of the body. Among the Australian Arunta, quartz crystals, stones, bone splinters, nails, or shards of glass appear. The shaman of the Hialakwulup of Tierra del Fuego draws blood out of the body, concentrating on the painful spot. He blows on it, kneads it with his fingers, presses it with the flat of his hand, or sucks on it. He accompanies this treatment with soft humming.

The Tibetan *wangchuk dbang-phyug*, or medium, heals by sucking. A drum is held over the afflicted spot, and the harmful substance is sucked out first through the skin, then through the drum. This is done in such a way that all the spectators can see it. The harmful object is then spat out into a bowl. Usually the object is a slippery brown or gray lump of an undefinable nature (Berglie 1978, 25).

The very last shaman of the Californian Wintu tribe is Easter Flower Woman, Flora Jones. The last generation of shamans initiated her in her youth. Today she is the only shaman who performs seances and healing ceremonies and administers herbs. Flora Jones went to school in San Francisco, but curious dreams finally forced her to return home. The dreams frightened her and severely shook her personality. At the age of seventeen, she fell into a trance for the first time. She was playing cards with friends when, without warning, she experienced a ringing and burning pain in her ears: "It was like a hot bullet shot through my ear. The pain flashed through my body and I was unconscious for four days." That was her first encounter with the star spirit. When she woke up, four older shamans were sitting around her, singing and giving her medicine. Later they took her to sacred places of prayer. Her protecting spirit taught her healing chants and introduced her to the art of healing. Only years later did she begin a regular practice as a healer. Her youthful experience of being torn in two directions—on the one hand, toward being a Wintu, on the other, toward the white

world—and the state of imbalance that it caused now subsided.

Since Flora Jones generally does not remember after a seance what she has said, she uses a tape recorder when no translator is present. She listens to the recording, then interprets the dialogue with the spirits for those present. Initially the spirits complain about the procedure, but soon they permit themselves to be appeased. In trance, Flora diagnoses illnesses with her hands. She moves them over the patient's body and in this way feels all disturbances. "I feel the pains, the wounds, the inflammations. When I hold my hand over the body, I feel every little muscle and every small vein. I feel the inflammation. It hurts me. If they have a heart problem, my heart beats faster. Where it hurts them, it hurts me too. I become part of their body."

Only in the case of serious illness, when the patient is near death or unconscious, does Flora Jones perform the soul dance to bring back the wandering soul of the patient. She dances to the rhythmic beat of sticks and whirls around with a tiny basket in her hand, in which she tries to catch the soul. If this succeeds, she lays the soul back on the patient's heart, the place of its origin.

Flora Jones also treats white people. Her protective spirit advised her to do so if she wanted to become a real doctor. For this, she uses a simple procedure, a short trance in which she looks at the patient's inner organs. Many of the white man's diseases she does not heal—all the ones that might be called diseases of civilization or epidemic diseases—for none of these were known to the Wintu before the appearance of the "poison people," as the Wintu call Westerners.

To those who have difficulty understanding her trance healing, Flora Jones says that they are going to "sleep spiritually" or "live with clouds before their eyes" (Knudtson 1975).

Among the African !Kung, a Bushman tribe of southwestern Africa, healing means physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and cosmic integration. The central event in the healing tradition of the !Kung is the nocturnal trance dance, which often takes place four times a month. The dance reaches its high point around midnight, when most of the participants are in trance. A second high point follows around sunrise. These dances often last more than thirty-six hours (Lee 1968, 39). The women sit at the fire and clap while the

men dance. The women too can enter trance through a special woman's dance, but usually only after menopause has set in, since it is believed that trances can have a harmful effect on babies they are carrying or might carry. A third of all women have attained *!kia*, or enlightenment (Katz 1973).

The entire village takes part in such celebrations. Anyone can become a healer. The more healers there are, the better it is for the welfare of the community. The dance fosters social relationships, eliminates hostilities, and protects the village from accidents. The nocturnal dances, as the !Kung say, make "the heart happy." They are vivifying, inspiring, and joyful.

The more one surrenders oneself to the dance, the more the mysterious vital energy, *n/um*, intensifies. Thus healers call themselves *n/um k'ausi*, masters of *n/um*. *N/um* resides in the pit of the stomach or at the base of the spine. Through dancing, *n/um* is heated, turns to steam, climbs the spinal column, and ascends to the crown of the head, causing the *!kia* experience. In this state, the healer recognizes the illnesses of others and begins to cure them by pouring *n/um* into the body of the afflicted person. At this time he also sees over vast distances and possesses X-ray vision. He is insensitive to fire and travels in spirit to the villages of the gods. In the *!kia* state, the human being attains self-realization. A *n/um* master expresses this as follows: "When I make the *n/um* rise, it explodes and tosses me up into the air; I enter heaven and finally fall back down again" (Katz 1982, 7). In the *!kia* state, the !Kung say, one has the feeling of opening like a ripe pea pod. K'au = Dau, a blind healer, regularly experienced transformation when he danced. God had taken his eyes out of his head, put them in a bag, and gone back to heaven. But when he danced and entered *!kia*, God came down for that time and put his eyes back in their holes. Then he began to heal and see again. Healers speak with the sickness spirits, struggle and wrestle with them, and try to persuade them not to take the afflicted persons away (Katz 1982). The healer draws the sickness out with vibrating hands and simultaneously takes it into his own body.

The healing energy is invisible to normal individuals, and the healer perceives it only in the *!kia* state, when it has mounted and the heart is "awakened." If the *n/um* heats up too quickly, it causes

pains and one no longer sees illnesses. Only when the inner eye is calm can illness be recognized.

When the healer has drawn an illness out of the body and into himself, it first enters the arms, then the neck, and finally the head. This causes pain and burns. Then, in the truest sense of the word, he shakes the illness he has drawn in out of himself, by shaking and wiggling head, arms, and legs. When the trance sets in, he yells "Gauwa is killing me!" The atmosphere of this healing dance can be described as follows. While all the healers are dancing in a circle around the fire and the women are singing and clapping, one or another of the healers breaks out of the circle and throws himself into the fire; he scatters the coals or sticks his head in the embers so that his hair catches fire. The others, alert, pull the ecstatic out of the flames or drive away the sickness spirits, screaming loudly. In the general excitement, some of the women also jump up and begin dancing with the men, while the others continue singing and clapping heatedly. At the climax of the trance dance, the healers fall down. Some of them are taken with a cataleptic rigidity of the muscles. Some of them remain in this state for only a few minutes; others do not awaken from it for a number of hours.

A similar phenomenon is found among the Hain//om, a neighboring tribe. When the dancers have inhaled enough smoke and put themselves into a trance through rhythmic clapping, an antelope conducts them to the great tree that joins heaven and earth. They climb up on it until, in its crown, they find a thong that has been let down by //Gamab, the creator. It pulls them up into his realm. Naturally, it is not their body that climbs up but their "inmost part." Now the shaman negotiates with //Gamab over the fate of the sick (Wagner-Robertz 1976). Earlier many healers in all the tribes were capable of this; today only a few can do it. Since during this "half-dead" phase, as the !Kung call it, the healer's spirit runs the risk of being caught by //Gauwa-si, the spirits of the dead, the other healers warn him to return. They shout: "Where are you? Come back!" With the healer's rattle, they bang him over the head so as to get the attention of his spirit. They wipe perspiration from their bodies and rub it on his, thereby transferring *n/um* to him (Marshall 1969).

A visible manifestation of *n/um* is perspiration, the steam from

the boiling energy. If this perspiration is rubbed on an afflicted part of the body, it has a healing effect. Perspiration is a metaphor for inner heat—that is, psychic power. This is also true for glowing coals, which the !Kung rub into their bodies as an expression of taking heat, energy, into themselves. During trance, many of them have the feeling that their stomach is boiling and that they are pervaded with vibrant energy.

After marriage takes place, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, many !Kung earnestly pursue careers as healers. They seek out a teacher and practice the trance dance. During their first attempts at entering trance, young people frequently get out of control. They behave antisocially—they scatter coals, throw themselves in the fire, ignite the clothes of the singing women, hit and crash into other dancers, and attempt to injure themselves. People calm such beginners, pour healing energy into them, and rub their bodies with perspiration.

The first sign of trance is that the dancers can no longer be distracted by disturbing noises. Vibrations rush over their bodies, they stumble and perspire, and finally their bodies become entirely rigid. The sudden onset of trance is indicated by wild leaps; other men come to help and hold the dancers between them until they collapse. Now they lay the dancers down within the dancing area and massage them. Older, more experienced healers do not go through this "half-dead" phase. They have learned to control themselves. Some young people, determined to broaden their knowledge of trance, trek from camp to camp and take part in all the dances. In this way they learn to master their altered state of consciousness and to refine their trance techniques. If a young man has trouble attaining */kia*, occasionally—though rarely—he is aided by the use of a drug. The drug is used to help him to overcome his fear, not to bring about the */kia* state.

The urge to experience trance can already be seen in childhood. Entire groups of children play, emulating the adults, at */kia* healing. They dance and let themselves fall to the ground, as if with */kia*. A prerequisite for becoming a healer is to have a longing to drink *n/um*. For this, a person must dance until the heart opens toward *n/um*. They should also sing until their voice reaches heaven. People who experience *n/um* in themselves for the first time cry out,

because it burns in their bellies like fire. The fear of the *!eia* state is great, because people are afraid of never being able to come back from it—of dying. But once beginners have learned to look death in the face, they overcome their fear—that is the breakthrough to *!eia*. As *!eia* begins to mount, fear increases. At that point, the healers rest a bit in order to “cool off.” They drink a bit of water, and in this way they calm the boiling energy.

There are two types of healers. The *!Kung* say: “Sometimes a person grows up with *n/um*, sometimes a person makes the *n/um* grow.” That is, some have an inborn *!eia* ability, while in others it is acquired. The real shamans are of course those who have the psychic energy from birth. They are also, for the most part, the ones who are able to leave the body with the soul. They possess the classical abilities of the shaman.

Here is one last example. In North America, from sunrise to sunset, the Navajo work on their sand paintings. On the smoothed earth, the medicine persons trickle sand, pollen, corn meal, and ground-root or -bark powder through their fingers. The patient is placed in the middle of these paintings of figures and signs of the Navajo cosmos made with the strewn sand and other materials. In the course of the ceremony he symbolically takes these into himself. Accompanied by sacred chants, he merges with the traditional wisdom of his tribe, the mythos of his culture, and the universal principles of existence. In this way his conflicts become situated in an appropriate framework, a framework that relativizes the conflicts, subsumes them, and removes the state of inner anarchy. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the medicine persons scatter the sand to the six directions, back to where it came from (Villaseñor 1974).

For the Navajo, healing is a harmonization of the psyche. For patients, the cosmological sand paintings bring about a balanced relationship of themselves with the universal forces. Religion, art, and psychotherapy come together, and at the apex of the unified vision of nature, earth, heaven, and humanity arises health and wholeness. Masked dancers, prayers, sand painting, recitation of myths, acting, drama, singing, and herbal medicines create a sense of existential unity. Myth become reality, connects patients with the source, gives them a meaning. They experience the unity

of cosmos, mythos, society, and themselves. That is the prerequisite for healing—balance, abandonment of one-sided egoistic thinking. Incorporated once again in the community of the healthy, patients regain their self-esteem. Moreover, amid the endless chanting of the rituals, which last for days, the patient enters an altered state of consciousness. This in itself is psychocathartic and is the basis for healing and heightened perception and attention. The communal atmosphere also contributes: many people—relatives and friends—are present. The sacred reflection on the history of the tribe, the union with the past, with oneself, with the tribe, and the cosmos bring to the patient an intensified receptivity, which soon takes on the characteristic features of trance.

Our purely symptomatic Western therapy does not view the person as a natural being, a cosmic being. By contrast, in the Navajo ritual, the individual is transformed through identification with the abstract forces of existence into a sacred, generalized person, into a person *per se*. This transition to the transpersonal has a cathartic effect, since it reveals a broader horizon for one's own being. This horizon is disclosed as a microcosmic version of the macrocosmic drama of nature. Through ego clinging the creative forces are diminished; through the experience of something suprapersonal in themselves arise liberation and vast vision. But to modern people, who are rendered artificially secure through medical insurance and technology, no broader vistas are proffered. From this comes our restlessness, our self-destructive tendencies. For us, a sense of planetary and cosmic relatedness is missing.

Navajo therapy includes group therapy, hypnotic therapy, altered states of consciousness, and presumably also paranormal and parapsychological influence on the part of medicine people. The person who is sung over accedes to a special place in the family after the ritual—for was he not for a period of time the embodiment of a natural principle? Has he not absorbed the powers of the gods? That is precisely what is missing in our Western healing arts: the capability of feeling one with the forces of nature. What is magic? There is no magic, only the naturalness of life! The stages that must be gone through to reach a sense of unity may be numerous. The goal, however, remains the same: real therapy is the quest for a transpersonal connection between self, world, and God.

The unity of this trinity is the foundation of a primal sense of the world; and today we must ask ourselves: Should we not return to that? Scientific facts are accumulating to show that our mechanistic, chaotically fragmented view of the world is responsible for the destruction of the Western spirit. We have embarked upon a stage of knowledge in which we are analyzing our analyses. But analysis done in the light of the transpersonal synthesis is our real future. After Galileo demanded that we dissect nature, and after the conviction became rooted in our culture that ritual and the attitudes of faith are based on superstitious circular reasoning, the new physics is now teaching us to see relationships and connections where hitherto only fragments, antagonistic particles, eked out their anomic existence. Today physics and other sciences are increasingly revealing a picture of interrelatedness, and with that we are once again back to the spiritual rituals of tribal societies.

God is in the forest, God is in the mind, God is in ourselves, and we ourselves are in God. We belong to God alone. Saying this, you will dance all day in the love of God. You will repeat as a mantra, "God is the husband, God is the wife, God is the intellect, God is the goal." You will understand that God is on all sides, the whole world belongs to God, and God maintains it. Dear people of the world! Thus your house will become a place of pilgrimage, and both husband and wife will become divine. Your household chores will be an act of worship, and your worldly life will become your duty to God.

Muktananda says: Meditate for this purpose. Your daily needs are fulfilled in meditation, and meditation is also the place of rest from everyday life. Meditation is your friend, your guide, your wish-fulfilling cow, and your wish-fulfilling tree. Therefore, practice meditation a little every day.

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From Muktananda, Play of Consciousness

CHAPTER TWO

Spirituality in Worldly Life

IF MAN COMBINED HIS WORLDLY LIFE with meditation and did his sadhana of meditation at the same time as his daily commitments, then the world, which had been filled with the threefold agony—the physical and mental suffering caused by oneself, by others, or by fate and the forces of nature—would become heavenly. It is simply because man is indifferent to God that the world is full of pain and suffering for him. If you made a sweet pudding, full of delicious ingredients—pistachios, almonds, cardamom—but left out the sugar, how could it have any taste? In the same way, the world can be enjoyable only if you meditate on God. Through meditation, man can make the world his greatest friend; without meditation on God, the world is full of suffering and pain. The truth is that life in the world can be a magnificent way to happiness, but only if God is in it completely. Without remembrance of God, without knowledge of Him, without meditation on Him, worldly life is crippled; it has no savor, no delight.

Don't abandon the world and your near and dear ones. Don't waste your strength running in every direction in search of God. Don't lose yourself while you look for peace and rest. Beloved people, stay at home with your husbands, your wives, your children. Be friendly with your crafts, skills, and talents. Stay with

your businesses and factories. According to destiny, you may be a rich man or a laborer, a king or a beggar, but God belongs to everyone. God belongs to the poor as much as to the rich, to housewives as much as to the *gopis* of Vraja, to ordinary people as much as to the ancient saints, sages, yogis, and yoginis. Call on Him with love, meditate on Him with love, and He will reveal Himself within you. You will see the divine light filled with His love. Cool streams of peace and the nectar of love will begin to flow in you from the *sahasrāra*, and you will feel that you yourself are the incarnation of ecstasy. Not only this, but your body will become transformed. Then you will feel, "Indeed, I am that Shiva, I am that Rama, I am that Shyama. I am." You will start singing this song with love. Your former weeping and wailing of many lifetimes will be destroyed. Your lamentation, "I am unhappy, I am a sinner, I am poor," will end.

Don't consider your body to be just a mound of flesh formed of the seven elements. When it is not solely a place for the gratification of the senses, it is something wonderful. All holy places, all gods, all mantras, and all sites that bestow extraordinary powers are in it. I heard an old but true story from Bhagawan Nityananda. A couple once vowed to bathe in all holy places, to go around the whole earth and to worship all the gods, but for some reason they could not carry out this vow. They worried and worried about this, until eventually they went to see a noble saint of great learning and experience, and told him about their vow. The wise man said, "Don't worry. Not far from here is a couple who have become fully united with God and whose lives in this world are filled with Him. Through meditation they have awakened their inner Shakti, they have completely purified the centers of all the mantras and deities in the six chakras, and through their dedicated practice of the great yoga, *kundalini* yoga, they have become God. They are holy people. Mahashakti Chiti plays within them. They appear to be ordinary human beings, but Chiti pervades their blood and all the fluids of their bodies. All sacred places and all deities are found in them. They are completely absorbed in the supreme Lord. Go

there, walk around them three times, make them an offering, and think of them with your hearts full of love; then your vow will be fulfilled."

That is perfectly true. O dear man! God lives within you, as do all holy places, all mantras, all seed syllables, all deities. He is as much within you as He is in Kailas or Vaikuntha. Why exhaust yourself looking for Him in different lands rather than within yourself? Lead your normal life and follow your own religion, but always place God first. Do not allow the teachings of any sect or devotional system to force you into thinking of yourself as ordinary, trivial, stupid, or weak. Do not lead yourself into destruction, don't bring about your own downfall, by saying that the body is without God. Don't make yourself an assassin of the soul by thinking that you are just ordinary. Don't kill yourself with your own hand by making yourself out to be insignificant and ignorant. Remember this saying of the Lord: *ātmaiva hyātmano bandhūrātmaiva ripurātmamānub*, "You yourself are your own friend and your own enemy."⁵ Knowing this, quickly begin the search for your spiritual welfare. To make your way in the world, you have searched out different colleges, you have searched in England and America, and at the end of your search, you have acquired knowledge and become an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor, or a professor. Similarly, to find the peace of the Self, to make your house into a temple of yoga, and to attain Shiva even while being a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer, you must go and search for a Guru.

Ram Muktananda,
Play of Consciousness

PART TWO

My Meditation Experiences

GENERALLY SPEAKING, one should keep secret the divine experiences with which one is blessed by God, but here I want to describe some of them for the benefit of seekers.

Initiation

AS I HAVE ALREADY SAID, it was my practice to worship and meditate on my Guru. One evening I went to have darshan of Bhagawan Nityananda. After darshan he would always ask me, "Are you going now?" But today he said nothing, so I stayed on. I spent a very happy night in meditation on my Guru. The morning that followed was the morning of August 15, 1947. What an auspicious day! How full of nectar it was! How divine! What merit and great fortune it brought with it! It was the happiest and most auspicious day of my life, the great day of many births and ages. It was truly holy; yes . . . yes, it was the dawn of the most auspicious of all auspicious days.

The sun had risen slightly in the sky, and the atmosphere was tranquil. I was standing in the corner, to the east, contemplating my Guru. In the opposite corner stood Monappa, Gurudev's cook. In the meditation hall, Gurudev was making little humming sounds in his throat, indicating he was about to get up from his meditation on the Self, and in a little while, he came out. He looked a little different than usual; in fact, I had never seen him looking like this before. He had on a beautiful pair of wooden sandals, and as he walked to and fro, to and fro, he was smiling. At one point, he went into a corner and began to chant some

secret mantras. Then he came in front of me and smiled again. He began to sing. He was wearing a white shawl and underneath it only a loincloth and the sandals on his feet. He kept coming and standing in front of me, making his familiar noise of endearment. An hour passed like this.

Then he came near me and touched my body with his. My body was stunned with this new wonder. I stood facing west. Gurudev, his body close to mine, stood opposite. I opened my eyes and saw Gurudev gazing directly at me, his eyes merging with mine, in the *shambhavi mudrā*. My body became numb. I couldn't shut my eyes; I no longer had the power to open or close them. The divine splendor of his eyes completely stilled my own eyes. We stayed like this for a while. Then I heard the divine sound of Gurudev's *bunb*. He stepped back a couple of paces, and I partially regained my consciousness. He said, "Take these sandals; put them on." Then he asked, "You'll wear my sandals?" I was amazed but replied reverently and firmly, "Gurudev, these sandals are not to be worn by my feet. Babaji, they are for me to worship all my life. I'll spread my shawl, and then please be so gracious as to put your feet on it and leave your sandals there."

Gurudev agreed. Making the same humming sounds, he lifted his left foot and its sandal and placed it on the edge of my outspread shawl. Then he put his foot down, raised his right foot, and placed the other sandal on the shawl. He stood directly in front of me. He looked into my eyes once more. I watched him very attentively. A ray of light was coming from his pupils and going right inside me. Its touch was searing, red hot, and its brilliance dazzled my eyes like a high-powered bulb. As this ray flowed from Bhagawan Nityananda's eyes into my own, the very hair on my body rose in wonder, awe, ecstasy, and fear. I went on repeating his mantra *Guru Om*, watching the colors of this ray. It was an unbroken stream of divine radiance. Sometimes it was the color of molten gold, sometimes saffron, sometimes a deep blue, more lustrous than a shining star. I stood there, stunned, watching the brilliant rays passing into me. My body was completely motionless. Then Gurudev moved a little and again made his *bunb*, *bunb*.

I became conscious again. I bowed my head upon the sandals, wrapped them in the shawl, and prostrated myself on the ground. Then I got up, full of joy.

I spoke softly and tenderly, "Gurudev, what a divine fortune this has been for me! I have received the greatest of all things. Please live in these sandals in all your fullness and let me worship them, even though I don't know the correct way." As I said this, he went over to the west side of the hall and brought some flowers, two bananas, a few incense sticks, and a small packet of *kumkum*. He put all this on the sandals. I began to repeat *Guru Om*, *Guru Om*. Today I was standing very close to my Baba. He sat down and, in his aphoristic way, started to speak: "All mantras are one. . . . All are *Om*. *Om Namah Shivāya Om* should be *Shivo'ham*. *Shiva*, *Shiva* should be *Shivo'ham*. It should be repeated inside. Inside is much better than outside." Making his *bunb* sound, Babaji went into his room. *Hunb*, *bunb* was a mantra signifying many different things. When he turned his head and made this sound, I would always leave, but this time he gave no sign, so I remained standing there. He came out from inside with a blue shawl in his hands and placed it over me. What wonderful fortune! From early that morning, I had received one blessing after another. Next he went quickly over to the kitchen where Monappa was frying *bhaji*s of green bananas and putting them on a tray. Bhagawan filled both his hands with these *bhaji*s and put them on my cloth with the sandals. Finally, uttering his ecstatic *bunb*, he gave me the signal to leave.

What a great and blessed day, what a sacred day it was! I went outside and began to praise my good fortune: "Oh, what merit of mine has brought this to me? What great deeds have I done that their fruit should come to me today?"

I was completely overcome with wonder, for I had never thought that such a thing could happen to me. How could a person like me be given the Guru's sandals? Nityananda had so many great devotees, devotees who had been with him for so long. Some were quite old. Some were big businessmen. Everyone believed himself to be an advanced and experienced aspirant, and the clos-

est of all to Bhagawan. I was a new arrival, ordinary and unknown. I had done no special sadhana and had no special attainment. I had no house and no business; I was just like a poor man. So, what had happened was just my extreme good fortune.

My Gurudev was a great *avadhūta*. He would wander through the world barefoot, never wearing sandals. But today he had worn sandals on his lotus feet, those feet that bestow the knowledge of yoga, that destroy our sins and are adored by gods and men. He had walked around, come before me, and raising his lotus feet, given me his sandals. My anguish had been lifted from me, my sins cut away, the cycle of birth and death ended, the curtain of ignorance removed. What a stupendous thing had happened. Usually Nityananda Avadhut did not bestow his grace in such a direct way; he would instead do it through an apparently meaningless expression or gesture. For him to give me his sandals was something that could never happen. He who never wore sandals had come to me wearing them and, not with his hands but directly from his feet, had placed them in the empty shawl of my poverty. And there was more: he would never look anyone in the face—if he ever looked at anyone, he would look from side to side. But on this day he had gazed into my eyes with his own eyes wide open in Parashiva's *śāmbhāvī mudrā*, as if he had never seen me before. He had entered me with the divine ray, full of Chiti, that grants all powers. As I watched, I had felt a trembling in my body and tears in my eyes. Stunned, I had, for a moment, experienced stillness and great joy.

In this way, he gave me his divine initiation. Then he beckoned me near. This poor *sādhū*, who had come from hundreds of miles away, on this day had his first opportunity of being close to Bhagawan. Otherwise, how would a helpless stranger have been able to sit next to Bhagawan in the presence of everyone? This day my special deity, Parashiva, whom they call *āśhutoṣha*—"He who is easily pleased"—had blessed me with the greatest reward for my inadequate Monday fasts and the repetition of his Name. It was certainly in keeping with the epithet *āśhutoṣha*. A poet has described the bounty of Lord Shiva just as it turned out for me.

He says:

*dhanya dhanya bholenātha
āpa bānta dīyā saba jaga eka palame
tere sama dātā nahi aur kahi jagame*

O simple-hearted Lord, how blessed You are!
You gave away the whole world in a moment;
no one in the world gives like You.

Gurudev had sat me next to him, and by giving me the highly charged mantra *Om Namah Shivāya*, by showing me the meaning of *Om*, and by uttering *Shivo'ham*, he had brought me to an awareness of oneness with Shiva. He had shown me the external practice of *Om Namah Shivāya*, the great five-letter mantra of salvation, and then spoken the word *Shivo'ham*, which is the form of the inner "I am Shiva" within the heart. In this way, he gave me the undying message of Shiva, the immortal Lord. And by saying "All is *Om*," he gave me the insight that all is one Self.

If one who never gives starts to give, then the recipient gets so much that he can take no more. This is what had happened to me. When Bhagawan Nityananda said, "*Shivo'ham* . . . this is how it should be," this great, supreme, and radiant mantra of Parashiva destroyed the innumerable sounds that had been rising in the space within my heart since time without end, making me wander through endless births and rebirths. He had destroyed the endless array of impure feelings, the lust, the anger, the delusion arising from the notion of "I and mine." He had transmitted into my heart that mighty mantra which is entirely Shiva, filled with the light of Consciousness, forever rising, luminous, embodying the truth of "I am perfect," the transcendent word of Shakti. In the flames of his grace, he had burned away the accumulated sins and karmic impressions of birth after birth.

Then he had spread a blue shawl over me. Just as great warriors carry shields to protect themselves from the blows, bullets, knives, and swords of their enemies, so the holy blue shawl would protect me from anguish, from the touch of sin, from the thieves of delusion and *māyā*, from the bandits of attachment and enmity,

from disease and mental suffering. And there is more, for he had made himself the priest and offered to me the sandals, flowers, fruit, *kumkum*, and incense. How fortunate I was! I had received sandals for worship consecrated by the priest Nityananda, who was naked and without the conventional signs of a priest. Yes, yes—my destiny was wonderful! And then—something that shows still more clearly the magnificence of his grace—he had gone inside, always making his *huh* sound, and had brought two handfuls of sizzling hot *bhājīyās*, which he had placed on the sandals. The priest was offering cooked food with his own hands, worshipping with the same divine lotus hands, full of Consciousness, that he raised in the *mudrā* of fearlessness. At that instant, my mind was flooded with ancient memories, memories of similar worship done in past lives.

As I came out of the hall, I kept raising the sandals to my head. I ate the *bhājīyās*, one by one, and again and again smelt the flowers. The smoothness, the beauty, and the magnificence of the shawl delighted me. My mind, which had earlier been completely still, motionless, and concentrated in the remembrance of my Guru, now became active to the same degree—but there was none of the dryness, the frustration, the frivolity, the anguish, the depression, the stupidity, or the anxiety that there had been before in the rush of my thoughts. Instead, there was ecstasy, rapture, zeal, enthusiasm. As my thoughts sped past, I looked once more at Gurudev's sandals. I was full of high spirits. I started to sing to myself some lines from the *Gurupādukashtakam*:

*jyāchyā kripechā maja lābha jhālā jannāntarīchā
bhavatāpa gelā*

shrī datta aisā upadesha kelā visarū kasā mī gurupādukālā

By his grace I was benefited, and the pain of many births was gone. Such was the teaching of Shri Dattatreya; how could I forget the Guru's sandals?

Congratulating myself on my good fortune and praising Parashiva, my former deity, for his wonderful grace, I slowly made my way homeward. Love for the Guru and a feeling of oneness

with him rose within me again and again. And once more I followed the prescribed method for worshipping the Guru and became drunk, repeating, "The Guru is inside, the Guru is outside." I felt waves of emotion, and on these waves I felt my identification with Nityananda grow and grow. Shri Gurudev's sandals were on my head. As I walked, I crossed Gandhi Square, where a small culvert marks the boundary of the present Shree Gurudev Ashram. An *audumbara* tree stands nearby, and as I reached it, my divine *gurubhāva* became *brahmabhāva*, identification with the Absolute. For a moment, I had an intuition of the One in the many, and I lost the ordinary mind that differentiates between the inner and the outer world, that sees the many in the One. I went on repeating *Guru Om, Guru Om* with the thought "The Guru is inside, the Guru is outside," and as I did this, the Vedantic doctrine of Brahman, the Absolute, which I had studied with various teachers, flashed again within me.

I was also blessed by Varuna, the god of rain, because a fine, delicate rain began to fall, and a cool breeze began to blow softly. I repeatedly opened and closed my eyes. When I shut them, I saw innumerable clusters of sparkling rays and millions of tiny, twinkling sparks bursting within me. I kept watching them. What a beautiful sight! Those infinitely small sparks were shimmering and coursing through my whole body at an incredible speed. I looked with wonder and awe at their speed and their number. Then I opened my eyes again. Again there were masses of the same tiny, scintillating blue sparks coruscating around me. I was overcome with awe and ecstasy. This was something completely new unfolding, not on a screen, but all around me. I was moving so slowly that I did not know whether I was following the road or the road was following me. I stopped near the Gavdevi temple, and my face turned spontaneously toward Ganeshpuri. I remembered my beloved Gurudev and again bowed to him mentally, and then continued walking along the side of the road. The light rain, Varuna's blessing, was still falling. It was marvelous to see the soft drizzle blending with these tender, delicate blue rays. I walked slowly, remembering in my heart Shri Gurudev, who is

the Self of all, and carrying on my head his sacred sandals. Even today I can remember that experience of oneness. I still see those tiny blue dots.

Eventually I reached the Vajreshwari temple, which is sacred to the great Shakti, the mother of yoga, who is known there as Vajra Bhavani. Behind Her temple is a smaller temple, dedicated to Dattatreya, and it was here that I used to stay. I would eat once a day with Babasaheb, the chief priest of the Mother's temple. Every day he would give me my meal punctually and with great respect.

I went into the temple and started to worship my Guru's sandals and to meditate. I always used to meditate at night. While at Vajreshwari, it had been my routine to go to Ganeshpuri every day—first to bathe, and then to have darshan of Gurudev. As I did this, my love, devotion, and faith for my Guru grew and grew.

The temple of the goddess Vajreshwari is a place of great spiritual force. It is a unique *siddha pīṭha*. Many Siddha yogis and great sages lived there in ancient times. According to legend, Lord Rama also visited this place. It is surrounded on all sides by hills, and around it there are a number of hot springs whose waters have the power of healing. There is a small river that flows luminously nearby. Many Siddhas are said to have performed worship there in olden days. I had spent a long time under the kind shelter of the divine Mother Vajra, drinking Her water and eating Her food.

Several days passed. One morning, as I stood before Gurudev having his darshan, he gave me some fruit, saying, *bunib*, and then said, "Go." I was still standing. Then he spoke again: "Go . . . to your hut, there . . . at Yeola . . . stay there, stay . . . knowledge there . . . meditate!" I left, feeling rather sad and worried. But I was completely ready to obey my Guru's commands, for more than ever before I understood the importance of the Guru's wish. Obedience to the Guru is itself *tapasyā*, itself *japa*, itself *sadhana*. It is one's highest duty, and there is nothing more beneficial to a disciple than obedience to the Guru. I believed this with all my heart. Service to the Guru is supreme worship, universal worship.

So, with this understanding, that obedience to the Guru is the disciple's foremost duty, I set out for Yeola the next day. In the meantime, Gurudev was to have the Gavdevi temple renovated and three small rooms built there. These today form the hall of Shree Gurudev Ashram.

I arrived at Yeola, and the next day I left for Suki, where I had a hut for practicing my *sadhana*. My hut faced north, between two mango trees, one to the east and the other to the west. All three were waiting for me. I installed the sandals of my Guru, ate the fruit he had given me, and sat down to meditate.

My state of mind was just the opposite of what it had been before. I was tormented by anxious questions. "Where has the new kingdom of joy I found at Ganeshpuri disappeared?" This anxiety grew in me and caused great anguish. Just as I had felt a surge of bliss before, now I was full of worry and was arguing with myself. My body was sore all over, and my head was hot with the anger, fear, and worry that danced around inside me. It was half past eleven, and the landlord came with my lunch. At that time, I would have vegetables, millet, chapatis, and a little milk. I sat down to lunch but didn't like the food at all. However, I forced myself to eat half a chapati and drink some water, and then I got up and went outside. I sat on the swing that hung from the friend of my sadhana, the mango tree. I couldn't bring myself to do anything. Everything I saw around me terrified me. I was a long way from Gurudev. There was no one I could talk to. I got off the swing and climbed into the friendly mango tree, where I sat peacefully for a few moments, but after a short while, the torture and anguish returned and grew. I cannot write the horrible thoughts that filled my mind, but—it's true—I had them. I was obsessed with impure, hateful, and sinful thoughts.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the landlord came again, this time with a hot drink. After I finished it, I began to pace up and down outside my hut, from one side of it to the other. People from the nearby villages were arriving to see me, but I did not receive them hospitably or answer their questions properly. I sat in one place after another—in all my favorite places, such as under the mango tree—but only a terrible discontent welcomed me.

My Guru had once told a story that seemed to describe my condition perfectly, and for that reason it came to my mind then. There was once an unlucky, poor, and worthless man. Wherever he went, his poverty and misfortune went with him. If the wretched fellow visited a generous, devout, and rich person in the neighborhood, that virtuous man would become as poor and miserly as his visitor. One day this miserable creature became so full of self-despair that he set off for Mount Kailas, the abode of Lord Shiva. On the way, he saw a man walking in front of

CHAPTER ELEVEN

My Confused State of Mind

THE NEXT DAY, FROM EARLY MORNING ON, I was in a very strange state. I was seized by restlessness. My whole body ached, and every pore felt as if it were pierced by needles. I don't know why this suddenly happened. Where had my rapture, my ecstasy, gone? My pride and my elation had been taken away, and I was suddenly the same poor, miserable wretch that I had been before meeting Nityananda. My mind was filled with remorse. Where was my earlier intoxication? Alas, what had happened? A whole new, carefree world of joy had been opened up before me, but now it had completely disappeared. What had happened to the earlier state? Swami Muktananda felt like a ruler gazing out as if in a dream at the ruins of his once-beautiful and beloved city, now destroyed by fate. I came out of my hut and sat down beneath my beloved and unperturbed friend, the mango tree, asking myself again, "What has happened? How did it happen?" This anxiety was burning me up. During the night, I had had a series of nightmares, and from the moment I got up, I had felt this restlessness. My peace of mind had been destroyed, and all my thoughts were leading me into a deep melancholy. An old friend, Babu Rao Pehelwan, used to come and spend the night with me, but on this day I asked him to go back to his house in Yeola, and so he left.

him, so he walked faster and caught up with him. He said, "O brother, where are you going? Let us both go together." The other man turned around, revealing himself to be the epitome of misery and destitution, and replied, "Wretched sir, I cannot go with you, for I am the servant of your fate. I have to go ahead of you so that I can gather destitution, poverty, cruelty, restlessness, mental turmoil, and stupidity, and have them ready to welcome you. That is why I go ahead of you, sir." Gurudev had said that even if an ill-fated man were to go to Kailas, he would be welcomed by all miseries.

There are some people who arrive at our ashram in this state. They may be at a *siddha pitha*, staying with a Siddha, and in the company of the good, but these sad people remain helpless, unhappy, restless, and miserable. Their faces lack luster. They live caught in their distaste. They can't forget Mumbai and the dream-world of its cinemas and clubs; they constantly remember the ease and comfort of their lives of pleasure. They have only one thought — "When will I get back to Mumbai?" — and this thought eats them up.

Muktananda was in the same state as this poor and unfortunate man. I was usually so happy sitting under the mango tree, but now it was disturbing me. Even my dear and good friends from the village of Yeola seemed heartless. At six o'clock, Babu Rao came with an old woman who used to come every day at that time and who delighted me with her songs. As soon as she arrived, I said, "Sing the one I like best," and so she began to sing:

*shavatīlī pālī tevā manusbyajanna
chukalīyā varma pherā pade
eka jannī olakkī karā ātmārāma
samsāra sugama bhogī nakā*

We are finally reborn as human beings. If we miss our opportunity, the cycle repeats itself. Go deep into your soul now! Don't just indulge in easy living.

This *abhanga* is very moving. It is by Saint Namdev. He also said: "Know the inner Self in this very body. It is only at the last

turn of the cycle that you get a human birth. Look after it very carefully or you will have to come again." The old lady sang this beautiful verse with much feeling, but it seemed lifeless to me and I didn't like it.

I asked the old woman to sing another song, this one written by Janabai, Namdev's beloved disciple. This *abhanga* is full of meaning. "Seeing Janabai's great devotion to her Guru, Lord Vitthal went to serve her and do all the tasks she had been given. This is the greatness of devotion to the Guru." Janabai was a great yogini, a great *bhakta* and *jñāna*—she was very intelligent and dedicated to her Guru. In her verses, she always refers to herself as "Nama's Jani" and "Nama's maid," and when she writes like this, she is pledging herself to a full acceptance of her servitude to her Guru. Because he was so pleased with her great dedication and service, Lord Panduranga Himself, who is difficult to attain even for yogis, would come to wash clothes with her, grind flour, clean the house, and sing and talk with her. He was with Janabai day and night. There is nothing surprising about this; such is the miracle of devotion to the Guru. Here is her song of repentance:

*nāhī kelī tujhī sevā dukkha vātatase mājhe jivā
nashṭa pāpīna mī hīna nāhī kele tujhe dhyāna
je je dukkha jhāle malā te tvā sosile vitthalā
rātrandivasa majapāshī dalu kāndu lāgalāsī
kshamā karāvī devarāyā dāsī janī lāge pāvā*

Lord, I have not served You at all, so I am full of pain. This sinner has not meditated on You. Even so, Vitthal, what have You not done for me? Out of compassion for Your devotee, You Yourself have borne all the suffering that came to me in the world, all the censure and trouble that people have piled upon me. You have stayed with me day and night, and all my hard labor You have hastened to complete for me. You have even ground and pounded grain for me. O Lord, You have suffered great tribulations for me. Lord, forgive me. Namdev's Jani humbly prays to You.

This song always showered nectar onto my heart, but now even this was dry. I could find no joy there nor any love. Oh, what had happened? How had I fallen into such a bad condition?

I asked the old woman to leave and went inside my hut. I was assailed by all sorts of perverse and defiling emotions. My body started to move and went on like this in a confused sort of way. The sun set, and Babu lit a lamp and an incense stick. He prepared and burned some *dhūp* and performed *ārati*. He then took up a tamboura and began to sing some devotional songs. After a time, my breathing changed, becoming disturbed. Sometimes my abdomen would swell with air, after which I would exhale it with great force. Often the breath that I took in would be held inside me. I became more and more frightened. I went outside, full of confusion and anguish. By now it was about eight o'clock at night. There was moonlight, but to me everything seemed dark. Far away in the distance, there were strange noises. My mind was sick with fear. I called Babu Rao and said to him, "Babu, go home now. The rhythm of my heart and the state of my mind are not good. I feel sure that I am going to die tonight of heart failure. So go, or people will harass you. I don't think I shall live through this night, and if I do, it will be to go mad. I am losing my mind. Do what I say; go away." He left me with a sad heart.

The night went on, calm and still. The moon's clear white light diffused over everything. I kept wanting to dance and jump and shout, and this desire grew stronger and stronger. My thoughts became confused, meaningless. My limbs and body got hotter and hotter. My head felt heavy, and every pore in me began to ache. When I breathed out, my breath stopped outside. When I breathed in, it stopped inside. This was terribly painful, and I lost my courage. Something told me that I would die at any moment.

Again I went outside. I saw the whole earth spinning, the sky spinning, the trees spinning. I kept getting up and sitting down, getting up and sitting down. I could not understand what was happening, how it was happening, who was making it happen. I felt drawn toward the mango trees. As I looked in their direction, I saw Gurudev sitting between them, his face turned toward me.

Now it was after nine o'clock. Someone had seated himself by my eyes and was making me see things. Again I looked at the trees. I could see Gurudev there. Then he disappeared. It seemed that I was being controlled by some power that made me do these things. I no longer had a will of my own. My madness was growing all the time. My intellect was completely unstable. I walked around the mango trees three times, bowed to Gurudev, and went inside my hut.

As I went in, I looked out and saw the sugarcane field on fire. The flames were spreading rapidly. My fear increased every second. I heard hordes of people screaming frightfully, as if it were the end of the world. I looked out of the small window of my hut and saw strange creatures from six to fifty feet tall, neither demons nor demigods, but human in form, dancing naked, their mouths gaping open. Their screeching was horrible and apocalyptic. I was completely conscious but was watching my madness, which appeared to be real. Then I remembered death.

I sat down on my *āsana* and immediately went into the lotus posture. All around me I saw flames spreading. The whole universe was on fire. A burning ocean had burst open and swallowed up the whole earth. An army of ghosts and demons surrounded me. All the while I was locked tight in the lotus posture, my eyes closed, my chin pressed down against my throat so that no air could escape. Then I felt a searing pain in the knot of nerves in the *mūlādhāra*, situated at the base of the spine. My eyes opened. I wanted to run away, but my legs were locked tight in the lotus posture. I felt as if my legs had been nailed down permanently in this position. My arms were completely immobilized. I was quite aware that everything I was seeing was unreal, but I was still surrounded by terror. If I tried to close my eyes, they would immediately open again.

Now I saw the whole earth covered with the waters of universal dissolution. The world had been destroyed, and I alone was left. Only my hut had been saved. Then from over the water, a moonlike sphere about four feet in diameter came floating in. It stopped in front of me. This radiant white ball struck against my

eyes and then passed inside me. I am writing this just as I saw it. It is not a dream or an allegory, but a scene that actually happened—that sphere came down from the sky and entered me. A second later, the bright light penetrated into my *nāḍis*. My tongue curled up against my palate, and my eyes closed. I saw a dazzling light in my forehead, and I was terrified. I was still locked in the lotus posture, and then my head was forced down and glued to the ground.

After a while, my eyes opened. I saw a very soft red light shimmering all around. It was flickering slightly, and from it sparks spread throughout the universe. As I watched, my legs unlocked, and I returned to body-consciousness. I got up, went outside, looked to the right, and looked to the left. The atmosphere was calm. I was astounded and dazed, recollecting everything that I had seen. I went inside again and closed my eyes. The red light was there as before. I opened my eyes and went outside again, but there was nothing there.

By now it was far into the night. I tried to sleep but was unable to. My head was heavy. I stayed in this state until four o'clock and then took a bath. Afterward I sat down in the lotus posture and once again started to meditate on the Guru. As soon as I sat down, my mind became completely indrawn. My body, fixed in lotus posture, began to sway. I felt a pain in the *mūlādhāra*. I beheld a light in the heart space that gladdened my mind, and I began to sway in the inner resonance of the divine sound of *Guru Om*. This meditation went on for an hour and a half, and then a new process began.

I started to make a sound like a camel, which alternated with the roaring of a tiger. I must have roared very loudly, for the people around actually thought that a tiger had gotten into the sugarcane field. The impulse of this *kriyā* lasted only a little while. Then I was quiet. When I finished meditation, I got up. My body ached badly, and I was stiff.

Now, back to normal consciousness, I went outside my hut and sat on the swing. The atmosphere was serene. The sun was rising in the east, and in the mango trees, the whole company of birds told me of this with their chirping. The landlord came. He

came *dhūp* in its holder and carried it around the hut; soft clouds of fragrance wafted through the air and permeated the atmosphere outside the meditation hut. He turned to me and asked, "Babaji, what on earth was going on this morning? I found you in meditation. It seemed that a tiger had come. Really, Babaji, I was in the field over there, and for over half an hour, I could hear a tiger roaring." He told me all this in a puzzled sort of way. It was time for my warm drink. This I usually made in my hut, but today he made it for me. I drank it, wondering what this could all mean. It was true that I had made a noise like a tiger during my meditation, but how could it have carried so far? If I were to speak the truth to anyone, he would have said that I was mad, so I said nothing.

At the time, I had neither heard nor read about such a state. I had only heard pompous talk about Vedānta and explanations of its verses.

I sat quietly on the swing. Babu came early that morning. As he approached, I saw that he was smiling. He was very relieved to see that I was all right, neither dead nor insane. He bowed and sat down opposite me. A dear friend called Patil also came and started to sweep, as he used to every day.

Babu asked, "How are you? You said you would either die or go mad. I prayed to God that neither of these things would happen. I was sure that they wouldn't."

I answered, "What wouldn't happen? Death did come last night. The whole world was on fire. The earth was covered with water. I alone narrowly escaped. Babu, I am in a terrible state. I have gone completely insane. You may not be able to see it from the outside, but inside I am crazy." Babu brought out the tamboura and began to sing some verses. I had made a firm rule that no one should come to my meditation hut unless they were going to sit quietly, so it was all very quiet. I listened very carefully. It was a verse from *Śruti-ki-ter*:

*tū āpa apani yāda kara phira ātma ko tū prāpta ho
nā janna le mara bhī nabī mata tāpa se santapta ho*

*jo ātma so paramātmā bai tū ātma me sanirupta ho
yāh mukhya terā kāma hai mata deba me āśakta ho*

Remember your Self, and then attain the Self. Be free from birth and death; don't be tormented by suffering. The Self is God, Paramatman; find peace in the Self—this is your main task; don't be attached to the body.

This verse aroused sublime feelings in me. My body began to twist. I went inside the hut, and meditation started. Now it was not I who meditated; meditation forced itself on me. It came spontaneously; it was in all the joints of my body. All the blood cells in my body were spinning, and *prāna* flowed through the *nāḍīs* at an astounding speed. Then suddenly a red light came before me with such force that it seemed to have been living inside me. It was two feet tall and shone brightly. I clearly saw myself burning, but I did not feel the heat of the fire on the outside. Every part of my body was emitting loud crackling and popping sounds. I became absorbed in meditation on the light, but at the same time, I was completely conscious of what was happening inside me. The red flames of the fiery light soon made me hot inside, and then my great worship of the Guru began. When it was over, my ecstasy waned. I went outside and sat in the swing beneath my friend the mango tree. Once more I began to think, "What is it? How did I see it? What did I see?"

I would always reflect on my inner experiences in this way. I would puzzle over them and go back over the movements and visions I had experienced in meditation. I didn't see many people and never touched anyone or sat down with anyone. I always sat alone. Again and again the same ecstasy would arise; my body would ache; I would think about a variety of things and desires and become confused—in this way my days would pass. Babu Rao would come every morning and leave at night. I made a new rule about visitors: no one should come in the morning. There would be only an evening darshan, and people should stay just a short time. I had this written on a sign and hung it up. All the people of Yeola knew very well my discipline and my nature, and



Swami Mukyananda seated outside his hut in Suki with Babu Rao
The instrument he holds is an *dhar*.

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accepted this with love and respect, for they and the people of the neighboring villages loved me very much. In Yeola I had grown from youth to manhood, and I had learned Marathi there. Now I was having my second birth near Yeola in the sadhana hut at Suki. All the devotees of Yeola used to come for darshan every evening, bringing various offerings that were distributed as *prasād*. I was the beloved Baba of all the people of Yeola, young and old. After they had left, I would light some fragrant *dhūp* and meditate on and worship my beloved Gurudev. After that I would drink some milk, which came from a nice old cow I had with me at the time.

In meditation I would have all sorts of emotions and feelings and identifications. Sometimes I would see the red light burning and would become completely one with that. Sometimes I felt like a camel, sometimes like a bird. At times I was full of joy; this would be followed by agitation, worry, foul thoughts, and then by worship of the Guru. My meditations passed in this way. After them I would go outside and sit under the mango tree and reflect on the things that had happened in meditation. Then, once again, all sorts of impure thoughts would come to me. I stopped people from coming for darshan and touching my feet, for I felt that my mind was impure and my heart full of negativities; I felt dirty inside. I felt that I was ignorant, enveloped in *māyā*, and that I should not commit the sin of allowing other people to worship me. The thought came to my mind, "Hey! You yourself are not completely pure. Why do you deceive others by posing as a Baba?" Sometimes I would tell people what went on in my mind, but they wouldn't accept it. They believed that I was just saying these things to hide myself. I would speak like this to rid myself of a nuisance, but people thought that I had received something from Bhagawan Nityananda that I wanted to conceal. As a result, more and more people came every day. Nevertheless, I kept a time every day for meditation in solitude. I had many different experiences. At times I was sad; at times I was happy. Sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, I continued my journey.

Slowly, I reduced my contact with people outside, since whenever someone came to see me, we would gossip about all sorts of things, and I would not get good meditation afterward. My mind would be agitated, and this interfered with my meditation. Visions would not come, not even the visions of the lights, and I would get depressed as a result. Besides, these meetings affected my purity and delayed the experiences I was to have in sadhana.

At this time, I understood nothing about the various experiences, such as the vision of dissolution and the radiant light, that had come to me on the first day. Only afterward did I learn that they were all part of a process pertaining to shaktipat. Shaktipat is simply another name for the full grace of the supreme Guru, the blessing of a Siddha, or *śāmbhava* initiation. People who have experienced it call it the awakening of the Kundalini. The experiences I had had under the mango trees were due to the grace of my Gurudev Nityananda; they were all his *prasād*. If I had understood that all these experiences came from his blessed gifts—from the sandals, the shawl, and his explanation of the secret of the mantras—then they would have taken on a different, joyful aspect. Whatever had happened was due to Nityananda's grace. I realized this later when I went to Nagad and read a little about it in a book.

Our saints, such as Jñaneshwar Maharaj, Saint Tukaram, and Janardan Swami, have described these experiences in their poetry but in veiled language. The words of these perfected sages and seers are complete and true visions of God for mankind. These men have reflected deeply on the individual and universal Self, and in their own sadhana, they have discovered the Truth and have written about it. Some seekers perceive this Truth, while others do not, according to the degree of their worth. However, there are all sorts of experiences that come to devotees of Siddha Yoga that you neither hear nor read about. If you do happen to find such an account, it is usually in a secret language, and you don't find a seeker who has perfected his sadhana who can tell you the meaning. For this reason, many aspirants do not understand the wondrous process of this amazing sadhana. Their minds become

frightened, and they give up their practice. Many *sādhakas* have said to me, "Babaji, as soon as I sit for meditation, a snake comes and bites me." "Babaji, as soon as I sit for meditation, a naked woman appears, and then I get frightened." "Babaji, during meditation the most terrible thoughts come up." *Sādhakas* have to face many difficulties like this.

Sometimes an aspirant gets frightened by the various movements that come through the grace of the divine Shakti, set in motion by the Lord of Siddha Yoga. He gets confused and gives up his practice. The main reason for this is ignorance about the direction of his *sadhana*. When he gives up his practice due to ignorance, he also makes other people afraid, saying, "This path is not a good one. It will make you lose your mind and make you insane." To take an example, last year a swami saw one of my Siddha students, a good practitioner of *sadhana*, doing some yogic movements. The swami believed himself to have completed his *sadhana*. He sought out my student, took him aside, and said, "Listen, you are making a big blunder. This is not yoga. Brother, I am warning you. I have attained full *samādhi*, and what you are doing has nothing to do with it. You'll either go crazy within a short time or die." Then, even more emphatically and to frighten him still more, he added, "You will die in a few days, and if this does not happen, it will be no more than a month or two before you go completely insane." The student wrote to me, "Babaji, a swami here is frightening me by giving me all these warnings, and he has told me not to tell anyone what he said."

I left the letter for a few months and then answered as follows: "My dear Siddha student and brother, the time limit is over. Not two, but four months have passed. Your *sadhana* is going very well. You have passed through several stages. You have had the experience that your mind is full of bliss; this is very good. You are getting the fruits of your *sadhana* and are happy. Remember one thing, however; if you ever meet the swami, get a doctor to examine his health and head, and read the report carefully. Then say to him, 'O all-knowing Swamiji, you predicted that within

two months I would either die or go mad. Neither has happened, and so I can only believe that you, Swamiji, just live off other people and that you accumulate earnings by making a show of your erudition. Even though you are not learned, you speak as though you were learned. I think it is you who is crazy, crazy yourself, crazy for the undiscerning praise of your group of disciples and crazy for pontificating." If such things occur, then man can fall from his *sadhana*, and so a book about such experiences, as well as an experienced Master, are essential.

me. Some had long, matted hair, some were clean-shaven, and some had pierced ears. Some were sitting under trees, some were sitting on stones, and some were inside caves. I also saw the great seers I had read about in the Puranas. I saw Sai Baba of Shirdi. Though Nityananda Baba was in Ganeshpuri, he was here, too. Each Siddha had his own hut or cave or house made in styles I had never seen. Some of the Siddhas were just sitting quietly.

The climate was very good, and the light very pleasing. I found that I now knew everything. I recognized the seers and sages of ancient times and, moving on a little, saw many yoginis, all sitting steadily in their various divine *mudrās*. I spent a long time wandering around Siddhaloka, looking at the yoginis and Siddha saints. I was very fascinated by Siddhaloka. No other world had seemed so good to me. I did not feel like leaving and thought it would be very nice if I could stay. Then I saw a huge lotus pond with golden lotuses growing in it. Turning away from this pond, I saw the Seven Sages in a group, a sight which brought me peace, happiness, and love. I went on roaming in this state of peace and love; it seemed that someone unknown was guiding me. I entered another forest—very beautiful. I did not recognize the species of any trees in it. I saw more Siddhas there and felt the desire, as I had earlier, to sit down in the lotus posture and meditate. As soon as I sat, the blue star appeared, and for some reason I felt compelled to go and sit in it. I don't know how I did this or who was controlling me. Anyway, the star at once took me back at immense speed to the place where I was meditating.

When I arrived, the blue star passed within me into my *sahasrāra* and exploded. Its fragments spread throughout the vast spaces of the *sahasrāra*. There was no star in front of me now but just an ambrosial white light. Then I passed into Tandaloka, which was quite near to me. At that moment, a Siddha, whom I did not know, appeared to me from Siddhaloka and said, "You have just seen Siddhaloka, the world of the Siddhas. Here live the great saints who have achieved *jīvanmukti*, liberation. There is no hunger, no sleep, and no awakening. One eats joy, drinks joy, lives in joy, and continuously experiences joy. Everything there is joy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Visit to the World of the Siddhas

AGAIN THE BLUE STAR SHONE steadily before me, not moving at all. While I gazed within at the upper regions of the *sahasrāra*, I traveled to many worlds with the blue star as my vehicle. It was not the blue light or the Blue Pearl, but a blue star. Though it looked small, it was large enough to contain me. One day it took me far away and set me down in the most beautiful world, the most entrancing of all those I had seen. I cannot describe its beauty, for words would be an insult to it.

In this world, I came upon a fascinating path, and following it, I saw many woods, caves both large and small, flowing streams of pure water, white, blue, and green deer, and also some white peacocks. The atmosphere was very calm and peaceful, and there was a beautiful blue light everywhere, such as you would see if you looked at the early morning sun through a piece of blue glass. There was no sun or moon, only light spreading everywhere. When I arrived, I felt such strong waves and impulses of shakti that I knew intuitively that I was going to have the darshan of the ancient seers. I started to move around with the speed of thought. And then what? This was Siddhaloka, the world of the Siddhas!

I saw many Siddhas, all of them deeply absorbed in meditation. Each one was in a different *mudrā*. None of them looked at

Just as a fish sleeps in water, lives in water, eats in water, and plays in water, so the inhabitants of Siddhaloka abide in joy. Without the grace of a Siddha, no one can go there. Those who are doing the sadhana of the Siddha path, who belong to the Siddha tradition, and who will attain full Siddhahood will go to Siddhaloka. The blue star, which became your vehicle and took you there, is the only way of traveling to it. It can also take you to other worlds. But until the star explodes, the cycle of birth and rebirth is not broken, the bondage to karma is not cut, the veil of sins and good deeds is not torn away. Only when that is torn is the eye of differentiation removed." After he said this and blessed me, the saint disappeared.

Fran Kalweit, Shamans, Healers,
a Medicine Man

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THE VISION QUEST

The real vision has to come out of your own juices. It is not a dream; it is very real. It hits you sharp and clear like an electric shock. You are wide awake and, suddenly, there is a person standing next to you who you know can't be there at all. Or somebody is sitting close by, and all at once you see him also up on a hill half a mile away. Yet you are not dreaming; your eyes are open. You have to work for this, empty your mind for it.

—LAME DEER
and ERDOES
(1972, 53-54)

Fay Clark was adopted for two years by Chief Michael Red Cloud, a Winnebago from Wisconsin, and was sent on a vision quest. He recounted his experiences to writer Brad Steiger. At the age of around thirteen, he and others were tutored for several weeks on what to expect and then were asked to go and pick a spot in the woods near a stream. They were not to bring food or look for any kind of wild food, nor were they to seek shelter, but instead had to be exposed to the elements. They were to weaken their bodies and pray at least three times a day for their guide. The main idea was to exhaust the body as quickly as possible, occupying the mind with a monotonous physical activity while the subconscious mind focused on finding the guide.

After a while, one would begin to see wildlife that would seemingly become friendlier. After a time, some creature would approach, as if

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to offer itself as a totem, or guide. It could be bird, a chipmunk, a gopher, a badger. If the boy were very hungry, and if he were afraid of staying out in the wilderness alone, he could accept the first creature that approached and say that he had found his guide. But we were taught that if we could endure, Manitou, or one of his representatives in human form, would appear and talk to us.

I spent twelve days fasting and awaiting my guide. I had many creatures, including a beautiful deer, come up to me and allow me to pet them. The deer, especially, wanted to stay. But I had been told that if I did not want to accept a form of life that offered itself to me, I should thank it for coming, tell it of its beauty, its strength, its intelligence, but tell it also that I was seeking one greater.

On the twelfth day, an illuminated form appeared before me. Although it seemed composed primarily of light, it did have features and was clothed in a long robe.

"You I have waited for," I said. And it replied, "You have sought me, and you I have sought."

Then it faded away. But it had appeared before me just as real as you are. (Quoted in Steiger 1974, 144)

It is difficult for us outsiders to relate to the meaning and significance of the vision and power quest as it is carried out by members of Native American tribes. Such spiritual exercises are unfamiliar to Western psychology. The conflict with the scientific worldview and their religious origin make them doubly suspicious. They strike us as primitive, savage, even unnatural. The suffering and exhaustion that accompany a vision quest do not correspond to the mild and gentle style of modern psychotherapy. Westerners do not want to have to exert themselves to solve their problems. Our milder way is the way of a materially sated existence that, within the protective sphere of economic well-being, is content with little spiritual profundity and vitality. But the radical spiritual cure entails injury, pain, and inhumanity. No civilized person believes in finding salvation through pain. Rendered secure by the existence of hospitals and the medical establishment, Westerners banishes all suffering from their perspective. Since it has required all our effort and intelligence to keep suffering out of our world, why should we bring it back in again? Is it not the real achievement of the West

to have liberated humankind from a raw and rugged struggle for survival and physical pain by extricating people from their natural conditions?

In the outlook of Westerners today, dependence on nature seems reprehensible, even archaic, and every contact with the natural world seems to us like a descent into primitivity. Anthropology has developed completely within this mindset. Its theories and research strategies are pervaded by it, and if one were to try to divest anthropology of its theory of the separation between humanity and environment, its entire structure would be in peril of crumbling. It is inextricably bound up with an attitude of praise for the comfortable life, a state without suffering, as well as with the idea that culture is the antagonist of nature. Thus, anthropology has no choice but to classify everything that strikes it as uncivilized under the pejorative heading of "primitivity," which it conceives of as hostile. As a result, it regards all ecstasies and trances as the products of undeveloped minds; it regards every spiritual gesture and mystical perception as an act of unreason and alienation from civilization. For Westerners, the inmost essence of culture is remoteness from nature; artificial—that is, nature-rejecting—culture has become our second, and supposedly better, nature.

Against this background, the views that ethnologists carry into the field become easier to understand. In our technologized culture, they too have lost touch not only with the outer world of nature but with their own inner nature. At most in our society, one may still find relics of our primordial nature in psychiatric institutions; but even there the psychology industry has found ways and means to still the primordial nature in people. As our institution of sociotechnical pacification, it distorts the last vestiges of the "savage" psyche and renders them meaningless and harmless. The manifold "archaic" drives of our psyche are enveloped in a thick layer of Freudian and behavioristic theoretical artifacts that restrain the richness and the developmental potential of the real psyche.

If civilization has taken a path of refined and indirect knowledge, tribal culture has taken a path of immediate knowledge. It is a hard path, fraught with privations. What is more immediate than to seek

out solitude untouched by humanity, to withhold from oneself the biological needs of one's body, to fast, to be silent, alone, without family or group relations, to be exposed to the rigors of the elements, a naked child under the stars? It is no accident that in vision quests, everything that recalls culture, such as clothes and material objects, is taken away, and only sacred objects are kept. Also, ordinary activities are excluded. Without the protection of the family and the tribe, the initiate, continually vulnerable to the dangers of storms, lightning, and wild animals, is thrown entirely back on his or her own resources. When they are liberated from their daily concerns, the real, latent powers of the psyche, unobstructed by the trappings of civilization, fill the consciousness.

Vision. Even the sound of this word evokes for most people in industrial culture a sense of antediluvian, barbaric archaism. But the principle of the vision quest is not simply to return to "naked existence"; rather, the initiate is to take in the forces surrounding us entirely without the various intellectual filtering systems and cultural prisms to which we are accustomed. Our organism then begins to work, and a kind of unconscious self-regulation sets in. This is the free play of the unconstrained nature of our own mind. It is hardly surprising that people in tribal cultures, who live closer to the heart of nature and thus to the center of their own consciousness have found the way to this "psychotherapy." The biochemical processes are set in motion; fasting takes its effect; consciousness spins its own threads; and firmly rooted cultural categories loosen up and fall away. As we experience hunger and thirst and pain and intensely wish for genuine contact with a spiritual power that transcends our own existence, the last physiological and sensory stabilizing mechanisms that hold our perception and emotions in balance fall apart. Then a new world unfolds—a vision is born.

The visionary experience is not limited to people in traditional societies; others who follow the same methods have similar experiences. Vinson Brown, a writer on Native American subjects, describes his four visions on the sacred mountain Bear Butte, which he experienced under the guidance of Fools Crow, the ceremonial chief of the Oglala Sioux. Here is one of his visions:

So I concentrated on singing my prayers outward as hard as I could as if my spirit were rushing out in all directions, and gradually the

initial overwhelming tendency to shiver stopped. . . . So I lay down on my rocky bed and tried to sleep, though it was nearly impossible because of the rocks stabbing into my back no matter what way I turned. But somehow, four times I managed to find a snatch of sleep that night and in each of those four brief moments of slumber I had a vision.

The first one was perhaps the most strange and weird, yet somehow not frightening. I sensed that a huge man was standing beside me in the darkness, a man of immense power. He soon reached down and placed his arms under my body and lifted me as if I were as light as a fluff of down. Then he carried me about a hundred yards down the mountainside till we came to the opening of a cave. Into this cave he carried me about fifty feet, it seemed, until we came to a room that was filled with a suffused light. The room was carpeted deeply with sweet-smelling sagebrush, sacred to the Sioux, and on this he placed me. As I felt myself sinking into that softness, for this sagebrush bed was far deeper and softer than my primitive bed of sagebrush on the mountain top, I felt surrounded by warmth, comfort and protection, a most happy contented feeling after the cold wind and the sharp rocks above. As I lay there he spoke to me six words: "Here you will be all right!" (Brown 1974, 170ff.)

Fools Crow told him later that his vision was *wash'tai! wash'tai!*—very good, very good. The first vision was explained by Fools Crow as meaning that the Mountain Spirit, as representative of the Great Spirit, had acknowledged Brown's purified spirit.

Another example is that of the first Guardian of the Feathered Pipe of the Gros Ventre, Whistling Man, to whom the Pipe said that every guardian could hold it for four years, and then it would tell him who should receive it next. It happened this way with five guardians, all of whom were endowed with the highest supernatural powers. After the first five, another sixteen were to follow, of which the first fifteen would possess various powers and the sixteenth, omnipotent supernatural powers. This cycle of sixteen pipe holders would then be thrice repeated, until finally a total of four guardians with extraordinary powers had watched over the pipe.

The last pipe holder with power was the sixteenth man of the fourth cycle, Bull Lodge, who died in 1880. After that, the guardians had only slight powers or were without supernatural powers.

Before Bull Lodge died, he called his people together and said: "My heart is sad; I grieve for my son, the Feathered Pipe. It will not be long before its powers vanish. There will be three more guardians after me, and then its task will be complete." Before Bull Lodge died, he had a vision, which Fred Gone recounted to the ethnologist Verne Dusenberry. A voice said to him one night:

"You have eight more days to live. There are seven who watch you. Four of these have been wanting to take you from the Earth, but three have not been in agreement that you should come. Now, these three have had the influence to check your coming, but they have given up and have consented that you be taken. So, your time is coming. You have eight more days to live. Now, prepare yourself. Just watch and wait."

Bull Lodge said nothing to his family. Each day he sat in his tipi and marked the time with a piece of charcoal. When he put six or seven marks on the tipi, he had a vision. Off to the East where the sun comes he saw a man standing on a ridge. The sky was getting golden, and the man stood there silhouetted against the rays. Just as the sun came up, a man approached. Bull Lodge saw that he was carrying a staff that was painted red and that he was dressed as a Pipe Keeper.

"I will give you this stick," said the man when he had neared Bull Lodge. "In your life time, things have been given you when you appealed for what you wanted. You have practiced things as you should have done. You have used your powers correctly. Nothing has been denied you. Now, I'm the last one to come to you—the final one. I am going to give you a crowning glory—something that is going to be a Supreme Power for man on this earth. That Power will be the resurrection."

"From your marks on the tipi, you know that you have just one more day. Your time is coming near. Assemble your family and pass along to them the information that I am going to tell you. Listen carefully to me, for these are the directions you must tell your family."

"I must die," you must say. "When I die, and if you want me back again, you must do these things."

"First, you must make four sweat tents and place them in a line that runs east and west. The one farthest east you must make with twenty willows; the next one, use eighteen; the next one, sixteen

willows, and the last one—the one to the west—you must use fourteen willows. These four sweat lodges must be covered with four buffalo hides each. Then over each of these lodges must be placed a tipi, and each of these tipis must be made from buffalo hides. The robes on the sweat lodges must be placed according to the cardinal directions."

"After the lodges are made, and the tipis placed over them, [tell your family that they must] have someone raise the robes on the sweat lodges so that there are openings to both the east and the west. So, likewise, must the tipis be opened. Now when all this is done, four men must take your body and carry it to this row of tipis. When the men carry your body in, two of them must be at your head and two at your feet. They must take you into the first lodge through the east entrance and place you on a bed of incense that they have prepared for you. They will lay your body on that bed and light other incense that has been prepared. Then, the two men at your head will go out through the west opening and the two at your feet will back out through the east opening, closing the openings after them."

"When the men have sung four songs, [you must tell your family,] they are to open the flaps and in exactly the same manner go to the second lodge within the second tipi and repeat exactly the same performance. When all has been completed there, the men will carry your body in exactly the same manner into the third lodge. Again, the same procedure is to be followed. While the men are singing the third song there, however, they will hear a movement in the lodge. They are not to become frightened but will sing the fourth song, and then again, in exactly the same way, the men are to carry you into the fourth lodge, light the incense, close the flaps, and while the men are singing, I will call you."

"Rides Tight, come forth, I'll say. I shall repeat that call every time the men sing their song. On the fourth and last time when I make that call, you will come out the west side of the sweat lodge. Then, you will come back to life again if the people want you to do it and will follow these instructions. These are the instructions you shall give to your family. That is the Power that I will bestow upon you as the last one—the last great Keeper of the Feathered Pipe."

That day, Bull Lodge called his family together and told them of his vision and gave them the instructions that he had received. That night

his family was with him. About midnight, he told his family to go to bed—all except his eldest son and his wife. Suddenly, Bull Lodge made a noise like a bear and trembled. When he quit trembling, his son and wife looked at him and realized he was dead.

The family called the people in the camp together and told them of the prophecy. A great conclave was held to decide whether they should follow the instructions given to them. In the end they decided that it was impossible to follow his instructions. The buffalo lodges and robes were gone. The Gros Ventre way of life was ending. Soon the Feathered Pipe would lose its Powers, too. But, it had tried to give one man, Bull Lodge, the greatest Power bestowed upon any man—resurrection. (Dusenberry 1961, 23ff.)

Native American children are prepared for fasting as early as their sixth year. Endurance of pain, contact with supernatural mysteries, solitude, and fear of the forces of nature bring them in touch with a spiritual protector who will guide them through life with a sure hand. Physical and psychological withdrawal phenomena bring to life an unconscious depth in us; they cause the individual's life situation and secret wishes to appear in the form of metaphorical visions. The suppression of sense perceptions and of normal body processes is the most effective way to attune body and mind to the transpersonal dimension. This way, the inner wisdom of body and psyche are activated.

A person wishing contact with the inner self must first disable all the mechanisms that maintain a stable ego fixed on the events of the external world. From time immemorial, the means of achieving this disabling have been solitude, monotony, and narrowly focusing the concentration by means of prayer and chant. Through these means, everyday reality becomes vague and dissolves, replaced by a visionary, paralogical, inner reality. We, however, tend too quickly to regard this visionary experience as a purely inner phenomenon. For visionaries, there is no inside and no outside; both meet in a single point—in consciousness; and consciousness becomes for them a factor that binds mind and matter and the outer and inner world with each other. What is within is also without and vice versa. The opposites that characterize our normal reality are resolved at this point. For the visionary, it is not inner experiences

alone that exist; beings from the other world also leave behind traces and signs in our material world. Animals approach the adept, touch his body, and speak to him. The visionary is in harmony with the world around him; the result is that the separation between different kinds of living beings becomes extraneous and communication between different species becomes possible.

During his pipe fast, Arthur Amiotte, a contemporary Sioux artist and a student of the Lakota medicine man Pete Catches, saw eagles circling above him repeatedly, giving him the feeling that it was they who were leading the fasting ceremony. He refers frequently to the connection between all the elements of nature and all animals. The behavior of nature toward the seeker is a mirror image of his own state. Amiotte, who during his first fast had several experiences of this nature with clouds, cows, and hawks, tells us how he developed an inner relationship to a bird:

A little brown bird flew close and sat in a pine tree about ten feet from the square. I addressed it as I had the butterfly; there were other birds in the trees to the north, east and south, and they circled as though in response. A feeling of communication and of being a natural part of that place made me feel that I wanted to stay there forever. One of the birds, a blue one, remained long after the others flew away, and returned daily for the next two days, always coming by itself to the same tree where it sat for hours regarding me. I offered it the pipe each time. I did not know then that it would return for the next three years to sit in a tree to the east of me and, in the third year, sing me a song of encouragement, the words of which I would understand on my third pipe fast and sing on my fourth. (Amiotte 1976, 35)

Former physicist Gerhard Kunze, who for a long time lived with the Mexican Huichol, had similar experiences after the shaman Pedro de Haro had said to him: "For five days you may neither eat nor drink. And then on the fifth day, when you drink, the old woman (Great-Grandmother Earth) will appear." "Five days?" asked Kunze, horrified. "But nobody could survive that!" Pedro replied with emphasis: "It is possible to survive that!" (Kunze 1982, 86). Kunze is one of the few Europeans who has had the courage to undertake shamanic techniques of consciousness. He set out to get through the first practice of *mará'akame*: fasting, solitude,

prayer. Even on the first day, as he wandered through the valley of the Rio Verde, he saw "signs" and had strange encounters with animals. A heron accompanied him for an entire day, always flying a hundred meters in front of him in a particular direction. Occasionally, it would land and wait for Kunze. Later, an eagle accompanied him and showed him the easiest way through the bush until Kunze could do without its advice. Then it flew away. He also received another kind of sign: every time he needed help, he opened the Bible, the only book he had brought with him, at random to a passage. As if it were a book of oracles, the passage he opened the Bible to each time gave him an astonishingly appropriate response.

Later, toward the end of the fasting period, out of extreme thirst Kunze wanted to take just a taste from a spring. But a big Mexican hornet stung him in the leg, which quickly swelled up. Would he now be unable to make his way back through the valley to civilization? He was overcome by mortal fear. He knelt and prayed. After two minutes, the pain subsided, and after a few more minutes the swelling and the sting wound vanished completely. Had the hornet protected him from prematurely breaking off his experiment?

It is always astounding that through the simplest alterations of consciousness, we can enter a world of living interaction and unity. Objects acquire meaning, animals relate to us, even enter into an inseparable unity with our situation, and randomly opened books reveal our mental state. A world of synchronicity, of signs and meanings, arises, a universe of the *unio mystica* in which we need not feel ourselves lost.

Although the vision is a transpersonal expression whose images and symbology are universal, it is nonetheless definitely tied to culture. By contrast, the essence of the transpersonal and the mystical is without symbology and without form—its nature is absolute purity. That is, at least, the way it is understood in Eastern philosophy. The yogi strives for complete formlessness, complete emptiness; Zen Buddhism seeks formless enlightenment. In tribal cultures, on the other hand, transpersonal experiences remain for the most part attached to the realm of forms and images. This does not, however, mean that the mystical experiences, of shamans are unlike those of Eastern saints and yogis. It seems to me, rather, that tribal cultures represent formless enlightenment in an outward fashion,

symbolically, since they have to survive in a world that requires that they maintain more concrete relationships to the environment than the world of monasteries and meditation caves.

In states of intoxication induced by alcohol or drugs, as well as in fatigue and exhaustion, we readily see images in natural formations like clouds, mountains, and other geographical features. We also see patterns and phantoms, even whole films dancing before our eyes—we hallucinate. When the brain is isolated from external data, it can produce its own worlds on the basis of stored excitation patterns. But we can go still further, beyond the level of phantasmagoria. We then land in a spiritual sphere, the reaching of which is the goal of all esoteric and occult philosophies. Here we touch upon a sphere of consciousness in which we are able to communicate with the dead, spirits, animal entities, and amorphous beings, or with the creative principle, the superself. After a still further step and still further effort, we may enter into a "psychic emptiness," a space that is without the frame of reference of human existence—the absolute. The visionary experience is for the most part imaginal and metaphorical. It therefore corresponds not to the apex of mystical introspection but to a deeper psychic depth or the transpersonal sphere.

The physiological and biochemical analysis of visionary experience remains incomplete, but it is what is necessary to provide a truly scientific access to these phenomena. I have already referred to Aldous Huxley's view (1963, 150–54) that in the European Middle Ages visions were significantly more frequent, because for many people, during the winter and the six-week period of fasting, as a result of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency, fundamental psychological and biochemical changes took place that were conducive to visionary experience. Today, as a result of improved living conditions alone, visions account for a very small proportion of psychological phenomena. Self-mortification, too, has largely died out, but it heightens the possibility of visions, for through it large quantities of adrenaline and histamine are released, which influence consciousness. The canonized nineteenth-century Catholic mystic Jean Vianney remarked on this point, after his bishop forbade him to torment himself: "When I could do with my body what I wanted, God refused me nothing."

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When a visionary encounters holiness, his life changes abruptly. Now that he has drunk from life's profound wellsprings, has been bathed in life force, and felt something of the essence of primordial existence, he is suddenly endowed with extrasensory perception, precognition, the ability to leave his body, to see spirits, and the like. He has received attributes of sacred existence and has himself become a messenger, an epiphany of holiness. Through his supernatural powers, he manifests a higher world.

Such transpersonal experiences are unfamiliar to today's psychotherapy. Nonetheless, they could be meaningfully applied to psychological healing and integration. The states induced by breaking physical and psychological habits could complement Western healing procedures. We have before us a mysterious realm of the psyche. When we begin to give our attention to it, we will have much to learn from shamans.

Since most anthropologists and psychologists do not try out on themselves such techniques as fasting and going without liquids, staying for a long time in a natural environment praying and alone, visions tend to seem to them to be pathological manifestations of the brain, hallucinations, or mental confusion. These researchers not only refuse to try these techniques, they also refuse thereby to test the research results of the modern psychology of consciousness. The denial of the existence of a more all-embracing spiritual reality is as old as psychology itself. In psychology, a new discovery can prevail against established opinion only with tremendous effort. When we compare the history of resistance to dream interpretation, the unconscious, and research into sexuality with present-day resistance to the transpersonal and the unconscious, we see that nothing has changed in people's fear of the riches of the psyche.

THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE:
IS THERE ROOM FOR US ALL IN THE DANCE?

REFLECTIONS ON THE LAKOTA SUNDANCE

CONSTANTINA RHODES BAILLY

I have been privileged to attend the Lakota Sundance for the past two summers on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in St. Francis, South Dakota. It is remote territory. It is one of the few places remaining in North America that doesn't readily transmit or receive a cell phone signal.

For about a month, I lived in a canvas tent, cooked collectively with fifteen other people – non-Natives and Natives, some of whom spoke very little English. We had a very rudimentary outhouse and only occasional access to shower facilities. Sometimes we could take our soap and shampoo, catch rides to the lake a few miles away, and jump in with all of our clothes on to bathe.

Last summer temperatures soared to 118°F, whereas this year it rained frequently and temperatures dropped into the 40's. A hole was torn in my tent, creating a small flood. For about a week everyone in our camp passed a respiratory ailment and fever back and forth, our bedding remained cold and damp, and much of the food supply was soaked and ruined. Despite all, I had a great time! And when I returned to Florida, my coolers, water jugs, lanterns, and attitude came in quite handy for our visitations from hurricanes Charley, Francis, Ivan, and Jeanne.

"THE OTHER" AND NATIVE THOUGHT

There is much to say about the highly complex Sundance and its implications for the Lakota people, indeed for all Native people. What I'll be discussing this evening is just an introduction to Native concepts of interconnectedness and the concern for the protection of its integrity. I hope that this will take us a step closer to understanding the varied ways that people receive the Stranger into their midst. I have found that the issues at hand right now with the Sundance practices are a direct reflection of the questions that many people across America are facing as we move into the 21st century and contemplate the religious space that we occupy.

In our explorations of the Other among world religions, it is important for us to note that the concept itself is conspicuously absent from primal religions. "Otherness" is antithetical to the native understanding of how the world works. A basic ontological unity embracing diversity underlies all of Creation.

NATIVE PEOPLE ALLOW GREAT LATITUDE IN PRAYER AND CEREMONIAL PRACTICES, FOR THEY SHARE A FIRM UNDERSTANDING THAT EACH OF US HAS A DIRECT CONNECTION TO THAT WHICH IS HOLY, AND THAT EVERY BEING HAS ITS OWN PARTICULAR DESTINY.



Here is how a member of the Teton Sioux described his worldview. Speaking in the late 19th century, a man known only by the name of Shooter said:

All birds, even those of the same species, not all are alike, and it is the same with animals and with human beings. The reason Wakan Tanka [the Great Mystery] does not make two birds, or two animals alike is because each is placed here by Wakan Tanka to be an independent individuality... (Qtd. in *Songs of the Earth*. Edward S. Curtis)

In approximately the same time period, Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939) of the Oglala Sioux, explained:

Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom – an intense and absorbing love for nature; a respect for life; enriching faith in a supreme power; and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equality, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations. (op.cit.)¹

Native people allow great latitude in prayer and ceremonial practices, for they share a firm understanding that each of us has a direct connection to that which is holy, and that every being has its own particular destiny. It is up to each person to discover this truth; it is something that cannot be imparted or imposed by any one else. This, in a very general way, explains why there is such diversity within the Creation and of course why there are so many different religious traditions. Native ceremonial leaders many not understand or even agree with the tenets of other religions,

but nonetheless they extend genuine respect to individuals as they come together in prayer.

The Sundance is one of the most – perhaps *the most* – important ritual of the Lakota Sioux, and because the activities of the Lakota in the past thirty or so years have been at the forefront of influencing the ritual and spiritual activities of many other Indian groups throughout North America, what happens with the Lakota Sundance in many ways speaks for what happens with most other traditional ceremonial practices throughout the United States.

In recent years there have been “outsiders” who attend and even participate in the Sundance ceremonies: Who allows this to happen and under what guidelines are a constant subject of discussion among Native ceremonial leaders. Some groups welcome the presence of outsiders; others do not. In addition, there has been a recent movement to bring the Sundance to regions beyond the Plains. Most recently, plans have begun to inaugurate a Sundance on the Qualla Boundary Cherokee Indian Reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina. To some, it seems a natural and welcome progression to reinstate Native religion where it has been for the most part lost. To others, it has been construed as an imposition of Otherness. We shall return later to the topic of the Cherokee Sundance.

THE INTEGRITY OF THE SACRED HOOP

Let us begin by trying on the paradigm of what the Lakota refer to as the sacred hoop: a circular rather than polarized sense of community, consisting of many separate but related

components. Here, there are no real "others," but rather differing degrees of expression. As such, there may indeed be room in the dance. The catch, of course, and there's always a catch, isn't there? – is that one must approach the dance without any preconceived notions of the steps or the particulars – in other words, check your ideologies at the gates before entering. If you enter the dance seeking to modify it, fix it, recast it in your own image, or apply your own categories to it, you deny the integrity of its essential structure. There are of course great subtleties in how this can be finessed. We may consider, for example, a motif from the Sundance in which there are shifting concentric rings of formation. At times, participants from all levels join in one large circle; at other times, the groups separate out, some moving to the sacred center, and others forming a protective, secondary ring around them.

I was invited to join a group of Sundancers from North Carolina who caravan out to South Dakota each summer to participate in and to support the ceremonies. Among this group are mixed Cherokee-Lakota, full-blood Cherokee, full-blood Mohawk, mixed Cherokee and white, and non-Native. Although technically open to anyone who happens upon it (and this would usually include only the locals in the Lakota community), attendance at this particular Sundance is for the most part by invitation only. I didn't find this to be an ideological issue, for indeed many of the invited guests practiced other religions, and many different ethnicities were represented. Rather, it was a matter of perceived respect for the traditions.

The Sundance chiefs were acutely aware, on the one hand, that what went on at their ceremonies was consciously undertaken to benefit and uplift not only the local community but ultimately the entire creation. On the other hand, they were aware that certain features of the rituals could attract ridicule; indeed, at one time, the Sundance could have been closed down by the police and the participants could have been imprisoned for up to ten years and/or fined \$10,000 (Catches 1). This was officially rectified by the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom

Act. You may be surprised to learn that this legislation protecting Indian ceremonies occurred only as recently as 1978. Before that, Native Americans enjoyed only limited religious freedom, and they were forced to practice in great secrecy.

These days, the chiefs have a slightly different concern, as they seek to protect the sanctity of the ceremonies as they are practiced under many different conditions. Because there is no one central human authority in charge of making the decisions about how the ceremonies are conducted, the issues of inclusiveness and exclusivity continue to be widely debated, especially in recent years.

As I mentioned, the notion of Otherness itself is foreign to Native perceptions of the universe. Throughout every ceremony one hears the invocation of the following phrase: *mitakuye 'oyasin*, "all my relations." This refers to all peoples, and in addition it means that the rocks and the earth, the sky and the waters, birds and mammals, fish and insects, departed ancestors, elemental spirits, the forces and spirits of the cardinal directions – indeed all of creation, are intrinsically connected. Everything is infused with the essence of the Great Mystery, Wakan Tanka. Certainly there is a recognition of differing categories, such as *oyate*, meaning "people" or "nation," or *tiyospaye*, meaning a type of extended family. These categories are situated in a nonhierarchical fashion in relation to one another. They coexist in a circular pattern, which, in its ideal and harmonious expression, constitutes the sacred hoop.

TO DANCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

The Sundance is performed at the height of the summer and it affords a time for people to live and pray together and to strengthen old ties. It may be said to mark the beginning of the sacred year, for it closes out an old cycle and consciously inaugurates a new one. It is a time to mend the old and prepare the new: to repair the fabric of tipi covers, to sew new dance regalia, to re-align the sacred hoop of relationships. The ceremony is performed by the Sundancers, lead by the Sundance chiefs. Where I attended, there were approximately one hundred Sundancers – male and female – and there were three main co-chiefs and several auxiliary chiefs. Originally the Sundance is thought to have been performed by the male warriors of the community, in preparation for a war party. Although bravery and endurance are central to the performance, today these qualities are directed toward the healing and restoration of what is most important to

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today's practitioners: Native elders believe that a strong spiritual base is imperative to healing the nearly insurmountable distresses of contemporary reservation life. It is for this reason that its performance has become so crucial in recent years.

Why does a person choose to participate in the Sundance? In true shamanistic fashion, most Sundancers explain that they were chosen by the spirits to participate, or at least to become involved initially. The rigors are intense, and Sundancers admit that they would not likely undertake such severe sacrifices without some strong spiritual compulsion. The Sundance exists as a vehicle of sacrifice, the benefits of which are articulated as *wicozani* – health and well-being. Often one dances for the sake of an ailing relative – one with cancer or diabetes or with an addiction to alcohol or drugs. There is also a wider intention – for the benefit of the whole community...or further, for all Indian peoples...or for the entire nation...or for peace throughout the entire world. Indeed, all of these intentions were addressed by the Sundance chiefs as they inaugurated the ceremonies each morning at dawn. In addition, time was allotted throughout the day for anyone to address the entire group to impart his or her own ideas about why they were gathered together and to elicit particular calls for help.

One becomes a Sundancer by stepping forth publicly at a designated time and making a pledge to dance for four years, beginning in the next yearly cycle. From that moment on, the person who pledges enters into a state of *wakan* – of holiness. He or she will spend the coming year in ordinary occupations and activities, but these will be enhanced by following certain guidelines to promote one's spiritual awareness as well as to develop physical endurance. One is encouraged to engage frequently in self-reflection and to attend purification ceremonies, or sweat lodges. These are opportunities to develop one's ties with the spiritual community and to bring one's intention into clearer focus as the ceremonial season approaches. But as many Sundancers insist, your own Sundance goes on for the whole year; it becomes a way of life.

PURIFICATION

Sundancers and supporters begin to gather at Rosebud in early July. The four days preceding the Sundance are known as the Purification days, which serve to draw the dancers and the community of helpers away from ordinary activities and into a mutual effort of spiritual and material preparation. There is much work to be done as informal brigades go off in pickup trucks to collect dry wood, rocks, and wild sage for use in the upcoming ceremonies. The outer ring of the arbor is constructed and covered with leaves for shade; and sweat lodges are prepared for the purification of dancers and supporters. Tents and tipis are put up in the precincts surrounding the arbor, where everyone will live for the next couple of weeks, and the entire area is designated as *wakan*, or holy.

Everyone in attendance is expected to observe certain behavioral guidelines. Some of the prohibitions are spelled out on a sign posted at the entranceway to the sacred grounds: no photography, no recording devices, no alcohol, no drugs, no firearms – that is, nothing to disturb the peace, well-being, and sacred intention of the ceremony. A general attitude of respect, especially for the dancers, is expected. It is understood that people may behave as they wish in their ordinary lives, but within the sacred time and space of the Sundance, all collapses into a cooperative effort, seeking to generate harmony.

On one level, this refers to the time of the ceremonies themselves. The presence of a photographer, for example, could cause a participant to cross the thin line from performance-as-ritual to performance-as-spectacle. Of course, the dance is a spectacle, but when contained within the precincts designated by sacred time and sacred space, it cannot, in theory at least, be lifted out of its original context and therefore become subject to desecration.

Sundance chiefs share a concern about where such photographs will end up and within what contexts they will be viewed. Even if they were viewed with the most respectful

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of intentions on the part of the viewer, the photographs constitute a step away from the sanctity of the ceremony and thus desacralize it. The ceremony is understood to take place in eternal time, whereas the *document* of the ceremony is a product of ordinary, profane time. To capture a sacred event and lock it into an artificial, eternal present is to deny the unfathomable character of the sacred. It is similar thinking that preferences the oral tradition above written literature.

In addition, the viewer is forced into the role of subject, and the image is forced into the role of object. Once something becomes an object, it can be owned and diminished and reinterpreted in infinite ways by the subject. At the very least, an artificial category of Otherness has been constructed, and this in itself is problematic. In Western thought we articulate this with the reminder that "map is not territory." Native thought has always known this. Indeed, to require such a reminder is to indicate a certain intrinsic comfort with the notion of Otherness.

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TREE DAY

The Purification days culminate in what is called Tree Day, in which everyone goes out to the woods to collect the sacred tree and bring it back to the Sundance grounds. This tree will stand at the center of the arbor and will serve as the sacred center of most of the ceremonies throughout the Sundance. The tree ceremony takes most of the day, and it engages the entire community, which includes all members of the Creation — meaning humans, departed ancestors, plants, the "eagle nation," the "buffalo nation," and so forth. As we have noted, there is constant invocation of *mitakuye 'oyasin* — "all my relations." I came to learn that this was not just a platitude, but it was understood quite literally.

This means that elders as well as the very young are involved, and never did I detect a hint of patronizing. We are all related, and even if we might be a big, dysfunctional family, we do exist as a unit and everyone's presence is necessary to make it work. The first stroke of the hatchet

in the inaugural chopping of the tree was performed with great solemnity by a very young girl — about the age of four or five. The final part of the ceremony, held at the Sundance grounds many hours later, consisted of the tree's trunk being wrapped in a star quilt that had been handmade for the occasion by one of the oldest grandmothers of the community. With great tenderness and respect, several teens accompanied this slowly moving lady in her walker as she approached the tree with her gift. During the hours in between these events, a large group of men took turns chopping the tree and arduously carrying it to its destination in the sacred arena several miles away. All of this was accompanied by the chanting and praying of the elder Sundance chiefs, whose prayers invoked the Great Mystery — in connection with all of the family of the Creation — to participate in this sacred event.

I was aware that some of the songs were addressed to the *wanbli oyate*, that is, the "eagle nation" or "eagle people." The eagle holds a particular spiritual significance, and, like other "relatives" in nature, it is not considered as an ontological stranger, but rather as a peer among the great web of beings both animate and inanimate. There was particular concern that the "eagle nation" somehow make its presence known, for this would be a sign that blessings had been conferred upon the inauguration of the Sundance.

We had descended deep in the woods, having trudged through a hilly area, down through underbrush to reach the tree that had been selected and prepared ceremonially by the medicine men many months before. It seemed to take forever for the men to bear this huge tree up and out through the difficult incline of the woods and eventually out into a clearing toward the road. There was quite a bit of drama as the heavy tree trunk began to slip out of their grasp, for if any of the limbs were to touch the ground it would spell disaster — a sign that the Sundance would have to be canceled on the spot. The successful emergence of the tree out into the clearing, therefore, was a moment of collective celebration. But something else happened at that moment, too.

THE TREE CEREMONY TAKES MOST OF THE DAY,
AND IT ENGAGES THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY,
WHICH INCLUDES ALL MEMBERS OF THE
CREATION — MEANING HUMANS, DEPARTED
ANCESTORS, PLANTS, THE "EAGLE NATION," THE
"BUFFALO NATION," AND SO FORTH. AS WE HAVE
NOTED, THERE IS CONSTANT INVOCATION OF
MITAKUYE 'OYASIN — "ALL MY RELATIONS."

THE EAGLE HOLDS A PARTICULAR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE, AND, LIKE OTHER RELATIVES IN NATURE, IT IS NOT CONSIDERED AS AN ONTOLOGICAL STRANGER, BUT RATHER AS A PEER AMONG THE GREAT WEB OF BEINGS BOTH ANIMATE AND INANIMATE.

Just as the tender and auspicious beginnings of the Sundance were hanging in a balance, and the tree had been moved successfully to its initial, safe ground, there was a tremendous screeching sound from above. At first I didn't know what it was, but immediately I followed the gaze of others. There in the sky directly above us appeared two tremendous eagles, dipping low enough to be seen quite clearly, circling together and emitting cries that were received with joy and amazement by the group. Clearly the eagle nation was reporting glad tidings from above.

If you share any of the awe and excitement that I felt that day, you are getting a sense of what has been called "seeing with a native eye" (Tolken 56). As a non-Native, I don't suppose I'll ever fully attain that type of perception, and in a way this doesn't matter. What matters, I think, is that one catch enough of a glimpse of it to understand how powerful and widely encompassing this perspective is, and to recognize that for Native peoples, such a worldview epitomizes right relationships.

THE FOUR DAYS OF THE SUNDANCE

At the end of Tree Day, everyone went to sleep exhausted but equally anticipating the next day, when the Sundance proper would begin. The Sundance ceremony is conducted within a circular arena around which an arbor has been constructed for the supporters and other guests. The sacred tree, adorned with prayer ties and flags, is situated in the center. The dancers enter the arena through one of four entrances, or "gates," marking each of the cardinal directions. The "dance" itself takes place over the course of four days. It begins in the predawn darkness with the loud beat of a drum. The Sundancers proceed into the arena single-file and clockwise through the West gate, moving slowly to the drumbeat and shifting into a dance step as the rhythm picks up and the singers culminate in the opening songs that welcome in the dancers and the appearance of the sun itself. The dancers are arranged into specific groups, and they move in choreographed formations while performing the ceremonies throughout the course of the day, from dawn until dusk.

During the four days of the dance the Sundancers undergo a strict fast. At some Sundances, food is prohibited for the entire four days. Where I attended, the dancers are allowed one meal a day – in the evening – but otherwise they may ingest neither food nor water. The prohibition against water actually begins during the Purification period. For a total of eight days, then, the Sundancers exist in a state of *wakan* – holiness – and part of this distinction is the abstention from the life-giving element of water. Not only may they not drink water, they may not allow it to touch their bodies at all during this time. Prayer, fasting, and sacrifice mark the qualities of the Sundance, and to abstain from contact with water is to force one into a deep contemplation of the sanctity of the most basic of elements, without which none of us could live.

PRAYER, FASTING, AND SACRIFICE MARK THE QUALITIES OF THE SUNDANCE, AND TO ABSTAIN FROM CONTACT WITH WATER IS TO FORCE ONE INTO A DEEP CONTEMPLATION OF THE SANCTITY OF THE MOST BASIC OF ELEMENTS, WITHOUT WHICH NONE OF US COULD LIVE.

OTHERNESS

Now, to return to the questions of Otherness. I would suggest that one of the strongest factors in determining how we define Other has to do with how one perceives one's place in the universe. Are we as "human people" on somewhat equal footing with the "eagle people," the "thunder beings," the "buffalo people," the "rock people," the "tree people," and so forth...or are we not? For those who claim a clear and strong connection, their entire sense of reality and meaning is called into question when those relationships are stripped away, negated, or otherwise destroyed. For those who do not share this view, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend its foundational meaning in the everyday lives of its adherents. This is why so many of the initial contacts between Native peoples and missionaries went awry. The indigenous peoples might initially welcome the Stranger as yet one more voice, another perspective, another relative to sit in the sacred circle, offering a different vision but one that could fit within the larger framework of inclusiveness.

The original missionaries, for the most part, entered with an either-or agenda. The only way they could imagine a cooperation with the Other was if the Other became wholly like themselves...and the only way this could be

From Joseph Murphy,
Santería: African Spirits in America

3

BOTÁNICA

If we would walk along the streets of any Hispanic neighborhood in New York, wedged between the busy groceries and newsstands we might see small retail stores called *botánicas*. To the uninitiated, their merchandise must look mysterious indeed: candles and beads, herbs and oils, cauldrons and crockery, and plaster statues of Catholic saints. Yet, for those who know their meaning, each of these items has a part to play in *santería*, the religion of the *orishas* in New York. *Santería* came to New York in the heads and hearts of Cuban emigrants, who came in waves after the revolution of 1959. It has prospered here, bringing growing numbers of Puerto Rican and black Americans into the way of the *orishas*. If we enter a *botánica*, we can get our first taste of this ancient African spiritual path in modern America.

This particular *botánica* is called La Caridad del Cobre and is found in the middle of a bustling Cuban neighborhood in the Bronx. In its picture window is a huge, life-sized statue of its patron, La Caridad del Cobre, the Virgin of Charity, Cuba's patron saint.¹

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Caridad appeared to humble fishermen and left them her holy image, which came to be enshrined at the town of Cobre at Cuba's eastern tip. Today her plaster image reveals a beautiful dark lady in perfect repose, crowned and holding a wise royal child. At her feet are the three fishermen, awestruck, hands clasped in adoration.

In the *botánica's* window, Caridad is attended by a number of smaller statues of the important saints and virgins of Cuban folk piety—the dark Lady of Regla, crippled Saint Lazarus on his crutches, regal Saint Barbara with crown and sword.

But these are not only Catholic saints. To the initiated, they are just the public faces of more puissant and mysterious spirits, the *orishas*. The Lady of Regla is the Catholic face of Yemaya, lovely mother of the seas. Saint Lazarus is a public way of representing Babaluaye, the *orisha* of disease and healing. Saint Barbara is Shango, the great thunder king in the guise of a woman. And Caridad, the beautiful patroness, is Oshun, the sweet river goddess.

Some might see these Catholic images as disguises for the *orishas*, ways to preserve a secret tradition while pretending to practice another. It is true that secrecy has been vital to preserve the integrity of the tradition and protect it from the intolerance of bigots. Prejudice and oppression have taught the children of the *orishas* to be prudent in how they present their soul life to outsiders. Still, thoughtful devotees maintain that the Catholic saints are not disguises for the *orishas* but rather personae. They say that the saints are *caminos*, “ways” of the *orishas*, ways that the *orishas* manifest themselves to the Catholic world. Just as the Catholic church believes that the Virgin Mary manifests herself in different ways to different cultures, so these *santeros* have sought a universal vision of the *orishas*. For them, the *orishas* are capable of appearing to ordinary Catholics as pallid white saints and to *santeros* as the invisible forces of *ashe*.

The window scene of the *botánica* is reminiscent of the courtly serenity of the Yoruba temple, but, once we go inside the store, we are overwhelmed by a riot of merchandise for sale. Shelves and glass cases are crammed full of religious articles. One large case is devoted entirely to necklaces of brightly colored beads, each coded to a particular *orisha*: yellow or gold for Oshun, blue and white for Yemaya, pure white for Obatala, red and white for Shango. The beads themselves are cheap plastic, but some are finely strung with meticulous at-

tention to numerical patterns. Each *orisha* manifests in different *caminos*, and the patterns must reflect which *caminos* the devotee wishes to invoke.

In fact, everything in the *botánica* is color and number coded to the *orishas*. Spiritual work done with Oshun, for example, should be done in fives and with the color yellow. In order to focus her life-giving *ashe* on their problems, devotees will light for her five yellow candles, offer her five yellow cakes, and wear yellow beads in various groupings of five, depending on her *camino*. These are her mystical coordinates that put her *ashe* to work for her human children. A complete chart of the *orishas* is given on pages 42 and 43.²

Piled high in unlikely corners are large crockery tureens in a variety of colors. These are *soperas*, great lidded bowls that will contain the most fundamental symbol of the *orishas'* presence—their holy stones.

In so many myths of the *orishas*, we are told that they left the primordial community of Ile-Ife by descending into the earth. All that remained of their presence were stones, still resonating with their *ashe*. Devotees can find these *orisha* stones among ordinary ones if they can learn to listen carefully enough. For the *orisha* stones are alive with the *orisha's ashe*. They are most likely to be found in the element most expressive of their force—ocean stones for Yemaya, river pebbles for Oshun, meteorites for the thunder king Shango.

The stones can answer that they are alive with an *orisha's ashe* by means of a number of oracles derived from Yoruba Ifa. The fall of coconut or cowrie shells, the patterns of Ifa chains or palm nuts, can be interpreted to listen to the stones' deep voice. If the stones are indeed alive, they are to be collected in a *sopera* whose color represents that *orisha*. There they are venerated as the *fundamentos* of the *orisha*, the most fundamental, tangible representation of the *orisha* on earth.

As embodiments of the *orishas*, the stones must be treated as the living things that they are, and so they are lovingly bathed in cooling herbs, cleaned and oiled, and fed with the blood of animals.³

Orisha	Saint	Principle	Number	Color
Agayu	Christopher	fatherhood	9	green, red, & yellow
Babaluaeye	Lazarus	illness	17 or 13	black or light blue
Eleggua	Nino de Atocha, Anthony of Padua	way-opener, messenger, trickster	3	red & black
Ibeji	Cosmus & Damien	children	2	those of Oshun & Shango
Inle	Rafael	medicine	7	green
Obatala	Mercedes	clarity	8	white
Ogun	Peter, Santiago	iron	7	green & black
Olokun	Regla	profundity	7	blue & white
Orula	Francis	wisdom, destiny	16	green & yellow
Osanyin	Joseph	herbs	3	green
Oshosi	Norbert	hunt/ protection	7	lavender & black or blue & orange
Oshun	Caridad	eros	5	yellow
Oya	Candelaria	death	9	maroon, red, or brown
Shango	Barbara	force	4 or 6	red & white
Yemaya	Regla	maternity	7	blue & white

Foods	Dance Posture	Emblem
fish, meat	long paces, carries children	oshé
tobacco, rum, doves, hens	infirm, lame	crutches, reeds, & cownies
white chicken, rooster, opossum, rum	buffoonery	hooked staff
—	children's play	twins
—	fishing	leaves, earth
♀ goats, pigeons	calm reality	whiteness, fly whisk
♂ roosters, dogs	bellicose	iron
rooster, spiced rum	seas	shell
chicken, dove	dances through Oshun	ifa
rodents	does not dance	leaves, forest
doves, rum, guinea hens	hunting calls	bow & arrow
♀ white hen, goat, sheep	coquette	fan, gold, peacock feather
only fowl, hens, doves	bacchanal, storm	lance
♂ rooster, sheep, goat, pig, bull	aggression, violent acrobatics	oshé
duck, turtle, goat	smooth or raging seas	fan shell

The *orishas*, like all living things, must eat. Few aspects of the way of the saints is more misunderstood than blood sacrifice. To outsiders, it often appears as the essence of primitivity, for some romantically authentic, to others revolting and barbarous. But it is really none of these things. It is a way to show the relationship and interdependence of living things.

Animals die so that human beings may live. Urbanites forget the source of their food, that their consumption of beef or chicken—even vegetables—requires the death of living things. All are related by delicate exchanges and balances of nature that make human life possible. In *santería*, sacrificial animals are never slaughtered cruelly or wantonly. The cuts are quick and clean, and their flesh is eaten by all at the great feasts. Their blood is offered to the *orishas* to show human beings their dependence on the world outside them and to give back to the invisible world something of what it gives to the visible. *Santeros* are naturally reluctant to discuss animal sacrifices with outsiders, and we must be patient if we are to learn more.

In the apartments of New York, these blood offerings require containers like the *soperas*. They hold the fundamental stone symbols of the *orishas*, they contain the sacrifices that are offered through them, and they conceal the sacred stones from the eyes of the profane.

As befits a king, Shango has his own kind of *sopera*, the *batea Shango*, always in wood and always elevated on a wooden mortar stool, the *pilón*. *Santeros* in New York have not forgotten Shango's shrines and the Yoruba equation of kingly power and fertility. And they have remembered Shango's dispute with Ogun, the blacksmith, so that all Shango's tools are of wood, especially his mighty *oshe*, the double-headed ax. We can see a variety of *oshes* in the *botánica*. Some are just crude ax shapes sawn from plywood, but others are delicate and decorated with tribal marks like their Yoruba prototypes.

When the meaning of the *soperas* and *bateas* becomes clear, we might notice on a shelf behind the counter a neat

row of little iron cauldrons no more than six inches high. They are fire blackened with rounded bottoms perched on three nubby legs. These will contain the *fundamentos*, the fundamental symbols, of Ogun, miniature tools of the blacksmith's forge—an anvil, a rake, a hoe, a pick, a machete, a spade, a pike, a sledge. Like the stones of the other *orishas*, Ogun's tools are worked from the ore of the earth and receive warming blood and cooling herbs. They are the medium through which Ogun eats and works.

As a warrior *orisha*, Ogun's tools are also weapons of war. Ogun fights for his children, and his tools must be in a constant state of preparedness. They must be kept clean and well oiled with palm oil. As the devotee grows in the religion, he or she will learn how to use the tools as symbolic medicines to protect against those who would do the devotee harm.

Beside Ogun's tools, the *botánica* has placed a stylized bow and arrow wrought in iron, the fundamental symbol of Oshosi, *orisha* of the hunt. Oshosi and Ogun are natural companions, for both blaze paths through the forest and both are knowledgeable about the secret powers of forest leaves. These rugged, independent *orishas* walk together to protect the devotee from the jungle of dangers outside one's doorstep. Life continues to be hard for the children of the *orishas*. New York's dangers may not be those of Cuban slavery, but devotees still need spiritual toughness to battle the hard world of the inner city.

Ogun and Oshosi often walk with a third companion, whose fundamental symbols are usually kept out of sight. Yet, in a small case on the floor behind the counter, a sharp observer may see a cluster of small cones of grey concrete about three inches high. Embedded in the concrete in the right places are three small cowrie shells forming a pair of eyes and a jagged, open mouth. These are rough busts of the *orisha* Elegguá, opener of the paths of *ashe*.

Elegguá is the Cuban Lucumi name for Eshu, perhaps derived from the Western Yoruba praise name Eshu-Elegba.⁴

CHAPTER THREE

Like his African counterpart, New York's Eleggua is a powerful, restless observer of the human condition. He is sometimes imagined as a little boy, a mischievous trickster fond of dangerous practical jokes. At other times, he is a serious monitor of human behavior, gatekeeper to the world of the *orishas* and messenger to Olodumare.

These images of trickster and monitor of conscience have prompted some devotees to find correspondences between Eleggua and the Christian idea of the Devil. Purists are quick to point out that Eleggua is not a force for evil like the Dantean Prince of Darkness lurking in Christian mythology. Yet Eleggua does resemble the Advocate of the book of Job, restlessly overturning human complacency.⁵

Eleggua's conical shape is a convenience to contain medicines that energize the concrete to convey hard, aggressive *ashe*. He is properly placed in the home of a devotee at the threshold, and, together with the other warrior *orishas*, Ogun and Oshosi, he guards the door against intrusive forces from the jungle beyond.

The concrete Elegguas in the *botánica* are hollow and inert, waiting for an herbalist's touch to transform them into the *orisha* at the threshold, who opens the way to his devotees and closes the door against a hostile world.

In a long glass case next to the beads is the real focus of the *botánica* that gives the store its name. This is the botanical merchandise of packets and dried clusters of herbs sacred to the *orishas*; herbs to make holy infusions, to focus and channel *ashe*. *Santeros* find that herbs impregnated with *ashe* have amazing powers to cure body and soul.⁶ Blessed in ceremonies to Obatala, elecampane can cure bronchitis. Consecrated by Shango, sarsaparilla will alleviate nervous disorders. Oshun's river fern can be infused into bathwater to relax the mind and turn the evil intentions of others back on them.

Herbs can be made to energize spiritual medicines. Bits and pieces of small symbolic objects can be tied together and infused with the appropriate herbs to protect the wearer from evil influence. *Santeros* call these protective bundles *niche osain*, medicines sacred to Osanyin, *orisha* of forest leaves.

BOTÁNICA

Osanyin is imagined as a leaf man, with one leg like a long stem.⁷ He hides in the forest and yields his secrets only to those who know where to look. This relationship with Osanyin made the old *santeros* true botanists, some with staggering knowledge of thousands of plants and their properties. Osanyin's fundamental symbol is a short staff called an *osun*.⁸ We see them now on the upper-most shelf of the *botánica*, six-inch steel dowels, surmounted by a small cup rimmed with little bells on chains. Fixed to the lid of each cup is a two-inch steel rooster. The cup will contain *ashe*-filled herbal medicines; the rooster plays on Yoruba associations between birds and magical powers as well as the sacrificial blood that releases the herbs' power.

Herbs can be medicines for the *orishas* as well as for human beings. The *orishas* are volatile spirits who can have both benign and wrathful incarnations. A devotee's love of an *orisha* is always tempered by a respect for a much greater force. Shango wields blazing thunderbolts; Oshun is a passionate woman who cannot be scorned. As the red blood of sacrifices warms and empowers the *orishas*, green herbs can cool their overheated *ashe* when their stones are bathed in fresh, herbal water.

Herbs keep the *orishas* happy and serene and keep their human children healthy in body and soul. They are at the heart of the religion, and the herbmaster is its most vital office. Above everything else, the herbs are what make the religion work, and their properties and symbolic meanings are the most closely guarded secrets of the way of the *orishas*.⁹

The *botánica* is nothing if not catholic in its technology of spiritual work. Many patrons will supplement their work with the *orishas* with other systems of spirituality. The entire back wall of the store is devoted to shelves of twelve-inch votive candles in all the colors of the rainbow. *Santeros* have learned from Catholic liturgies that the powers of saints can be focused on the problems of the living by showing the pure flame of devotion at the feet of their images. Many *santeros* will supplement the African style of devotions to the *orishas* with more orthodox Catholic veneration of their saintly coun-

CHAPTER THREE

terparts. The *botánica* does a brisk business in the rosaries, Bibles, prayer books, scapulars, medals, and statues familiar to Catholic folk piety everywhere.

Some patrons of the *botánica* are said to "cross" (i.e., to supplement) the way of the *orishas* with spiritualist séances. The writings of the nineteenth-century French spiritualist Alain Kardec continue to be enormously popular in the Hispanic world.¹⁰ In the spiritualist tradition of *mesa blanca*, the world of European mediumship and that of the *orishas* has been brought together ("crossed"). The *botánica* carries large supplies of florida water, the universal solvent and conductor of these spirits.¹¹

These more European devotions are sometimes derided by purists faithful to the African origin of santería. They especially deplore the mass-produced good-luck charms and amulets that the *botánica* offers to the credulous—lucky number books, anti-jinx spells, get-rich-quick pendants. The herbs have even become modernized into aerosol sprays of doubtful content. Distanced from the ritual acts that can truly energize an object spiritually, these objects only alienate the devotee from the healing work of preparation. It is training and devotion that make a *santero*, say the purists, and only that knowledge and love can further *ashe*.

Most *botánicas* sell lottery tickets, and patrons sometimes buy one for the *orishas*, hoping the spirits will bring the lucky number to pass. At several stations in the Botánica de la Caridad del Cobre, small Plexiglas boxes have been fixed before statues of the *orishas*, and they are usually filled with coins, bills, and lottery tickets.

Despite its commercialism, the Botánica de la Caridad del Cobre offers the genuine *santero* a refuge from a much colder world outside. Thrust into the most urban world imaginable, the *botánica* preserves something of the forest, the pure and wild realm of Osanyin, and so the world of the *orishas* in New York.

THE RELIGION

As a religion, santería needs a special kind of interpretation that will do justice to the spiritual world of its devotees. Religions offer their practitioners a unique dimension of experience that motivates them to interpret their whole lives by it. If we are truly to understand santería, we must take this special world seriously. We must attempt to see it as *santeros* do—alive, powerful, real.

But our attempt to make this leap of understanding runs into a host of problems of method. In the same way that we asked whether whites can interpret the experience of blacks, we wonder whether non-*santeros* can interpret santería. Must we believe in santería in order to understand it? If we leave our objectivity behind, will our interpretation of santería be only a projection of our own religious experience? A variety of scholars have wrestled with these questions, and I want to show how their ideas contribute to the interpretation of santería.

UNDERSTANDING A RELIGION

In their hopes to create a science of human behavior, anthropologists and sociologists have worked to develop methods that will screen the subjective experience of the researcher from the data being collected and described. American anthropologists often speak of two ways of categorizing and in-

terpreting data to arrive at objectivity in cultural description: the emic and the etic.¹ The goal of emic ethnography is to present cultural data purely in the categories of thought used by a member of that culture. While the ethnographer must systematize those categories and present them in English, the end result would produce an ethnography with which the "native" would agree and that would be able to predict "native" exegesis of new data. Etic analysis, on the other hand, seeks to interpret cultural data by means of the categories applied by the researcher from his or her own, presumably Western, culture.

Obviously, both these methods work together to help the outsider understand santería. Alone or together, they expand our knowledge of something strange to us as outsiders, something that eludes our grasp and needs to be understood. But they miss something too, something at the heart of the ceremony. The *bembe* is also something that is not strange to us; it calls on something that the outsider and the *santero* share. When the outsider participates in a *bembe*, he or she also experiences something that is crucial to examine in order to interpret the ceremony correctly.

The German sociologist Max Weber recognized that the objective interpretation of human meaning necessarily involved the subjective viewpoint of the observer.² Weber argued that we can understand these meanings only by empathy, by feeling that they conform to ideal types of meaning shared by all human beings. We have to make the unverifiable assumption that we are able to understand others before we can make verifiable statements about what we have understood about them.

When we turn to religious behavior, the necessity of empathy takes on particular challenges. The German-American scholar Joachim Wach speaks of a "hermeneutic circle," an interpretive double bind that demands that the observer share religious meaning with those he or she is attempting to understand. Acknowledging a debt to historian Wilhelm Dilthey, Wach writes,

Concretely stated, the religious content of myth cannot be found alone in a careful and thorough, though necessary, analysis of its ideological elements and motives; rather, the entire personality of him who studies and understands is spoken to. If he wishes to understand the attitude from which the mythological faith and custom have issued, he must respond. An inner aliveness and broadness is necessary if we actually wish to understand other religions.

... Hermeneutics demands that he who wishes to understand other religions must have a sense for religion and in addition the most extensive knowledge and training possible.³

Following Wach, I believe that santería, as a religion, requires this "sense" of religion in the observer in order for him or her to understand it properly. It is impossible for the outsider to know what santería means to the *santero*, but this religious sense in the observer can only bring him or her closer to what a *santero* believes than attempts at detached objectivity.

In his classic study of religious experience, *The Idea of the Holy*, the German theologian Rudolf Otto shows little patience with scholarly detachment in the study of religion:

The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no farther; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings.⁴

Perhaps Otto goes too far with this jibe at scientific detachment, but his point is well taken. Some level of empathy

and identification with the religious experiences of others is a prerequisite for understanding their religion.⁵ One does not have to believe in santería in order to understand it, but one must be willing to believe in something. The observer must find the empathy to see that *santeros* feel as deeply about santería as the observer does about his or her most deeply held convictions. As *santeros* have repeatedly told me, the *orishas* will respond only if the seeker gives something of himself or herself to them. So this interpretation of santería is indeed a projection of my own religious experience, but it is a projection shaped by years of listening to Padrino, the drums, and the *orishas*.

If santería is to be understood as a religion, beyond the social and cultural forces that have shaped it, we must develop an idea of religion as a category in itself. What is religion besides a cultural focus or a means of social differentiation and cohesion?

Rudolf Otto argued that the origin and essence of religion is to be found in deep emotional experiences that he called "numinous."⁶ A numinous experience is uniquely religious, shared in greater and lesser intensities by all religious people of every culture and historical epoch. The heart of religion for Otto is an awesome, numinous experience of a "wholly other" reality, a holy or sacred dimension of existence that stands apart from and beyond the ordinary world in which we live.

The historian of religions Mircea Eliade expands on Otto's ideas by seeing religion as a dialectic between these realms of experience—the sacred, eternal world of the gods and the profane, ordinary world of time and change.⁷ The sacred world provides the models or archetypes for meaningful action in the profane world of ordinary life. Eliade writes,

The point to be emphasized is that, from the beginning, religious man sets the model he is to attain on the trans-human plane, the plane revealed by his myths. One becomes truly a man

only by conforming to the teachings of the myths, that is by imitating the gods.⁸

The more religious man is, the more paradigmatic models does he possess to guide his attitudes and actions.⁹

Myths symbolize the content of the sacred world. Rituals, by aligning human actions with mythic models, allow human beings to approach the sacred world. Religion, then is a relation to a sacred world, an attempt to align human actions with those of a world of eternal significance. As a religion, santería can be understood in the light of this dialectic of sacred and profane. Santería is the way of the saints, the way that *santeros* living in the profane, ordinary world of the Bronx approach the sacred, eternal world of the *orishas* at Ile-Ife.

SANTERÍA ONTOLOGY

The sacred world of santería is motivated by *ashe*. *Ashe* is growth, the force toward completeness and divinity. The Belgian missionary Placide Tempels called this view of the world an ontology of dynamism, that is, a belief that the real world is one of pure movement.¹⁰ In fact, the real world is one not of objects at all but of forces in continual process. *Ashe* is the absolute ground of reality. But we must remember that it is a ground that moves and, so, no ground at all. To conceive this ground, in order to speak of it as something rather than nothing, *santeros* speak of Olodumare, the Owner of Heaven, the Owner of all Destinies. Olodumare is the object of *ashe*, the ultimate harmony and direction of all forces.

As one enters more deeply into santería, one sees this vision of *ashe* with increasing clarity. All things that we are accustomed to call beings are, in reality, *caminos*, ways of *ashe* that can be liberated and channeled by those who understand them. The person of wisdom, the true *santero*, learns to work

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with these forces. By words and actions, *ashe* can be awakened in what seem to be objects and people to bring about the fulfillment of their destinies. Stones, leaves, animals, and people are vibrations brought into harmony by *santeros* to further them on their road in the way of Olodumare.

Ashe is a current or flow, a "groove" that initiates can channel so that it carries them along their road in life. The prayers, rhythms, offerings, tabus of santería tune initiates into this flow. They are lifted out of the self-absorption and frustration of ordinary life into the world of power where everything is easy because all is *ashe*, all is destiny.

The *santero* reaches this world by movement. When I have attended santería ceremonies, I have been reminded of those old British anthropologists pronouncing on "savage" religion as "danced religion."¹¹ For, in spite of themselves, they were right. What they did not know is the profound religious insight that African dancing reveals. Santería is a danced religion because dancing expresses the fundamental dynamism of *ashe*. Words, even a religious encyclopedia like Ifa, cannot express the mystery. The world is a dance. Its meaning lies in its constant movement. The dance is the expression of this mystery and more: it is its technology.

Ashe is liberated and channeled through dancing; the person and the community are brought to the source, the real world. In Eliade's terms, the dancers are brought back to the real time of the beginnings, the time of the myths when the *orishas* lived at Ile-Ife. The dancers become contemporaries of the gods.

The technology of santería dance may be neurobiological. Movement, rhythm, adrenaline, exhaustion, may trigger hypnotic states of mind that were imprinted in the brain during initiation.¹² The insight that *santeros* bring to this explanation is the ontological claim of the religious—that the special states of mind brought on by dance reveal the world as it truly is, a world of unfiltered *ashe*. *Orisha* consciousness is true consciousness, and our ordinary view of the world is derived from it.

This ontological claim comes through in the derivation of the word *orisha*. The Yoruba theologian E. B. Idowu thinks that *orisha* is a contraction of the words *ori*, "head," and *sha*, "source," yielding something like "head source."¹³ When we remember that *ori* is that ancestral aspect of ourselves that chose our destiny before we were born, an *ori-sha* would be the source of this self. Abstracted further, we may say that an *orisha* is the source of that consciousness that makes us what we are.

Santeros in New York have told me that an *orisha* is *el dueño de tu cabeza*, the "lord of your head." This may mean little more than a deity above and beyond oneself, a lord in the medieval sense of one's social superior. Yet I am led to think that, if this deity is lord over one's "head," one's consciousness, then the language of consciousness is the most appropriate way to interpret the meaning of *orisha*. The lord of one's head is the personification of a higher, truer consciousness of the world. Through the images of deities, santería is presenting a precise and profound ontology of consciousness.

Santería teaches not only that *ashe* is dynamic but also that it can be channeled into types. There are innumerable kinds of *ashe* as there are innumerable kinds of people in the world. A monotheistic perspective sees these as "hypostases," "ministers," "intermediaries," "manifestations," of one force.¹⁴ A polytheistic perspective recognizes intrinsic differences among our experiences of the world and sees these types representing the variety and possible ways of being in the world. While these experiences are theoretically infinite, there must be a limited number of types to be intelligible and useful as a typology of the sacred world. These are the *orishas*, the types of *ashe*.

Santeros have several overlapping ways of classifying the *orishas*. For example, *orishas* can be hot and cool. Shango, Ogun, and Babaluaye work through the fire of lightning, forge, and fever to heat up the *ashe* of the devotee in order to force change in the world. Osanyin, Inle, and Oshun cool through leaves, herbs, and fresh water, calming the hot head that impedes the devotee's vision of destiny.

There are also *orishas* of the sky and *orishas* of the earth. Obatala the sculptor and Orula the diviner work with Olo-dumare on high to shape and interpret our destinies. Nana and Babaluaye roam the earth choosing whom they will for illnesses, punishing or calling them to service.

There are *orishas* of the forest and *orishas* of the town. Osanyin is the lord of the forest, the genius of the wild leaves from which all the efficacy of santería ritual derives. Elegua, Ogun, and Oshosi are hunters who walk together outside the boundaries of the community. They are fearless and fearsome because they know the secrets of an unknown world. Within the town are the royal *orishas*: Obatala, king of Ife; Shango, king of Oyo; and Ogun, king of Ire. The royal *orishas* command the *ashe* of seniority, the power of connection to the world of the beginnings, Ile-Ife.

Finally, there is Elegua and all the other *orishas*. Elegua is the restless outsider betwixt and between worlds. He over-turns order and, by doing so, reveals it. Ifa is the senior *orisha* of destiny and order, but Elegua is the true *orisha* of divination because his randomness and unpredictability show the true order in the world. Out of the fall of shells and nuts, the order of our destinies becomes clear. Because Elegua disrupts our lives, we learn the patterns that control them. Santeros say that Elegua serves all the *orishas*, that each *orisha* has his or her own Elegua. Without Elegua and the disorder that he provokes, the *orishas* would all starve, for they would have no purpose. Human beings would have no need of them, and no sacrifices would be due them. Elegua provides the dynamism that moves the road of life.

We have seen that santería expresses a religious ontology, that is, a belief about what is ultimately real. Reality is *ashe*, vital force, and all the objects of the world are in reality forces of *ashe* in relation to each other. The *orishas* are the major types of *ashe* expressed in the mythological language of personality and narrative. Myths, Eliade tells us, reveal how the real world works. The myths of the *orishas* are timeless stories that provide models for human beings to imitate in order to live in the real world. By imitating and repeating the timeless

acts of the *orishas* in rituals, human beings can approach and align themselves with the real world of *ashe*.

THE WAY OF THE SAINTS: SANTERÍA RITUAL

Santería recognizes four principal ritual ways of approach to the world of the *orishas*: divination, sacrifice, trance, and initiation.

All santería ritual begins with divination, and all divination begins with a devotee's problem. Since *santeros* are often poor, the most pressing problems are generally very practical ones involving health, money, and love. Without the money for private physicians, and finding little but insensitivity and misunderstanding in overworked public institutions, *santeros* trust the world of the *orishas* for help with health problems. This is not to say that it is only deprivation that forces *santeros* to turn to the *orishas*. *Santeros* say that modern medicine treats only the symptoms of more basic spiritual problems. Padrino has told me several times that he always sends querents with medical problems to qualified doctors but that the basic problem will keep recurring until they understand that their illness is a message from the *orishas*. The same argument holds for problems of money and love. Poverty and wayward spouses are ultimately problems of the spirit, problems of the "head," which is out of tune, "not listening," to the call of the *orishas*.

It takes knowledge and insight to recognize the spiritual causes of ordinary problems, and it takes information to treat them. This is the realm of divination, the art of the awareness of destiny. Divination offers the means for interpreting the meaning of random events. With increasing subtlety and precision, Obi, *dilogun*, and Ifa divination open the devotee to the world of *ashe* by providing information. They offer models of divine action, stories of what the *orishas* and heroes did in Ile-Ife when they were faced with the same problem that querents face today. With absolute specificity, santería divination aligns human with divine action, opening the channels

of *ashe*. Divination is effective because, when the querent seeks meaning in chance, he or she establishes what psychologist Carl Jung calls a "synchronous" connection between timeless meaning and the moment the querent seeks meaning.¹⁵ The *odu* that falls for the *santería* querent was meant to fall, at that time and for that person. Divination gives the *santero* the knowledge of his or her destiny and specific models for action in order to take advantage of it.

Nearly all the problems and situations that divination reveals are resolved or furthered by deepening the devotee's relationship with the *orishas*. There is no firmer way for the devotee to show this relationship than through the symbolism of shared food, that is, in sacrifice. Sacrifice (*ebo*) creates bonds between human beings and *orishas*. It is a gift that opens up the channels of *ashe* by exchange. In divination, the *orishas* speak to human beings, diagnosing their needs and opening their destinies to fulfillment. In sacrifice, human beings respond, giving back to the *orishas* the *ashe* that is the sustenance of life.¹⁶

Though they are more powerful than human beings, the *orishas* are not omnipotent. Like all living things, they must be constantly nourished. A Yoruba proverb says that, without human beings, there would be no *orishas*. The *orishas* need the sacrifice and praise of human beings in order to continue to be effective.

Sacrifices can also be exchanges of another kind. The *orishas* can make terrible demands on their devotees, even to the point of threatening their lives. Sacrifices are gifts to propitiate the *orishas*, to give them the life that they need and to spare the devotee's own: *vida para vida*, say the *santeros*, life for life.

In a general sense, an *ebo* is any ceremony requested by an *orisha*, including purifying baths, feasts, or initiation ceremonies. More particularly, *ebos* are the offerings of foods requested by the *orishas* through divination. Each *orisha* has special foods that it enjoys. Yemaya, the ocean mother, prefers duck, turtle, and goat. Oshun, the lovely river maid, likes

fine cakes and white hens. Ogun, the virile iron master, insists on red and white roosters. Sometimes the *odus* of divination are very specific about which foods are to be offered to which *orishas*. The *dilogun odu* called *Eyioko*, for example, prescribes special offerings for one of six possible *orishas* speaking through it, plus two parrots, two coconuts, two eggs, and two doves. The *Ifa odu ogbe meji* related by Bascom requires a sacrifice of two black hens, two pigeons, two roosters, two pots, one arrow, one leg of a deer, and one feather of a parrot.¹⁷

The French anthropologist Dominique Zahan calls the African attention to sacrificial detail a "choelogy," a science of libations, by which the combination of sacrificial ingredients produces powerful and effective semantic statements.¹⁸ For *santeros*, specificity is the key to efficacy. One offers the *orisha* precisely what the *orisha* wants, where and when the *orisha* wants it, and in response to a particular situation for which the *orisha's ashe* is sought.

The theory behind all santería sacrifice is that the *orishas* consume the invisible *ashe* of the sacrifices that is instilled in or, better, liberated from them through consecration, the sacred words of the *moyuba* dedication. A *santero* once told Lydia Cabrera, "La sangre para el Santo, la carne para el santero," "Blood for the saint, meat for the *santero*."¹⁹ The *ashe* of the sacrifices is consumed invisibly in vegetable sacrifices and through the blood of the animal in animal sacrifices, which is sprinkled or poured on the fundamental symbols of the *orishas*. The blood of animals consecrated to the *orishas* strengthens their powers: once again, *vida para vida*, "life for life." When the blood is poured on the "heads" of the *orishas*, the sacred stones, or the prepared heads of the initiates, the *orisha* is fed, and the devotee shares in the *orisha's ashe*.

The most dramatic and intimate approach to the world of the *orishas* is the cultivation of a sacred state of consciousness induced by the drums and dances of the *bembe*. This consciousness, sometimes called trance or spirit possession by outsiders, collapses the sacred dialogue of divination and sacrifice into a single ritual encounter. In santería trance, the

channels of *ashe* are fully open as human dancers merge with divine rhythms.

It is difficult to find an English word that will describe this sacred consciousness. "Trance" connotes an inferior, suggestable state of awareness, while "spirit possession" implies to most Westerners a demonic influence. Yet santería mediums claim to remember nothing of their activities when in this altered state of awareness, so the term "trance" is not entirely unfounded. And since their behavior is controlled by the *orisha*, "possession" conveys something of the experience.

The basic problem rests on the understanding of this consciousness as religious. Santería presents an ontology of consciousness, the belief that certain states of awareness reveal the world as it truly is and that our ordinary awareness, while possessing its own validity, is dependent on this *orisha* consciousness.

If we recognize the limitations and possible misinterpretations of the word, "trance" is probably the easiest way to refer to this special awareness, especially if we remember that, for *santeros*, this "trance" is a special and genuine form of awareness.²⁰ *Santeros* themselves speak of *bajar el santo*, "the saint descending," or *el santo montado*, "the saint mounted," which places emphasis on the activity of the *orisha* in descending on or mounting the head of the medium. The "mounting" activity of an *orisha* refers to the medium's role as a "horse" whose activities are directed by an *orisha* rider.²¹

The most persistent misconception about trance is that it is frenzied or hysterical behavior. While the transition from ordinary to trance consciousness may involve some sudden, staggered movements among inexperienced mediums, once the *orisha* has fully mounted the medium his or her behavior becomes very precise indeed. The dances are tightly choreographed according to traditional models and are immediately recognizable to the congregation as reenactments of mythical themes. Sometimes these themes are simply gestures recalling the *orisha's* powers, such as Ogun swinging his machete or Oshosi drawing his bow. But the dances can be elaborate

pantomimed dramas that last for hours.²² When more than one *orisha* joins a *bembe*, they reenact their mythical relationships with each other. Ogun and Shango feud, Obatala asserts his authority over Shango, and Oshun plays cruel tricks on her rival Oba.

Even more important than the dance is the incarnated *orisha*'s capacity to give advice. Throughout the course of a *bembe*, an *orisha* may favor certain devotees with warnings, admonitions, and harangues. *Santeros* have told me that incarnated *orishas* can make startlingly accurate predictions about the personal lives of devotees and that one should always take their advice. One *santera* told me that she consistently hits the lottery on the numbers that *orishas* give to her.

These patterns of *orisha* behavior occur in a particular cultural context. Mediums generally have grown up in a culture surrounded by *santería* and have seen many *bembes* before they have ever been "mounted" themselves. It is impossible to say whether the medium learns trance behavior or learns to be a medium for trance behavior. The Franco-Brazilian ethnologist Pierre Verger writes of Yoruba trance and initiation, "He [the initiate] carries within himself the latent image of the god, impressed at the time of initiation on a mind free of all impressions and this image is revealed and manifested when all the favorable conditions are brought together."²³

When one is initiated into *santería* during the *asiento* ceremony, the *orisha* determined to be one's patron is "seated" inside one's "head." This ceremony is an incarnation in potential, which becomes realized when the *orisha* becomes manifest in the trance dance of the *bembe*. Following Verger, the American anthropologist Sheila Walker shows the complex relationship between the "head" of the devotee and the deity that mounts it by contrasting West African trance, which she characterizes as "mostly cultural," with Afro-Brazilian trance, which she argues is "cultural and psychological in equal portions." She writes,

In the traditional Dahomean and Yoruba cults in Africa only one deity was served by a devotee,

but possession by him was not expected to allow the expression of any personal tendencies. The benefit to the devotee was mainly the opportunity to be appreciated by others in such an exalted position. In Bahia possession by a god is supposed to express a facet of the devotee's personality, but although there are many deities, an individual may, in the traditional Yoruba cults, only be possessed by one.²⁴

Once again, the "place" of the *orisha* is ambiguous. Is the *orisha* a cultural category internalized by the medium? Or is it a psychological category emerging in culturally recognized forms? By saying that they do not remember their behavior during trance, *santeros* seem to deemphasize both the exalted status of the medium and the psychological aspects of trance. *Santeros* have repeatedly told me that it is not the medium who profits from trance but the community that enjoys the healing presence of the *orisha*. Yet observers have noted that the amnesia of mediums absolves them of responsibility for their trance behavior and so allows mediums special opportunities for uncensored self-expression.²⁵ Much of the things incarnated *orishas* say and do is aggressive and impolite, and they often reveal a great deal of gossip. Is trance not an opportunity for the powerless to set everyone straight?

I do not think that *santeros* would disagree with this kind of interpretation of trance if we remember that it is not the medium but the *orisha* who is telling the truth. What is interesting is that the outsider and the *santero* would agree that the *orisha* is a subconscious part of the medium's personality. The difference in the viewpoints is the ontological claim of the *santero* that the *orisha* is the real source of the medium's personality. For the outsider, it may be seen as a suppressed side of the personality giving vent to antisocial feelings; for the *santero*, it is the genuine and divine source of the personality and thus worthy of the deepest respect.

Santeros find the *orisha* both within and without. They see it as an influence from outside the person since it takes a

ceremony to "seat" one in the devotee's head. On the other hand, since the *orisha* is consciousness itself, it can be said to emerge through the human body as its material medium. In trance this force streams through human consciousness unhindered. The huge eyes of the medium open to a light shining from within.

This special awareness is a mark or sign of a deepening relationship with the *orishas*. With divination and sacrifice, it aligns the world of human beings with the world of the *orishas* and brings the devotee toward the reality of *ashe*. This process of growth *en santo*, "in saintliness," in *ashe*, is marked by ceremonies of initiation. Initiation both recognizes wisdom and imparts knowledge. The ceremonies show to the devotee and to the community the depth of the devotee's commitment to the *orishas* and his or her mastery of the techniques of invoking *ashe*.

Santeros speak of initiation as "making" the saint, *hacer el santo*. Mercedes made Obatala and Padrino made Ifa. This making suggests an active engagement on the part of the initiate. His or her involvement with the *orisha* creates the power of that *orisha*. One "makes" an *orisha* as one makes a commitment to an *orisha*, perhaps as one "makes" love with a lover. The *orisha* is not a static symbol to be had but a moving, flowing current to be enhanced, "made" by the devotee's commitment.

Although I have been using the word *santero* to refer to all santería devotees, only those who have made the saint can be properly called *santeras* or *santeros*. Their role is revealed in the Lucumi words *iyalocha* and *babalawo*. *Iya* means both mother and wife and baba both father and husband. *Ocha* is *orisha*. So initiates are both mothers and wives, fathers and husbands, of the *orishas*. They serve their *orishas* as spouses and give birth to *orishas* by making them in the heads of new initiates. Thus, an *orisha* is in a continual process of rebirth, being made anew everytime an *iyalocha* gives birth to a new godchild.

There are basically two roads of initiation in *santería*, which were once explained to me as *el camino del santo* and

el camino de Orula (the way of the saint and the way of Orula). Each road leads to a different kind of priesthood: the priesthood of the *orishas*, the *iyalocha* and *babalocha*, and the priesthood of Orula or Ifa, the *babalawo*. Each road leads to different kinds of divination as well: *santo* prepares the head for divination by trance, and Orula prepares the mind for the insight to interpret Ifa. While the road of *santo* is open to both men and women, the road of Orula is available only to men. The preponderance of *santo* initiates are women. I estimate that there are roughly four women to every man in Padrino's *ile*. I have been told that women are more "open" to the influence of the *orishas* than men are, and I wonder if the symbolism of sexual union is again the explanation. Since women are likely to be "mounted" by men in sexual intercourse, are women's spirits, their "heads," likely to be mounted by *orishas* in the spiritual intercourse of trance?

The road of Orula, the path of the *babalawo* priesthood, is open only to those few whom Ifa calls and who are willing to undergo the arduous training to master the oracle. Most devotees are called to the path of *santo*, the path of *orishas* who are seated in the head. In the *asiento* ceremony, the devotee makes the basic constellation of the most important *orishas*, whichever royal courtiers are demanded by the patron *orisha*, usually Obatala, Yemaya, Oshun, Shango, and often Oya. Later, many *santeros* go on to make other *orishas*, each with its own prayers and rituals to be mastered and special relationships to be fostered—*orishas* such as Babaluaye, Inle, and the Ibeji. If they are called to it, some *santeros* make a different Ogun than the one who walks with Elegua and Oshosi at the devotee's door. This Ogun confers the ability to use the sacrificial knife, *pinado*, in order to offer larger, four-footed animals to the *orishas*. With each new initiation, the devotee is brought more fully into the community of the *orishas* and the real world of Ile-Ife.

When I received Elegua and the other warrior *orishas*, I was making my first step toward a relationship with *ashe*. I learned some elementary Lucumi prayers in order to address Elegua. I learned how to offer him nonanimal sacrifices of

water, rum, tobacco, and roasted corn. I learned to listen to his responses through *obi* divination. In the beginning, this give and take was awkward and stiff. Only gradually does the formality of a ritualized relationship become a vehicle to focus sincerity. As the relationship with the warriors develops, I will be ready for more complex and specific relationships with them and with the other *orishas*, and these will involve still more complex and specific prayers and offerings. It is only through this slow process of learning and giving that the secrets of santería will be revealed.

My interpretation of santería rests on my level of initiation. Understanding the *orishas* requires both the knowledge of the techniques of invocation and the experience of relating to another personality. It requires the willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to bring to life a friendship, or a love affair, or a marriage. This is why Madrina and Padrino keep calling on me to listen to the *orishas*. Growth *en santo* requires the active engagement of the devotee. This is also why the interpretation of my experience at the *bembe* remains closed to me. Its significance cannot become apparent until I am willing to make a further commitment to the *orishas* involved. The intimacy of trance usually requires the commitment of *asiento* initiation in the same way that society sanctions the intimacy of man and woman in marriage. In order to make this commitment, one must work to learn of the ways of another and work to be able to give of oneself to another. One must work in order to love.

As a devotee grows in this love, one particular *orisha* will begin to assert itself as the devotee's patron, and it is the love of this *orisha* that will provide the devotee with his or her basic orientation in life. *Asiento*, the ceremony of seating the *orisha* in the head of the devotee, seals a fundamental bond of consciousness between human being and *orisha*. The *iyawo* Mercedes received Obatala, and so a fundamental part of her consciousness is Obatala. After the rebirth drama of *asiento*, she entered a new life as Obatala, who now "owns" her head. Surrender to this *orisha* tunes her into the real world of *ashe*.

Through the very special and secret prayers that a devotee has learned during initiation, the relationship between human being and *orisha* becomes ever deeper. The world is revealed as a theater for the interaction of invisible powers, and the *orisha* within is an infallible guide to worldly success and heavenly wisdom. The spiritual exchange between human being and *orisha* becomes increasingly more fluid. The devotee no longer must listen to the call of the *orisha* because the voice is his or her very self. The prayers, sacrifices, divinations, and dances come to be seen as the outward manifestations of inner processes. Thus, santería culminates in a mysticism of identity between *orisha* and human being, not only in the trance consciousness of the *bembe*, but in everything that the *santero* does.

One time, a distinguished *santera* named Ayorinde came to visit Padrino's *ile*. She was tall and thin and very old, but she carried herself erectly. When I was introduced to her, I had that strange sensation of having known her a long, long time. She smiled very kindly at me as if she knew my thoughts, and this only made my feelings of unsettled wonder grow. After some polite small talk with my eyes locked on hers, I dared to ask a question. I asked, "What is an *orisha*?" Her gaze never wavered. She just said softly, "I am."

From Kalweit, Shamans, Healers, &
Medicine Men

6

THE TRANCE OF HEALING AND THE LOGIC OF TRANCE

It is as if heaven and earth become one.

Everything becomes radiantly bright.

It is like the experience of making love for the first time.

As though you were walking lost across a wide country road.

—The Indian SAORA ELWIN'S
descriptions of trance (1955, 476)

Trance means "having a *loa*," being possessed by a god. "Understanding that I must go when the *loa* enters means understanding that man and god cannot exist simultaneously," says Maya Deren (1975, 235), one of the few white people who learned through voodoo in Haiti how to become possessed. The first sign of trance for Deren is a "vulnerability" of the ego, a shaking of the foundations of the ego, which must dissolve and make room for other forces. Here is her experience of dancing:

The air seems heavy and wet, and, gasping, I feel that it brings no refreshment into my labouring lungs. My heart pounds in the pulse at my temple. My legs are heavy beyond belief, the muscles contracted into an enormous ache which digs deeper with every movement. My entire being focuses on one single thought: that I must endure.

I cannot say, now, why I did not stop; except that, beneath all this is always a sense of contract: whether, in the end, one be victor or

victim, it is to be in the terms one has accepted. One cannot default. So focused was I, at that time, upon the effort to endure, that I did not even mark the moment when this ceased to be difficult and I cannot say whether it was sudden or gradual but only that my awareness of it was a sudden thing, as if the pace which had seemed unbearably demanding had slipped down a notch into a slow-motion, so that my mind had time, now, to wander, to observe at leisure, what a splendid thing it was, indeed, to hear the drums, to move like this, to be able to do all this so easily, to do even more, if it pleased one, to elaborate, to extend this movement of the arms towards greater elegance, or to counterpoint that rhythm of the heel, or even to make this movement to the side, this time.

As sometimes in my dreams, so here I can observe myself, can note with pleasure how the full hem of my white skirt plays with the rhythms, can watch, as if in a mirror, how the smile begins with a softening of the lips, spreads imperceptibly into a radiance which, surely, is lovelier than any I have ever seen. It is when I turn, as if to a neighbour to say, "Look! See how lovely that is!" and see that the others are removed to a distance, withdrawn to a circle which is already watching, that I realize, like a shaft of terror struck through me, that it is no longer myself whom I watch. Yet it is myself, for as that terror strikes, we two are made one again, joined by and upon the point of the left leg which is as if rooted to the earth. Now there is only terror. "This is it!" Resting upon that leg I feel a strange numbness enter it from the earth itself and mount, within the very marrow of the bone, as slowly and richly as sap might mount the trunk of a tree. I say numbness, but that is inaccurate. To be precise, I must say what, even to me, is pure recollection, but not otherwise conceivable: I must call it a white darkness, its whiteness a glory and its darkness, terror. It is the terror which has the greater force, and with a supreme effort I wrench the leg loose—I must keep moving! must keep moving!—and pick up the dancing rhythm of the drums as something to grasp at, something to keep my feet from resting upon the dangerous earth. No sooner do I settle into the succour of this support than my sense of self doubles again, as in a mirror, separates to both sides of an invisible threshold, except that now the vision of the one who watches flickers, the lids flutter, the gasp between moments of sight growing greater, wider. I see the dancing one here, and next in a

different place, facing another direction, and whatever lay between these moments is lost, utterly lost. I feel that the gaps will spread and widen and that I will, myself, be altogether lost in that dead space and that dead time. With a great blow the drum unites us once more upon the point of the left leg. The white darkness starts to shoot up; I wrench my foot free but the effort catapults me across what seems a vast, vast distance, and I come to rest upon a firmness of arms and bodies which would hold me up. But these have voices—great, insistent, singing voices—whose sound would smother me. With every muscle I pull loose and again plunge across a vast space and once more am no sooner poised in balance than my leg roots. So it goes: the leg fixed, then wrenched loose, the long fall across space, the rooting of the leg again—for how long, how many times I cannot know. My skull is a drum; each great beat drives that leg, like the point of a stake, into the ground. The singing is at my very ear, inside my head. This sound will drown me! "Why don't they stop! Why don't they stop!" I cannot wrench the leg free. I am caught in this cylinder, this well of sound. There is nothing anywhere except this. There is no way out. The white darkness moves up the veins of my leg like a swift tide rising, rising; is a great force which I cannot sustain or contain, which, surely, will burst my skin. It is too much, too bright, too white for me; this is its darkness. "Mercy!" I scream within me. I hear it echoed by the voices, shrill and unearthly: "*Erzulie!*" The bright darkness floods up through my body, reaches my head, engulfs me. I am sucked down and exploded upward at once. That is all. (243ff.)

That is her trance experience: graphic, artistic, psychological. A landscape of feeling that arises from within extends before us. Maya Deren is a filmmaker and artist—maybe that is the reason.

Now, what aspects of her experience are characteristic of the process of trance? First there is the "vulnerability," the dissolution of the boundary between self and the world; then pain and suffering, which, however, disappear again as perception and concentration are increasingly narrowed by the rhythm of the drum and the movement of the body. This leads to a condition of spontaneity, of freedom, of unconstrained, unforced movement—Deren is not dancing, she is being danced. Now time leaps from image to image—in slow motion. The gaps between the moments of percep-

tion get bigger, but what is happening within the gaps? Emptiness, nothingness, non-ego, timeless space—fear, panic in the face of self-surrender, overwhelms her.

Then a doubling takes place. She sees herself from outside; there is a split between consciousness and body. This means that everything now happens as if by its own accord. There is no longer any deliberate, conscious dance step. There is neither effort nor exhaustion. The body has taken over. Depersonalization continues, but the “ego” is still there. Again there is fear, even terror, of letting go of the ego, and finally giving it up, abdicating. Terror is darkness. Joy is radiant white. A duality of fear and joy? But now the ambivalence is resolved. The decisive step toward self-surrender, toward the experience of the “white darkness,” takes place. White is sublimity, and darkness is terror. They are unified at the climax of the trance. In this emptiness, there is oblivion; here the body moves in the most sublime fashion. It and the self want to be completely free from taboos and the tormenting deceptions of the ego world. Outer and inner are now one: “My skull is a drum.” The real power latent in human beings breaks through: “‘Mercy,’ I scream within me.” The power takes over; the body is a mere instrument. This eruption of energy explodes her feeling of self. She explodes inside herself: this is the breakthrough to an altered state of consciousness, a rebirth.

Later, remembering her experience, she wrote:

I see everything all at once, without the delays of succession, and each detail is equal and equally lucid, before the sense of relative importance imposes the emphasis of eyes, the obscurity of nostril, which is a face. Yet even as I look, as if to remember forever this pristine world, already the forms become modulated into meanings, cease to be forms. (246)

Characteristic of trance is the dissolution of the world of things. What are things but fragments of existence that have been artificially excised from the wholeness of being and captioned, laden by us with a relative sense of meaning; entities that do not really exist for us except in a conditioned way? Word, action, thought, sensation—these dissolve and come together again afresh, but this time without boundaries separating them. Once we leave behind the

world of relative concepts, the radiant world with its radiant beings and radiant forms suddenly appears before us. Why it is that in the unconditioned state the world appears radiant, as everyone who has experienced altered states of consciousness reports in one form or another, I cannot say. Time and space and causality, in any case, pass away; sequence is extinguished. Deren perceives everything at once, independent of temporal sequence. Here she approaches, but only approaches, real enlightenment, *unio mystica*. This is trance as a preliminary form of enlightenment.

Larry Peters, an ethnologist, tried to learn trance from his Nepalese teacher Bhirendra. His master and the other students had already, through drumming, brought themselves to a state of spiritual ecstasy. Wild spasms ran through their bodies and, sitting cross-legged, they bounced into the air, sometimes as high as a half-meter. Peters describes how they performed the exercise over and over. He began to shake consciously and gradually let go, becoming “part of the beat itself.” After a while, the shaking in his legs became more automatic. Next his whole body began to shake, and he bounced all over the room. His attention was focused on his movements and his eyes were closed. But as soon as he became aware of his surroundings, the shaking stopped being automatic, and he felt fatigued.

Looking back on the drumming that night, it seems we played as fast as possible, everyone playing the same rhythm, bam-bam-bam, bam-bam-bam, in threes until the beating became even faster. The trembling seemed to evolve from conscious to automatic at the moment Bhirendra inserted a loud extra beat between two of mine, changing the rhythm and causing it to quicken. I’m sure he did this purposely and always used this method with his disciples. He made two or three of these drumming maneuvers before my drumming and shaking became automatic. At one point, my shaking continued until I felt a fleeting fear that I was losing control and being overwhelmed, at which point I became aware of my body trembling. It was a disturbing feeling, not very traumatic but nonetheless jolting. Afterwards, my heart pounded and I reasoned that my resistances were strong against surrendering to the experience. I hadn’t fully “let go.” . . .

Bhirendra took complete charge of the ritual; setting the pace, his

drumming echoed against the walls. I followed his beat. While my body was swaying, I lost myself in the music and began to shake. Bhirendra broke my pattern by inserting an extra beat or two in the rhythm, and my beating quickened. He repeated this three or four times and then I lost control of my movements. My heart pounded, I forgot about the shaking and drumming and felt my body rise up. There was a tremendous amount of energy. At first, the shaking seemed to emanate from my genitals. I felt the drum rise up into the air, and the nervous feeling went along with it. The area near my solar plexus began to tremble, and then my chest, shoulders, and finally my head. When I became conscious of these movements, fear swept through me. I felt a flash of heat throughout my body. Then my mind split off from my body. I watched my body shaking and jumping into the air as if my consciousness was separated from it. (Peters 1981a, 10-11, 13-14)

When Serge Bramly (1978) spoke with Brazilian Macumba priestess Maria-José, she gave him detailed information about behavior in trance. Her presentation provides us with a well-rounded picture of the trance process. Trance mediums offer the gods their bodies so that the gods can enter them and establish themselves there. The gods slip over their body the way a rider slips a bridle over a horse. The medium's own consciousness is disabled and serves the god in some fashion as a transmitting station. At the beginning of the trance the medium often has the feeling of being a child again. She disturbs the ceremony with her pranks and jostles the other dancers or the audience. Then she has to be made to behave. That is the childhood stage of the trance, as it were. After the trance, the medium is left with a pleasant feeling: her mind has been empty for a while and has been able to regenerate itself; the god has left its power behind. In other forms of trances, mediums become totally exhausted and are often sick and depressed for days afterward, feeling divested of all energy. If the medium's own energies are used for healing, a state of exhaustion results; the medium is then like a worn-down battery. By contrast, when a god or a spirit works through a person, no energy loss ensues. Apparently, there are various possible ways to work with energy—with one's own or an alien energy.

During the Macumba trance, the mediums smoke a great deal and drink several liters of brandy. Amazingly, they do not get drunk, though in a normal state they would be unable to tolerate such quantities of alcohol. Apparently some mechanism works here to neutralize the alcohol. Various other trance phenomena are also present, such as an increase in physical strength and a heightening of sensory functions. One hears, sees, and smells everything much better; the contents of the unconscious are more easily accessible; exertion brings about no decrease of energy; thought and feeling are intensified; and the capacity to learn is heightened. According to the followers of Macumba, it is the gods who drink the alcohol, not the mediums.

Maria-José's task is to guide the trances of the mediums and to calm down their gods, who often overestimate the mediums' strength; this can quickly harm the mediums. To avoid this, she intervenes and breaks off the trance. If a nonadept falls into a trance, she orders a change in the chanting or the drum rhythm in order to liberate the person from the god that has entered him or her.

Rhythm is a key element in bringing on a trance. Maria-José says:

Our gods react especially to rhythm. If the rhythm changes, the behavior of the gods changes too. The drums are our spokesmen to the gods. They are our most persuasive voices. Our instruments are no ordinary worldly drums. We consider them living beings. Drums are fed, they consume the offerings, and a woman having her period is not allowed to come in contact with them. It takes away their power, it distorts the voices of the drums. (Quoted in Bramly 1978, 46)

If the medium is able to go out of herself—that is, if the god rides her—then she becomes an "obedient mount." This is how a new medium is born. The gods seek her out and attack her during sleep or trance. Occasionally, a medium into whom a god has already entered takes hold of another person from among the spectators, carries him on her shoulders around the ceremonial hall, and offers him a ceremonial greeting. This is an expression that the god would like to embody himself in that person.

Once a medium senses that she has the gift of trance, she can begin to receive proper training. She moves into the *terreiro*, the

cult house, where an attempt is made to discover the identity of the god who has entered her. Once it is known who the god is, the medium and the god make a pact, like the marriage to a spirit husband practiced in many tribes. During the initiation, the novice is strengthened by baths of blood since she has not yet mastered receiving the god into her properly. She lies motionless the whole night long until the blood has dried and the contact between her and the god has been firmly established. Before this, she must live entirely alone in a small room. She is to speak as little as possible within the *terreiro* and have no sexual relations. She takes regular spiced baths. Bathing, says Maria-José, the "mother of the gods," is a "death by installments." That is, the baths are sacred to the god who enters them, and the personality of the novice is washed away bit by bit until it is entirely extinguished. The novice arises from the bath reborn; she is purified, consecrated; she has been divested of her old personality and now becomes a *yao*, a consort of her god.

Soon the novice experiences her first trance. The god and his "child" unite. Prayers to the god are sung, and dressed all in white, the initiate receives her god-consort alone in the middle of the *terreiro*. Now she moves in a circle, and the god enters her. Fire-works are shot off, and there is applause. The "mother of the gods" runs a burning candle under the armpits of the initiate to test whether it is a true trance. If it is fake, the initiate is burned. Otherwise, the flames lick her skin without leaving burns. Then the girl returns to her everyday consciousness. During her training, she has not left the *terreiro*. Her family must buy her back—which amounts to paying the costs of the initiation. This money is distributed by the *terreiro* as an offering during large public feasts. Bramly asked the "mother of the gods" if a foreigner could also be initiated. "I don't know," she said.

It depends on the person him or herself. But why not really? I really am not sure. Foreigners often have a barrier in their heads, preconceptions that block them, which prevent them from really letting themselves go, offering themselves entirely, emptying their heads enough so that the god can establish himself there. . . . In general foreigners are too hampered by their education. Our dances and our sacrifices scare them. Also they are afraid of lowering themselves by accepting something that they really consider pure superstition. They

see the obvious with their own eyes but deny it with their heads. Their body says yes, but their intellect sets up a defense. They constantly hide behind the thought that there is no place for such things in the civilized world. (56f.)

Of course, altered consciousness conflicts with normal consciousness—they are mutually exclusive. Therefore Maria-José had to say:

Macumba doesn't explain anything. It can only be measured by its effects. It is not practiced with the head but with the body. What you feel is more important than what you think. If people would just learn to follow their intuition, they would be a lot happier. (60)

Here we come to the essence of the altered state of consciousness, of Macumba, of a world born out of an unconscious, high wisdom of the body and the mind: "Macumba is the central axis, the center around which human activity is harmoniously arranged" (60). Maria-José continues:

Everything can serve prophecy. You only have to pay attention. The universe is full of signs. When you learn to look at things the right way, you will understand what I'm trying to say. The shape of clouds, the way birds fly, the sounds of nature, an unexpected meeting—all these transmit a message that expresses the will of the gods. The universe is a whole that fits together logically and that maintains itself and develops in a meaningful way. (78)

Here, as everywhere in tribal societies, we find the idea of a universe in which everything can provide knowledge about everything else, and the whole of being is fundamentally an immense signal system. The trance is the first step toward deciphering this signal system. But deciphering it means doing away with our cultural program, our way of thinking and feeling, taking it off like an old glove.

The human being lives in a prefabricated universe, isn't that true? In an unreal universe that has been imposed on him by his culture and education. He lets himself be forced into this framework and imagines that it is the world of his own ideas. It is really necessary for him to be regularly referred back to his inmost nature. . . .

On the contrary, thought kills life, my son. It draws the power out

of things. Ask our followers. They don't explain what they do or experience. It is also not necessary to explain everything. Many thoughts go through my head. But I only believe what I have tested out. Our religion is practiced, not studied. For this reason, I don't understand your book. It is like a chant that one only knows the words to. And I tell you, it's the rhythms that are the most important thing. (127, 123)

Recent research shows that if a drum rhythm is synchronized with brain-wave frequencies, it is easier to achieve an altered state of consciousness. Hence the importance of drumming, rhythm, and chant in tribal cultures. To this, of course, must be added, as Larry Peters's example shows, the courage to let oneself go completely. It is our archaic fear of this that continually stands in our way. The history of humanity, it might be said, is a struggle between letting go of the self and keeping a tight rein of waking consciousness to establish security through reason. It might be interesting to rewrite history from this point of view.

A widespread technique for engendering trance is the inhalation of juniper smoke. This is still done in Hunza, a small kingdom in the Karakorum in northern Pakistan. In Hunza, when the trance reaches its apex, a transition is made to an out-of-body experience. The *bitan*, or shaman, Ibrahim of Altit acquired his shamanic powers at the age of fifteen on the mountain meadow of Chikiso Runanch. His mind left his body and traveled to the fairies, to the Great Mother, the mistress of nature—that is, of our inner nature. From her he received his shamanic power. He drank her in the form of blue milk from a blue glass. Here is the color blue, which so frequently crops up in connection with the acquisition of powers and extraordinary energies:

When I received my *bitanship*, the Mir also heard that someone in Altit had become a shaman. At that point our king commanded: have the new *bitan* dance in Altit. I danced on that day in Altit, and when the fairies appeared before my eyes, I saw seven of them. Three days later, I danced in Berishal. Three days later, I was brought to the prince's court. From then on, I had no more conversations at all with people. . . . When it was new moon and the protecting fairies came, I could no longer hold myself back. My mind left my body and hurried

away to the mountain. For five days, I stayed there with the fairies. They gave me a blue glass with blue milk. I drank the milk. After the fifth day, there was a great festival in Baltit, then another in Surias. I was not aware of any of that. But then the Great Mother gave me permission to go back. I arrived with all the fairies. One was Galzali, another Sabarangul. They laid me under the walnut tree by the well in Altit. When my relatives and friends saw me, they were very happy. I was back; I wasn't lost anymore. I went home with them, but I couldn't eat anything. I was still with the fairies; my mind was still with them.

It's like this: Ordinary people can't see the fairies. But who sees them? First of all, the *bitan*; and after that, the *pashu*, the seer. Between people and the fairies, there is a veil. When we hold a festival, when we beat the drums and make the flutes speak, when we make smoke with juniper branches and *gulgul* canes, then the fairies come. Then afterward, when water is poured on our faces, they leave.

On the day of the festival, the *bitan* doesn't eat anything. He takes only unsweetened tea. The tea is from the *tilpushing* flower that grows in the mountain meadows. We inhale the smoke of the *tilpushing*, of juniper and *supandur*. We pour millet over it and worship the *peri*. We do *barayo* (calling and requesting). At this request, the fairies begin to gather during the night, from a distance of seven days' travel. Then together we approach the assembly place. And when our king gives the sign and says, "It is up to you—now dance," then we dance. That is the way it is, sahib. My name is Ibrahim of Altit. (Schaefer 1978, 171f.)

In March 1975, the Tham, the father of the crown prince Ghazanfar Ali, requested Ibrahim to dance for him and look into his future. For this prophesying many people came together. Ibrahim was received with music, applause, and drums. In Hunza, the *bitan*'s seance is a folk festival. He goes to the drum and listens to its sound. Four assistants watch over him during his "absence," his journey to the heavens. They arrive with a mountain goat and a pan full of herbs and juniper branches. The *bitan* drinks blood from the goat and deeply inhales the smoke from the branches. Then the drums chase him around the castle courtyard. After going around the courtyard seven times, which for him are seven steps, his movements slow down. Ibrahim loses consciousness. His assistants now

carry "he who has gone home" to the king. But before he can give the king information about his journey, he sings a song in Shina, a Dardic language, which normally he is unable to speak. This time, he prophesies the death of the Tham; he will pass away a year hence, exactly on the first day of the dark of the moon after No Ruz. A year later, in March 1976, the Mir of Hunza died, just as prophesied (78, 162f.).

Essentially, there is no distinction between trance and deep hypnosis except a purely linguistic one. Whatever is suggested in the shaman's song or by cultural symbols is taken up by the psyche, which transforms it in the trance state into reality. Since there are no limits to suggestion, there is nothing of which shamans are not capable. They walk on hot coals, dip their arms in boiling water, and are proof against all kinds of pain. If an animal spirit takes possession of their consciousness, they take on the animal's movements and behavior. If the spirit is a pregnant woman, the shaman's belly swells up. If it is an omniscient god, the shaman becomes "omniscient." If it is a wrathful god, the shaman too becomes wrathful. If spirits from other tribes enter into him, he speaks other languages.

The range of the power of suggestion is without boundaries; it can relate to any area of life, all aspects of the mind and spirit, any kind of behavior. Trance thus heightens our inherent powers and faculties and brings out our latent potential. A lost memory can be retrieved, the ability to learn languages or to paint skillfully can be heightened; the hitting power of a boxer or the agility of a fencer can be enhanced. It is not, however, only a matter of realizing potential abilities. In trance we also gain access to a field of consciousness beyond three-dimensional space, access to hyperspace, to other realities and parallel universes.

Entirely on their own, many children hit on the idea of playfully trying out trance techniques. They spin until they get dizzy, they play hyperventilation games, they press the chest of a friend until he is completely out of breath. Babies are rhythmically rocked. Children generally keep such games a secret, but if you ask them what they experience, they answer: "It's like flying"; "It makes you dizzy and you feel good"; "It's like going crazy"; "It's like floating"; "I feel energy building up around my body"; "It's fun" (Weil 1977).

Eskimo children play "going into a trance." They hang themselves by their hoods until their throats are entirely constricted. No more blood flows to their heads, their consciousness is darkened, and their faces get purple and blue. Only at this point do their play companions take them down. The children say that this state is a very pleasant one; that is why they play this game again and again (Freuchen 1961, 157f.).

In the same way, among the African !Kung, the Siberian Tungus, and the Magar of Nepal, children play trance games and emulate shamans, central figures in the tribal community, in all their actions. Particularly noteworthy are the trances of Balinese children, who begin participating in the great trance dramas and public theater performances at an early age. This confirms how inborn the urge toward altered states of consciousness is and how natural the tendency is to create for oneself a multidimensional universe of consciousness in which the waking state plays only one role among many.

Alternative states of consciousness are not to be regarded as pathological. Every human being spends a great part of his or her life in sleep and dream states. To these can be added daydream states, faints, lapses, anesthesia, orgasm, stress, ecstasy, and of course outbreaks of strong emotions such as hate, anger, envy, antagonism, affection, romantic love, shock, and exhaustion. Then there are the psychopathological states of psychosis, neurosis, and so forth. In addition, there are the states evoked by psychedelic and narcotic drugs. On the whole, it is absurd to say that people spend most of their time in a normal state—quite to the contrary. There is no basis for, or possibility of, distilling a single state out of all these various emotions and mental conditions and calling it normal. Human existence is open in all directions for experiences of consciousnesses of all kinds. We continually swing back and forth on a consciousness continuum between subwakeful and hyperconscious states. Indeed, we live in a mercurial universe of consciousness. This leads to a conception of the psyche as a journey through various zones of consciousness. I believe it is one of our tasks to learn to distinguish these states clearly from one another in such a way that we can become masters of our own "creations." As we have seen, as children we already experiment in an entirely natural

way with these states. In shamans we may recognize the masters of consciousness transformation, the lords of the continuum of existence.

Among the Lapps, sorcerers have themselves brought out of their trances by their relatives at prearranged times. Nevertheless, there are many stories of Lapp sorcerers who have never returned—whose sons or wives forgot to wake them at the agreed time with the right expression or forgot how to utter this expression properly. The companion of one old sorcerer forgot to sing him awake. When the companion tried it later, the old man revived briefly and said, "You can't make a man out of a dead man if you haven't remembered him sooner!" Another sorcerer was forgotten for three years; only then did his companion remember the life-saving words, which were the description of the place where his soul was: "In the coil of the pike's intestine, in the third dark corner!" Hardly had these words been spoken when the sorcerer's legs began to shudder, and without cosmetizing his plight, he yelled out: "A rotten man isn't worth a damn!" (Itkonen 1960, 26f.).

Today, unfortunately, there is a tendency either to mythologize altered states of consciousness or to discredit them. Both tendencies are equally harmful. Like the artificial separation of normal and altered consciousness, both tendencies hinder research, whether the research subject is an intensification of all forms of perception or a modification of inner physiological and biochemical processes. Such research is not at all mysterious; it is simply a question of physiology and psychological chemistry. As harmful as the rejection of altered states of consciousness is the appropriation of them by spiritual philosophies, churches, sects, and religious believers. Altered states of consciousness belong to the natural history of mankind; they should be seen in the framework of human sensory activity and have little to do with religion and faith. They are physical phenomena, a matter of biology. They are partially chemical and partially energetic processes. It matters little if they are cognized at the time they take place. In any case, appropriation of them by ideologies and systems of belief is very dangerous—for the faithful and quite simply for the clarity of the human mind. The words *religion* and *spirituality* should not appear in this context; when they do, it is an ideological abuse of a natural condition, although this is very difficult to avoid. If we want to investigate

altered states of consciousness or consciousness altogether, at the outset we must set aside all the dogmas and traditions and ethical systems that have become bound up with the investigation of consciousness throughout history. The spiritual experiences that have been venerated, cultivated, and fostered by these traditions are nothing more than a metabolic process, electrical stimulation at the organic molecular or cellular level. Even out-of-body experiences and spiritual substances independent of the body are matters of biophysics, though on a higher level. The history of the mind and the history of nature coincide.

Recent research informs us that endorphins, the natural opiates of the brain, are responsible for alterations of consciousness. They suppress pain and produce euphoria (Prince 1982). That there is a connection between religious experience and the body's psychoactive substances has been largely proven. Stress and battle situations elevate the endorphin level; as a result, psychological euphoria overcomes psychological chaos, and calm ensues. Heightened stress, fear, panic, excessive effort, and physical overexertion stimulate endorphin production and trigger euphoric states. Recall that in the trance experience of Maya Deren, at the apex of physical exertion, which she described as a state of terror, a switchover suddenly took place that resulted in euphoria. At that point, everything flowed as if by itself. She experienced the slow-motion effect, depersonalization, and trance. But states of terror and euphoria go together: one does not displace the other—both continue to coexist in the form of "white darkness." Exertion carried to the limits of a person's capacity leads to a state of trance. States of physical exhaustion and extreme psychological concentration are the precursors of bliss, the gates to mental and spiritual greatness. On this point, Aldous Huxley tells us:

But, in one way or another, *all* our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely "spiritual," purely "intellectual," purely "aesthetic," it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence. (Huxley 1963, 155)

Huxley points out that in the Middle Ages, winter meant involuntary fasting and vitamin deficiency. This was aggravated by the official fasting period of forty days before Easter. During these

times, people's body chemistry turned ecstasies and visions into everyday occurrences. The whip of knotted leather thongs triggered the production of a good deal of histamine and adrenaline, and festering cuts released poisonous substances into the bloodstream. All of these physiological reactions broaden the reduction valve that is the brain, and strange and bizarre phenomena occur.

Overexertion resulting from uncomfortable positions, vitamin deficiency, reduction of blood sugar, reduced sleep, breathing exercises, and chanting—which increase the proportion of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood—broaden the "cerebral reduction valve":

To make biological survival possible, Mind at large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. (Huxley 1963, 23)

We have seen that drumming is particularly important for the development of trance. Huxley says of this:

No man, however highly civilized, can listen for very long to African drumming, or Indian chanting, or Welsh hymn-singing, and retain intact his critical and self-conscious personality. It would be interesting to take a group of the most eminent philosophers from the best universities, shut them up in a hot room with Moroccan dervishes or Haitian voodooists, and measure, with a stopwatch, the strength of their psychological resistance to the effects of rhythmic sound. Would the Logical Positivists be able to hold out longer than the Subjective Idealists? Would the Marxists prove tougher than the Thomists or Vedantists? What a fascinating, what a fruitful field for experiment! Meanwhile, all we can safely predict is that, if exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, every one of our philosophers would end up capering and howling with the savages. (Huxley 1932, 322)

Rhythmic stimulation, resulting not only from sounds but from other factors, influences consciousness. We breathe with a particular rhythm, our hearts beat rhythmically, we walk and speak with specific rhythms, and so on. Throughout our lives, we are exposed to psychological, physical, biological, and cosmic rhythms that determine our existence in an essential fashion. Rhythm and con-

sciousness are intimately bound up together. An alteration of our bodily rhythms creates a change in our consciousness.

Research into rhythm and sound will one day reveal an entirely new picture of human consciousness. The human being is essentially sound, vibration, and melody, and perhaps our consciousness frequencies can be arranged in scales. That would be the first step toward creating a fundamental representation of consciousness. Holophonic sounds bring about synesthetic experiences; that is, music is not only something we hear but something we feel with our bodies and see and smell (Zuccarelli 1983).

As the experiences we have described show, trance states can be meaningfully and creatively applied to many problems of our everyday lives. Indeed, if we were to make extensive use of trance procedures in therapeutic, pedagogical, and psychological applications, it could lead to a resurrection of the powers latent in our consciousness, a scientific renaissance in which broader forms of perception would advance our research, our knowledge, and our ability to solve problems by leaps and bounds. Indeed, the trance state is actually the real perception of mankind. It is just that it has been consigned to oblivion by a grand-scale cover-up strategy.

William James tells us this in his fashion:

The human individual . . . lives usually far within his limits; he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. He energizes below his *maximum*, and he behaves below his *optimum*. In elementary faculty, in co-ordination, in power of *inhibition* and control, in every conceivable way, his life is contracted like the field of vision of an hysterical subject. (1962, 221).

Trance states are usually arrived at through extreme efforts of body and mind: through singing, dancing, and any activities that lead to fatigue and exhaustion. I would like to give an example of this from our own cultural sphere—peak sports performances. In their book *Psi in Sport*, Rhea A. White and Michael Murphy (1983) compiled comprehensive documentation for psychic states among high-performance athletes. The alterations of consciousness that take place during these activities resemble trance experiences in tribal cultures in many respects and are worthy of a brief overview. A feeling of supreme well-being appears. Peak experiences and

feelings of freedom, composure, and calm come over the athlete in the midst of competition. Such athletes experience a sense of letting go and freedom, a sensation of floating and flying, of weightlessness, ecstasy and power, total control over themselves; a feeling of being totally present in the here and now; of total dedication; of fusion with the action, accompanied by a sense of great awe toward the mystery of life; a feeling of union with everything living. During games and matches, their perception of the size of the playing field or the player often changes; time passes more slowly, allowing them to see, for example, the approaching ball better, or the opponent's punch in boxing. It can happen that the whole of the athlete's life suddenly passes before his or her inner eye, as if on film. They may experience flashbacks on their life, stoppages of time, all manner of extrasensory perceptions, out-of-body experiences. They may have a sensation of suddenly being projected into other players.

Through these altered states of consciousness, peak performances come about, extraordinary acts of strength, speed, balance, and—something that all the spectators can see—effortlessness of achievement. Other such experiences are found among wrestlers, boxers, and football players, when an absence of pain as a result of their concentration enables them to continue despite broken hands or ribs. They may experience alterations in their subjective images of their own body; a sensation of floating above their own body; a sense of being able to penetrate solid objects; access to the inner worlds of music and rhythm; synesthesia—in which sounds are seen as colors and vice versa; a perception of inner body structures on the cellular level; a sensation of being able to expand their body limitlessly and thus exercise influence over opposing players or over the ball or javelin, for example; manipulation of other players psychokinetically or by suggestion, either positively, in the form of stimulation and inspiration, or negatively, in the form of psychological disablement; the power of the evil eye; breaking the spell of a hostile crowd through sorcery, mass hypnosis, or a curse. Also reported are incredible feats in dodging opposing players; runners' sensations of floating or running on the tips of their toes; a feeling of moving through a sacred time in a sacred place; enormous uninterrupted attention and concentration strong enough to produce complete oblivion to the environment; and a quest for perfec-

tion, beauty, or divinity in movement or performance (White and Murphy 1983).

All these transpersonal states arise as a result of the restriction or concentration of perception that comes about naturally in the activity of sports. Our next example, however, illustrates an even stronger form of concentration of the psychological energies. These are altered states of consciousness in near-fatal circumstances, such as falling while mountain climbing (Heim 1892) or suicidal leaps (Rosen 1975; Noyes and Kletti 1976).

Death is preceded by a series of altered states of perception that may be understood as ego-death motifs. The death of the ego entails the stripping away of all learned limitations, of a restricted thought process, and of a physiology that seeks to maintain an even level of nervous stimulation. For Charles Garfield (1977), ego death means an expansion of consciousness, a heightened sensitivity to all modalities of the senses, a dissolution of the I/world boundary, a collapse of the cortically filtered system of judgment, a heightened receptivity to emotional stimuli, and a reduction of the stimulus threshold between conscious and unconscious processes. Ego death is destruction of the organization of the senses, a shifting of attention and alertness to a deeper level of the psyche. The concept of ego death can be misleading; the ego does not die; nor does it dissolve. Rather, it joins itself to the rest of the world, establishes relationships with the environment, and steps beyond the boundaries of a previously encapsulated existence.

In mountain-climbing falls, a peculiar sequence of perceptual alterations occurs. In situations of minor or negligible danger, many people are paralyzed by fear and become incapable of action. But in serious accidents with possible fatal consequences, no shock appears. Of course, the person involved is filled with great fear and does initially struggle desperately for survival; but as a result of the hopelessness of the situation, this behavior is soon abandoned and gives way to a profound sense of resignation.

Self-surrender, resignation, and a willingness to die seem to be the motivating forces that trigger all subsequent patterns of action. In the face of mortal danger—as when one's body is in free fall—and when all means of escape within human capacity are futile, consciousness abandons itself to its fate. The fear of ego dissolution

vanishes, and one's identification with his or her own life story and existence falls apart.

Once people are liberated from the crazed fears of their ego, they can adopt a more objective, emotionless standpoint. At that point they are in possession of a clear consciousness, and the activity of their thoughts intensifies to a level resembling a filmstrip running at high speed. At the same time, their thoughts become a great deal more precise. They calculate the sequence of events of the accident and its outcome in advance with lightning speed, as though with a computer. They calculate their own chances of survival realistically, they run through possible preventive reactions, and in the midst of all this they remain capable of suitable spontaneous action. Instead of confusion, their minds are filled with clarity, objectivity, and an extraordinary inner calm and seriousness. Since they undertake no unsuitable or awkward survival efforts, their bodies remain completely relaxed. Calm, composure, and a feeling of peace prevail. They accommodate themselves to their fate and no longer attempt to brace themselves against the inevitable results of the fall through space. According to Kenneth Ring (1985), 60 percent of people who have been through a fall experience a feeling of peace but are afterward unable to express this in words—the wonderful experience has touched them too deeply.

In danger situations, many people react swiftly and decisively and, above all, the right way—spontaneously. This nonintellectual, spontaneous behavior can be explained in part by a heightening of their capacity for perception and thought, as a result of which they can process many signals in a short time, which leads to precise and immediate actions. In addition, some imponderable factor like "body wisdom" may be involved—that is, a hyperoptimized functioning of sensory and motor capacities that appears as automatic, unplanned action.

During free fall, some people have a feeling that they are being influenced by outside forces, an unmistakable phenomenon of trance. They look at themselves and are astonished by the autonomous flow of their behavior. Without their conscious participation, spontaneously, as though guided by outside forces, their actions complete themselves. This sensation is also typical of "passive" states such as trance, peak, and enlightenment experiences. In these

experiences, reasoned conscious supervision by the higher ego—the self or surface consciousness—is surrendered. We often labor under the misapprehension that the body will not work without the supervision of our waking "daytime consciousness." In point of fact, our psyche works better, more uninhibitedly, and more effectively in our "night consciousness" during sleep, in dreams, or in trance.

During a fall, one's perception of space is also altered. The size and distance of objects can no longer be estimated appropriately. The same applies to the sensation of time—a slow-motion effect occurs. The subjective moment is extended, and this is what makes precise and calm observation of the sequence of events during the fall possible. In my opinion, the sensation of the slowing down of time is an essential part of altered states of consciousness, trances, and parapsychological experiences generally. Existential experiences that take place in the nearness of death or during the collapse of the ego lead to a switchover from normal to trance consciousness.

Obviously, there is a relationship between the level of danger in a situation and the vividness of the altered state of consciousness and of all the accompanying characteristics of trance, such as the slowing of time, clarity, beauty, and speed in processing information. There is also a similarity between the heightening of perception in the slow-motion effect and the so-called flashing of one's life before one's eyes during a fall. How is it possible for one's whole life to pass before one's eyes in a few instants? I believe that this biographical flashback and the strengthening of the perceptions are conditioned by, among other things, the slowing of one's personal time. If time passes more slowly for us, we have more leisure to appreciate the stream of images rushing by. Many people say that this review of their life takes place in the twinkling of an eye. But this holds true only if one's personal perception of time has been slowed. Time plays a prominent role in the process of trance. And of course one's ability to gauge the situation during a fall and to consider possible preventive measures arises only through the slowing of time. This in turn occurs only as a result of the extreme directedness and restrictedness of a person's attention to the event taking place and the blocking out of all inessential stimuli. When

unnecessary thoughts and feelings are turned away, we acquire, so to speak, more space in our minds to let in the here and now; we therefore experience the present more strongly, more vividly, more colorfully. Subjectively, we have more time to occupy ourselves with every single object of perception. The fewer the stimuli of which we are conscious, the more attention we can apply to each; as a result, they become clearer to us. This can peak in the vision, as described by Albert Heim, of supernatural beauty—but, note well, during a fall, just before death!

We encounter the same principle among people who have experiences of the beyond. That which they perceive is of a more than worldly beauty. They also experience the biographical flashback and the slow-motion effect. Many shamans traveling in the beyond for the first time think they have spent only a short time there. Time is often much denser in altered states of consciousness. The journey to the beyond, the trance, the climbing accident—all take place, as it were, in another dimension of time. This assertion can be proven very simply. All studies of meditation show that the focusing of mindfulness and attention on one point, one object, intensifies that object's color, form, and meaning to the level of sublime beauty. By contrast, the more chaotic the perception and the more objects there are in the field of view, the flatter and vaguer the impression. An accident quite naturally focuses one's attention to the utmost. All shamanic consciousness techniques are aimed at narrowing perception to one-pointed conscious being.

But this does not exhaust the noteworthy aspects of the psychology of the fall. The final point is the development of a split between consciousness and body. Thus, the well-known mountain climber Reinhold Messner writes in his book *Grenzbereich Todeszone* ("Border-Area Death Zone") that he himself had out-of-body experiences three times during climbing accidents. At the moment in which the hopelessness of all countermeasures is acknowledged, an ego split occurs:

The so-called body sensation vanishes almost completely; we are outside our body. We feel unreal, free of all worldly ties. It is idle to argue about whether this state is possible in reality or if we are merely dealing with a phantasmic derealization effect. It is sufficient to note

that in greatest peril of death this experience of separation between body and soul can occur. (1978, 87)

A sense of unreality accompanies the beginning of the accident and manifests, as Noyes and Kletti (1976) call it, in a depersonalization, a separation between the participant and an observer. According to Kenneth Ring's typology of death experiences, thirty-eight percent of those involved had an experience of alienation from the body. This sense of remove from one's own experiences and from external events increases noticeably during a fall and reaches its apex in an out-of-body experience. Through the separation of consciousness from the body, emotion loses its basis. Feeling and thought, which are now located outside the body, logically need not identify themselves with the body in danger. The situation can now be coolly and soberly appraised. Thus, many people have reported floating calmly next to their falling bodies and, as it made impact, experiencing little sense of sympathy for their own situation of the moment. Later, they were able to describe the rescue operation, the people who appeared to help, and so on quite precisely, because they were literally "beside themselves." Many other fallers leave their bodies only at the moment of impact.

Trance and deep hypnosis are healing. They liberate us from the machinery of thought; they purify our consciousness of its compulsive, incessant inner dialogue, of its relentless, ongoing evaluating and judging. Interestingly, many researchers (for example, Shirokogoroff, particularly concerning Siberian shamans) report that shamans who have not undertaken a seance for a long period of time feel "heavy in heart and head," a feeling that they can get rid of only through the trance state, after which they have a light and pleasant feeling (1935a, 364ff.). Trance means healing through inner recuperation from the unending stream of external stimuli, from complex thinking, from complicated emotions. The trance, however, does not exclude all stimuli. On the contrary, it heightens perception and brings out the colorfulness and vividness and wonder of existence. But this occurs only after a phase of narrowing consciousness, which is what is defined as trance in the most restricted sense of the word.

From Muktañanda, Play of Consciousness

thing terrible.

As I was sitting quietly on the swing, morning came. I was thinking, "Where shall I go? This is no good. It isn't sadhana, nor is it God's grace. It's the fruit of my previous sins." As I was thinking all this, *tandhrā* came upon me, so I went inside and again sat for meditation. It started immediately. Now I began to roar like a lion. My tongue came right out of my mouth. I went on roaring for forty-five minutes, getting more and more frightened. This time there was no sexual desire, but it seemed that I was to be saved from one danger only to meet another. There is a saying, "Fall out of the sky and get stuck in a palm tree," and that was how I felt. This lion identification was making me more and more upset. I was determined to leave. These phases, moods, and conditions were all the divine *kriyās* of Siddha Yoga, coming from the grace of a Siddha, but because I did not know this, I was confused when I should have been happy.

Shortly afterward I saw a tonga coming across the fields. I could see the driver sitting in front but could not make out who

the passenger was. The tonga came near the mango tree. Somebody got down, and I saw that it was Hari Giri Baba, a very strange *avadhūta* and a great Siddha yogi. My mind was filled with joy. I got off the swing and stood there waiting for him. He started to call out to me from the tonga, "O King, O Emperor, O Swami, get up, get up," and saying this, he burst into peals of laughter.

This great saint was all-knowing. He was always laughing. He used to wander along riverbanks, wearing an expensive pair of shoes, a silk turban, a coat, and three or four more coats on top of that. Whenever he felt hungry, he would call out to anyone, "Give me something, give me something to eat," and then he would eat. When he finished, he would wash his hands and leave. He was a saint who was like a wandering spirit. He used to collect small stones from the river. He would look at one stone, then at another, and say, "Yes... very good, you are worth two hundred thousand." He talked to himself like this and wandered alone, always walking very quickly. He would go to the riverbank at two o'clock in the morning and come back at sunrise. When he spoke, it was hard to understand what he was saying.

Hari Giri Baba came up to me, and I bowed to him. I loved Hari Giri Baba very much, and he loved me, too. I said, "Baba, things are going badly for me. I am not in a good state." He said, "I know. Give me two rupees, and I'll tell you." I knew the way he liked to make jokes. Whenever he came and you asked him something, he would demand money. Even now he asked for some. I gave him two rupees. He spoke to me in Marathi. "O Emperor, you are in a good condition. Things will be very good for you. You will become a god. You've got a beneficial fever. Through coming into contact with it, many people will be cured of their sickness and suffering. You will meet many people." After he had said this, he left. I went with him for some distance, and then he said, "Go, go. You've got to go to come again. Don't be afraid." And so he departed. The people who were nearby started running around, crying, "Hari Giri Baba has come."

I went back and sat on the swing. As I remembered my lust of that morning and the way I had turned into a lion, my mental



Swami Muktananda with Hari Giri Baba in Chalisgaon
1933

turnmoil returned. It got steadily worse, for it is the nature of the mind to become like the thing it constantly thinks about. Whatever the mind dwells on, it becomes identified with and takes on its very nature. I am very fond of this verse:

*jo mana nāriki ora nibārata tau mana hotahi tāhiku rūpā
jo mana kābusā krodha karai puni tau mana hai tabahi tadārūpā
jo mana mēyabi mēya ratai nita tau mana būdata mēyake kūpā
sundara jo mana brāhma vichārata tau mana hotahi
brāhmasvarūpā*

The mind that is absorbed night and day in women takes on the nature of a woman.

The mind that is always angry burns in the fire of anger.

The mind that is always thinking of *māyā* drowns in the pit of *māyā*.

O Sundar, the mind that is continuously resting in Brahman eventually becomes That.

This is what that great devotee of Truth, the poet-saint Sundardas, says, and it is perfectly true. These two great illusions, sexual excitement and the lion *kriyā*, had completely taken over my mind.



Swami Mokshananda
1953
KASARA

eyes would roll up and focus on the spot between the eyebrows. This is the *shāmbhavi mudrā*. It brings great comfort and makes the mind steady; through it a yogi becomes like Shambhu, or Shiva. As the mind concentrates on the space between the eyebrows, one attains the state of *ātma chaitanya*, or consciousness of the Self.

My identification with a lion had become stronger still. I roared so much that the cows nearby broke their ropes and ran helter-skelter, dogs barked madly, and people rushed to my hut. They were astonished to find that it was only Babaji roaring so loudly. I didn't care whether I gave darshan or not, for I was having constant darshan of the mighty processes of Kundalini. I meditated three times a day: at three o'clock in the morning, at eleven o'clock, and then from seven to nine o'clock at night. Sometimes I would zigzag along the ground like a snake, sometimes hop like a frog, sometimes roar like a tiger. My mind was held spellbound watching the extraordinary inner moods of Goddess Chiti.

I also saw the red aura during these meditations and, more and more often, the oval white light, which was extremely beautiful. Gradually this light became steadier. I began to experience an unusual kind of sleep in meditation. My dear Guru, Mother Kundalini Shakti, of whom I had been so afraid when I had seen Her as a naked woman, would sometimes appear, and I would remain absorbed in my meditation. Because I did not feel satisfied without knowing more about meditative states, I asked for many different books.

I went to see another great saint I knew, named Zipruanna. He was a great Siddha. He used to go naked and spent his time meandering through the lanes of Nasirabad village. He was revered by everyone as a great being and addressed as Anna (uncle) by young and old alike. He used to live where there were no people, in dilapidated houses and huts away from the villagers. He had attained a very high state of yoga. He was farsighted, which is to say he knew about past and future events. His body had been burned so pure by the fire of yoga that no filth would touch it.



Zipruanna in Nasirabad

He had raised his body to such a high state that I marveled at him; the inner Self of yogis is free from stain, and even Zipruanna's body had this stainless purity. The first time I visited him, he was defecating in a corner; as I approached, he began to rub his feces all over his body. I sat down quite close to him and found that he emitted a sweet fragrance—he didn't smell bad at all. The next time I went to see him, he was sitting on a rubbish dump. Even then the filth would not touch him. I didn't have the courage to go up close, so I stood at a distance. After a little while, he came down off the rubbish heap. I washed his feet. A fragrance like the *ashvagandha* (a fragrant herb) was coming from his body. Zipruanna had great love for me. Even now I still wonder at the attainments of that great soul. I once asked him, "Anna, why are you sitting in that filth?" He replied, "Muktananda, the filth that's inside is far worse than this. Think about it. Man's body is just a bag of shit and piss. Isn't it?" I fell silent. Zipruanna was a great *avadhūta*, the crown jewel among saints.

Now I went to see him again. He greeted me very affectionately, pressing his body to mine. I told him all my experiences in the hut at Suki. He said, "This is the blessing, the initiation, the grace, or shaktipat, of a great saint. When you receive such a great blessing, these processes occur. It is normal to see a great conflagration, ghosts, demons, *yakshas*, cobras, *kinmaras*, and all the phantoms of Shiva's army, and this has happened to you." When I asked him about my trouble with lust, he answered, "Only with rare aspirants does the generative organ erect itself and dig into the navel. It is due to the extraordinary divine grace of yoga. Don't underestimate the generative organ. It is the organ that generates all beings and determines whether you are a man or a woman. Without it, a man is a useless eunuch. A man should respect his generative organ; he should restrain and control it as much as possible. When it digs into the navel and remains there for a length of time, all the seminal fluid in the testicles starts to flow upward toward the heart. It is heated in the gastric fire and passes right up to the brain, where it strengthens the sensory nerves. By its strength, the yogi's memory and intelligence are increased." Then he went on, "O Swami,

such a man is called an *ūrdhvareta*. You will become a Guru in the future and will be able to bless others through this power. As a result of the process called *vajroli*, which has happened to you, you will be able to store up the inner shakti and give shaktipat initiation. All your agonies of lust were, in fact, the great Shakti Kundalini expelling your previous sexual appetites from you. Now, instead of lust, love will surge within you. And from the rays of your love, many others will feel love."

I told him about the naked woman appearing in meditation. I explained that before meditation I had put on the armor of Shiva and closed off all the different directions. How then had the naked woman come through? As I asked this, Baba Zipruanna made a humming sound, and he lit up. In a grave voice, he answered, "Swami, no one can enter the radiant city of your meditation. No one can go into the luminous land of Goddess Chiti Shakti except Chiti Herself, the deity who is filled with Consciousness, and the Guru. It was your own understanding about the nature of woman that confused you. Why do you worry about whether a woman is naked or clothed? The Goddess takes on all forms. When you saw that woman, you should have remembered Goddess Chiti Shakti and looked at Her. No one can gain entry there. It is your attitude that bears fruit according to your conviction. From now on, you should understand whatever forms you see, good or bad, to be forms of Chiti. If you see this naked woman in your heart as the supreme Goddess, then She will show Her divine form. Chiti Shakti can perform innumerable miracles. You must have seen how fast those tiny, fine, subtler than subtle red particles move inside you. Later you will see countless different worlds in Her. She is the power of Consciousness, who assumes endless forms in a second and who shows all shapes in the One; She is the supreme *māyā*, the mother of yoga, Kundalini. O Swami, whatever happened to you was good; everything that will happen in the future will be good. Always remember the real form and nature of Kundalini.

"Listen to another thing. A yogi on the path of the Siddhas should always remember that anything he sees in the light of the

INVERTED WORLDS: SHAMANIC PARADOXES

In this chapter let us turn again to the sources of healing. Here I shall contrast the holy and healthy as an expression of a paradoxical world with the unholy and unhealthy as an expression of our linear, Euclidean world. At the same time, I shall sketch the outlines of a new psychology.

The primal healer and the shaman live in a self-absorbed world that lies at a remove from our own and that appears to us as twisted or mad. The shaman is the fool who turns everything upside down, but he is a holy fool. He is holy because he has been healed, because he has gone beyond illness and deception. In the light of this, we may ask which world is the inverted one—theirs or ours? Should we speak of the shamanic paradox—or of the paradox of logic?

In the preceding chapters, I have pointed to a true world. But what is true is hard to grasp—better, it is totally ungraspable. In short, what we grasp, what we touch, is hardly the world—the real world remains beyond our grasp. What you have read about in these pages is the invisible world, the source of our pseudo-real facts. In fact, that world determines the visible world. Another paradox! Is it ours or the shaman's? If you were to ask: "What is a quick and easy explanation of shamanism?" I would reply, "It is precisely the opposite of us! Just turn everything in our world inside out, and the shamanic world will soon begin to shine through."

Husko, an Ainu shaman woman, declared to the Japanese researcher Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney that profound knowledge cannot be grasped in words; ultimately, the only way to learn something about shamans is to become a shaman oneself (1973, 16). A further

inversion paradox: the researcher as shaman! What would they then research? The hollowness of mere researching, of not wanting to experience?

As I see it, our Western thinking has been trained for centuries to move in straight lines, from visible point A to visible point B in the material world. It has established itself with a causal explanatory model in Euclid's austere representation of existence, Newton's mechanical universe, Descartes's naive *cogito ergo sum* and "through reason to knowledge," Kant's fixed space and time constants, Luther's heartless moralism and work ethic, Marx's economic being that is supposed to determine consciousness. But all this represents only one possibility for life, only one orientation, and certainly not the best one. When are we finally going to learn this?

Shamans, on the other hand, courageously turn our naive worldview inside out—they are spiritual iconoclasts. Their secret is simple, but the realization of it goes nearly beyond human capacity—for who has the courage to experience the day as dark and the night as light? According to legend, Diogenes carried a lantern in broad daylight through the Athenian marketplace, saying "I am seeking the light." We, by contrast, live in a dark land, are on a journey through a realm of blackness. Who among us has enough boldness, enough light in themselves, to experience our lightless state completely?

The first shamanic paradox: Progress, the future, only arises through working through the categories of delusion, and through suffering. The way of suffering is at the same time the way of knowledge. The more of the former, the more of the latter. Our Western philosophy of an absence of suffering, of happiness, and of high spirits—is that not a flight from reality? If we were to try to call our most fundamental illusion by name, would it not be the quest for painless pleasure? But how do we arrive at a pleasurable existence? Presumably through pleasure. But the shaman reaches the goal through suffering.

The way of the mystic is one of suffering rather than the conceptualization of the world and the constant categorizations, circumscriptions, and determinations of the truth through proofs. Mystics long for chaos, the nonhuman state; they crave anomic pleasure.

But on our existential level, this is inverted and becomes the cause of pain. Yet if mystics rigorously work their way through the categories of illusion, they reach the pure land: joy, knowledge, equanimity, stillness—and they make a pact with nature.

We seek happiness and avoid unhappiness. This quest, by its very nature, leads us—circling through a labyrinth of obstacles—to unhappiness. Only those who acknowledge suffering gain the wisdom of the unsafeguarded life. There is only one way to enlightenment, to shamanhood—the rocky way.

Tribal cultures are aware of the hardships of shamanic education and of the despair that can plague shamanic students. For this reason, many who have a shamanic vocation refuse to travel this path; they let the germ of power be drawn out of them by other medicine people and allow their first vision to be shattered. There is fear in the face of the neophyte, deathly fear.

Western therapy and healing, by contrast, seek to arrive at the El Dorado of the mind by traveling along gentle curves in upholstered compartments through leisurely discussion. What comes of this? Soft, emotional people, introspective scholars, sensitive aesthetes. But shamans are people of nature, uncivilized, brutal toward themselves, often harsh in dealing with others, pitiless with their students, yet generous and expansive in thought to the point of self-abnegation. They have looked death in the face, they "travel" deliberately into death. They do not share our insatiable lust for life. Every day is a good day to die. There is nothing to cling to. On one side we have an artificial preoccupation with one's own psychological material; on the other side, that of the shaman, we have a primal, nature-bound existence. To put it once more in a single sentence: Self-healing means knowledge, the transformation of consciousness. This is the shamanic paradox.

While we interact with people to become more human, shamans learn humanity through solitude. Having only themselves to rely on, shut off from society, they abandon themselves ascetically to their aloneness. Because they have left others' approaches to the world behind and have become loners, they must be alone. Their new friends and companions belong to another dimension—they are spirits, the dead, personified earth or water powers, animal souls, nature beings, nonspatial entities, time beings. They have

helping spirits, possibly even supramundane lovers. They relate to the departed the way we relate to our earthly neighbors. Their contacts are mental, with the quality of daydream. They speak with the soul, listen to other worlds. What we regard as dead is living for shamans. For them, the death realm is natural, overflowing life; the realm of inanimate nature is a constant conversation partner. Shamans are open and eager to relate to the whole world of the dead, as well as to that of the living. Thence their *joie de vivre*, their scintillating, fantastic nature; thence their paradoxical, inverted lifestyle! Of course, fundamentally they invert nothing—inversion is only a model for thought to help us understand them. Shamans simply communicate on a larger scale than we do.

For us, seeing means looking outward; for the shaman it means looking inward. That is another basic paradox of shamanism: seeing the world with closed eyes. We speak of an inner world, but that is only a metaphor. There is no inner and no outer. Everything lies before us: one is visible, one is invisible, depending on our outlook and knowledge. What we see, shamans see too, but more vividly, with more participation, more feeling, more clarity. From this comes their spiritual perspicacity; for this reason they see more and differently. Perception is a sensory continuum along which it is always possible to go further. Our world does not end with emotion, with concept, with genius, with orgasm, with aesthetics, with music—these are not the final boundaries, the peaks of appreciation. Where we end, the shamanic level of appreciation begins. Shamans remain alien to us because they take their first step where we dare to take our last. Their knowledge, their appreciation are boundless; their emotions border on the infinite; their perception is a true participation in an ever-expanding reality. Western culture takes the visible spectrum for the entire spectrum. What interest do we have in gamma rays or X-rays, in ultraviolet? Who cares about the subsonic? These are verbal corpses laid on white paper, bits of textbook wisdom.

Shamans do not think; they are neither primitive thinkers nor dreaming poets of the fantastic. They simply experience a vaster world. They are not inventors of refined inner worlds. With devotion, they experience that which comes to them, and they incorporate it into their culture. Shamans do not store up professional

knowledge that they study. They do not sit at a desk in a classroom. They acquire their healing powers in the dimension of death, and they discover those powers through visions; personified nature powers have whispered to them. Shamans do not cram by reading piles of books; they are transformed, whether they want it or not, not by taking in intellectual knowledge but by being turned inside out psychologically, according to the principle, inmost outward. Therefore they are upside-down. They are the living embodiments of inwardness, of the hidden, the skeleton—which is why skeletons are so often depicted on shamans' drums and clothing, as symbols of their nature. The shaman is a clown, a fool, the reflection of an antimatter universe, a mirror image. Shamans are immune to every disease they know how to cure—how logical, really, but so strange to us. What doctor could assert that of himself? To what are doctors immune? I ask—to inner knowledge?

Here once again is the shamanic paradox in outline form.

Suffering as a way of knowledge—learning through pain.

From spiritual "dismemberment" to spiritual rebirth and development. Shamans die in order to live.

They enter the darkness, the inside of a mountain or the earth, in order to experience light. Darkness as light.

They must sacrifice themselves, live abstemiously, observe taboos, give in order to take later. They sacrifice themselves in order to keep themselves.

They possess double eyes, double vision; they see with the soul body.

Shamans speak, but in the archetypal, portentous speech of the spiritual world.

They do not perfect the body; they leave it and perfect the mind/spirit.

They possess two bodies: the physical body and the soul body.

They travel much. With the soul body they course parallel universes, spiritual universes.

Their friends are spiritual, invisible, of another dimension, "vibrational forms."

They must become sick in order to become healthy.

They die in order to become holy, to become healers. They die for their patients.

Self-healing comes first with them, before the healing of others. They become healers by experiencing illness themselves and overcoming it in themselves, then later in patients. They do not cure symptoms but their origin, the "idea" of the sickness.

Ultimately, we cannot call shamans healers. They are only a reflection of nature principles, which work through them: through their openness, nature principles flow freely, because shamans embody freedom from human laws and ideas. They are the channels through which nature flows through to us, the windows into the primal world.

The shaman is the doctor's antipode. The shaman is an antiparticle, antimatter, the essence of the black hole, a spiritual counterpart to our material-mechanistic level of existence.

By virtue of all these attributes, shamans are the incarnation of paradox. What they teach us is the negative way of the fool who turns everything upside down.

from Christ & Plaskow, eds.,
Womanspirit Rising

Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

... As a biblical scholar, I have long ceased to think of theology in "confessional" terms. My experience of feminist liturgies and theological dialogue, moreover, has taught me that feminist theology is truly *ecumenical*, since the Christian as well as the Jewish religious tradition and symbols share in the same patriarchal culture and language. If I therefore refer here to the Catholic vision, I do not intend to imply that this vision is not shared by other Christian churches and other religions, but only to say that my approach to the topic is strongly colored by my experience as a Catholic woman and theologian. As a teacher of women's courses in theology at a Catholic university, moreover, I am challenged again and again to explore the relationship between feminism, Christian faith, and the Catholic community and tradition.

When our daughter Christina was baptized, one of my college students asked me: "How can you with your feminist consciousness baptize a girl child into such a patriarchal and sexist community as the Roman Catholic Church appears to be?" The former Roman Catholic

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theologian Mary Daly spells out this question in the most radical way when she insists that the myth and symbols of Christianity are *inherently and essentially* sexist. "Since 'God' is male, the male is God. God the Father legitimates all earthly God-fathers" and "the idea of a unique divine incarnation in a male, the God man of the 'hypostatic union' is inherently sexist and oppressive. Christolatry is idolatry."²¹ The assertion of some theologians that Christ was male and, therefore, that women cannot be ordained as priests and represent Christ before the community appears to substantiate Dr. Daly's contention.

Yet if maleness is the essence of God, and maleness but not humanness the goal of incarnation, how could women have been saved and made in baptism full members of the people of God?

FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY

It is, however, not so much theology but my own experience as a woman having grown up in the Catholic tradition that leads me to question that maleness is the essence of Christian faith and theology. Despite all masculine terminology of prayers, catechism, and liturgy, despite blatant patriarchal male spiritual guidance, my commitment to Christian faith and love first led me to question the feminine cultural role which parents, school and church had taught me to accept and to internalize. My vision of Christian life-style, responsibility, and community brought me to reject the culturally imposed role of women and not vice versa. What was this liberating vision that came through to me despite all patriarchal packaging and sexist theological systematization? What was the driving force or spirituality that led me to question and to reject the cultural myth of femininity?

A comparison between radical feminist spirituality and the Christian spirituality which understands the Spirit, not in a platonic sense but in the biblical sense of the divine power and dynamic enabling us to live as Christians, can show that both are inspired by the same vision, even though radical feminist spirituality is often formulated over and against a patriarchal theology and sexist praxis of the Christian churches. Feminist spirituality proclaims wholeness, healing love, and spiritual power not as hierarchical, as *power over*, but as *power for* as enabling power. It proclaims *the Goddess* as the source of this power, as the enabling context of human lives and of a nonhierarchical, nonauthoritarian, noncompetitive community. The Goddess is the giver

and nurturer of life, the dispenser of love and happiness. Woman as her image is therefore not "the other" of the divine. She is not body and carnality in opposition to spirit and soul, not the perpetuator of evil and rebellion. Being a woman, living in sisterhood under the aegis of the Goddess, brings us in touch with the creative, healing, life-giving power at the heart of the world.

In my opinion, the Goddess of radical feminist spirituality is not so very different from the God whom Jesus preached and whom he called "Father." In ever new images of life, love, light, compassion, mercy, care, peace, service, and community, the New Testament writings attempt to speak of the God of Jesus Christ, and of this God's life-giving power, the Holy Spirit. All the New Testament authors agree that Christian faith has to be lived in the very concrete praxis of agape. In various ways, they spell out that Jesus rejected all hierarchical forms and power in his community of followers and explicitly warned that Christian leadership should not be exercised in the "power to lord over others" but in serving. The Second Vatican Council follows this New Testament spirituality when it attempts to speak of the Church in terms of enabling love, inclusive community, and service for all humankind.

The traditions about the Goddess and those of the New Testament are conflated in the Catholic community's cult of Mary. The more the Christian understanding of God was patriarchalized—the more God became the majestic ruler and the stern judge, the more people turned to the figure and cult of Mary. The more Jesus Christ became divinized, the more it became necessary to have a mediator between the majestic-transcendent God or his Son and the Christian community. One could almost say that through the dynamics of this development of the gradual patriarchalization of the God image, Mary became the "other face," the Christian "face," of God. All the New Testament images and attributes which characterize God as loving, life giving, compassionate and caring, as being with the people of God are now transferred to the "mother of God," who is as accessible as was the nonpatriarchal God whom Jesus preached. Even though any Catholic school child can explain on an *intellectual-theological* level the difference between the worship of God and Christ and the veneration of Mary, on an *emotional, imaginative, experiential* level the Catholic child experiences the love of God in the figure of a woman. Since in later piety Jesus Christ becomes so transcendentalized and divinized

that his incarnation and humanity are almost totally absorbed into his divinity, the "human face" of God is almost solely experienced in the image of a woman. The cult of Mary thus grew in proportion to the gradual repatriarchalization of the Christian God and of Jesus Christ. The Catholic tradition gives us thus the opportunity to *experience* the divine reality in the figure of a woman.

The Catholic cult of Mary also provides us with a tradition of *female language* and imagery to speak of the divine. Christian theology has always maintained that we can speak of God only in an "analogical way" and has never identified any human concept or image of God with the divine reality. God transcends all our human perceptions and language expressions. Yet the Jewish and Christian traditions have spoken of God predominantly in patriarchal language and imagery. We all are used to hearing: "God the Father loves you, and if you join the brotherhood and fellowship of all Christians you will become sons of God and brothers of Christ, who died for all men." Such masculinized God language has communicated for centuries to women that they are nonentities, subspecies of men, subordinated and inferior to men not only on a cultural but also on a religious plane. The combination of male language for God with the stress on the sovereignty and absolute authority of the patriarchal God has sanctioned men's drive for power and domination in the church as well as in society.

If Christianity preaches a God of love who liberates every person for new possibilities and for discipleship, then we have to speak of this God in nonpatriarchal, nonsexist terms. Language about God, if it is rooted in a living faith and a living community, can and does change. The cult of Mary in the Catholic church provides us with a tradition of theological language which speaks of the divine reality in female terms and symbols. This tradition encompasses the myth and symbols of the Goddess religion and demonstrates that female language and symbols have a transparency towards God. Only if we speak of God in male and female terms will our language about God truly become "analogical."

Yet this female-matriarchal language ought not to be absolutized if we do not want to fall prey to a reverse sexist understanding of God. The Christian language about God has to transcend patriarchal as well as matriarchal language and symbols, while at the same time employing a variety of human expressions to reflect a pluriformity of human experiences. The truly Christian God language has to affirm mutual-

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ity, fulfillment, maturity, and human potentiality not only in terms of gender but also in terms of class, culture, race, and religion if it is to be truly catholic and universal. Christian faith would then enable all kinds of people to affirm themselves as whole human persons, chosen and loved by God, and partaking in the divine reality. Moreover, such a truly Christian and Catholic spirituality would empower all of us to take on responsibilities for eliminating discrimination, oppression and the sin of sexism and for building a new community of mutuality and pluriformity which would mirror the universality of God's redeeming presence and let us experience her power of life and love.

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

The other liberating experience which the Catholic tradition provided for me as a woman is the assertion that everyone is called to *sainthood*. Even the vocation to the priesthood is superseded by the call to become a saint. Any Catholic girl who grows up reading the "lives of the saints" might internalize all kinds of sexual hangups, but she would not think that her only vocation and her genuine Christian call consists in becoming married and in having children. Granted, from a theological and hagiographical point of view the life choices of the women saints were often limited and conformed to male stereotypes. Yet they still contradicted the middle-class cultural message that women's Christian vocation demands the sacrifice of one's life for the career of a husband and the total devotion of one's time to diapering babies or decorating one's living room. The biographies of the saints are indeed different from the "total woman" propagated by the feminine mystique.

The "lives of the saints" provide a variety of role models for Christian women. What is more important is that they teach that women, like men, have to follow their vocation from God even if this means that they have to go frontally against the ingrained cultural mores and images of women. Women, as well as men, are not defined by their biology and reproductive capabilities but by the call to discipleship and sainthood. The early Christians considered themselves as those who were called and elected by God, the saints of God. This call broke through all limitations of religion, class, race, and gender. The gospels affirm in various ways that Jesus' call to discipleship has precedence over all other obligations, religious duties and family ties.

Jesus did not respect the patriarchal family and its claims but replaced it with the new community of disciples. When his mother and brothers asked for him, he replied, according to Mark,

Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? And looking round at those who were sitting in the circle about him he said: 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother'. (Mk 3:31-35)

This theological self-understanding of the Christian community is best expressed in the baptismal formula of Gal. 3:27-29. In reciting this confession, the newly initiated Christians proclaimed their vision of discipleship and inclusive community. Over and against the cultural-religious patterns shared by Jews and Hellenists alike, the Christians affirmed at their baptism that the Christian call eliminates all distinctions of religion, race, class, and caste and leads into a truly universal and catholic community of disciples.

This definition of Christian self-identity was derived by the early Christians from the call to become disciples of Jesus and members of the Christian community. Unfortunately, this early Christian self-understanding did not inform the definitions of Christian self-identity and Christian community proposed by later theology. Instead, theology derived the understanding of Christian identity from cultural anthropology and gleaned the structures of the Christian community from patriarchal societal orders. Instead of formulating a new Christian anthropology in accordance with the call to discipleship and sainthood, it spelled out Christian vocation and discipleship in terms of a cultural anthropology embedded in patriarchy.

DUALISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Catholic theology and anthropology has operated for a long time with the concept of the "two natures" of humanity, according to which women and men are by nature and essence different from each other. This attempt to see human nature and Christian discipleship expressed in two essentially different modes of being human led in tradition and theology to the denigration of women and to the glorification and mythologization of the feminine.

Women are not only different from men but also inferior to them. Traditional theology combined this male-female dualism with the

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body-spirit dualism. Women then represented sexuality, carnality, and evil. Whereas this tradition defines man by his mind and reason, it sees woman as determined by her "nature" and sexuality. Motherhood, therefore, is the true Christian vocation of every woman, regardless of whether or not she becomes a natural mother. However, in the ascetic Christian tradition nature and body have to be subordinated to mind and spirit, so woman because of her nature has to be subordinated to man. This subordination of woman is sanctioned by scripture. The official stance of the Roman Catholic Church on birth control is, moreover, based on this dualism. Women are not allowed through effective means of control to integrate their reproductive capabilities into a life plan of discipleship and vocation, but they have to remain subject to "natural" biological reproductive processes.

Catholic women have either to fulfill their nature and Christian calling in motherhood and procreation, or they have to renounce their nature and sexuality in virginity. Consequently, this traditional theology has a place for women in the Christian community only as mother or virgin. Since "the genuine" Christian and human vocation consists in transcending one's biological limitations, the ideal Christian woman's vocation is represented by the actual biological virgin who lives in concrete ecclesial commitment. The Roman Catholic sisterhood is not open to all women but is based on sexual stratification and on patriarchal anthropology. The most pressing issue within the church today is therefore, in my opinion, to create a new, inclusive sisterhood based on the Christian commitment to discipleship and call to sainthood.

The more contemporary theological aspect of the "two natures" concept of humanity is the assertion that women and men are equal but different. This "dual nature" concept emphasizes the polarity and complementarity of women and men. Only women and men together achieve human wholeness. This concept is often wrongly derived from Gn. 1:27, insofar as this Old Testament passage is taken as an explicative, dogmatic statement and not as an etiological explanation.

This theological anthropology corresponds with Jungian depth psychology, according to which the masculine and the feminine represent archetypes or principles embedded in a collective unconscious. In the opinion of Jungian theologians, the archetypes express not only the given structure of human reality, but also the structure of divine reality. The term *archetype* expresses

the presence of a divine force within the human soul which manifests itself in all the typically human patterns of thought, feeling, imagery and behavior.... So, when we say women are stuck in archetypal feminine roles, we must recognize that these roles are not simply human creations but that they also express an aspect of the divine.²

Many Christian feminists have found in the Jungian myth a "feminine religious identity." The thrust of this form of Christian feminism leads to a glorification of the so-called feminine qualities associated with the emotions, the body, the unconscious, the tribal-communal, and magic. It leads also to the rejection of the predominant cultural so-called masculine principle, associated generally with rationality, intellect, linear and hierarchical thinking, technology, and competitiveness. Whereas in traditional theological anthropology woman represented evil and temptation, in this new version of the "dual nature" concept of humanity, woman is the source of wholeness, life, and salvation. Consequently, the Father God of patriarchal religion has to be replaced with the Mother Goddess of matriarchy. In my opinion, this form of feminist theology is in danger of reintroducing into Christian faith and self-understanding a kind of gnostic dualism that maintains two ultimate principles and creative powers.

The "two natures" concept of humanity, in its negative as well as in its positive forms, reflects the myth of female power. Both the fear and demonization of women and the mythic exaltation and praise of feminine qualities presuppose the myth of the magic life power of the female. This myth has decisively influenced the Catholic understanding of the sacraments and the priesthood of the ordained.

THE MYTH OF FEMALE POWER

In cultures and periods when the mother was the only known parent and her pregnancy was easily attributed to the wind or to ancestral spirits, the power of women to create life must have been awesome indeed. In his study *The Masks of God*, J. Campbell suggests that the power of the female to create life was understood as a magical force which gave to women prodigious powers. In the very earliest forms of art, like the Venus of Willendorf, the swollen breasts, bellies, and huge buttocks of the female are stressed. Campbell believes that these earliest examples of the "graven image" were the first objects of worship and religion. In recent times, anthropologists have, moreover,

found numerous primitive peoples who are unaware that the male seed is as necessary to procreation as the female ovum and womb.

This awe for the magical female power to give life is not only a characteristic of primitive people but is deeply ingrained into the psyche of the modern person. A few weeks after having given birth to Christina, we had a faculty retreat, at which I had to make a presentation on the relationship of Loneragan's method in theology to the historical-critical method of biblical scholarship. To my great surprise, the chairman summed up my accomplishments: "Elisabeth did something that none of you men could have done. She gave birth to a child, while at the same time working at theological methodology." My ability to give birth had nothing to do with my intellectual ability to present a theological argument.

Scholars of religion suggest that the myth of female power may have led to the celebration of religious rituals and to the existence of religion as such. They interpret initiation ceremonies, at which one of the elders of the tribe confers adult status on the boys, as efforts by men to act out the rite of birth which nature denies them. Though women give birth to children in the ordinary course of events, by enacting the sacred rites of passage men turn these unfinished creatures into adult human beings. In token of this rebirth, the initiates often take on new names and are granted new privileges and dignities. The ceremonial religious act becomes as significant for the process of human maturation as pregnancy and birth.

In the light of cultural anthropology, it appears to be no accident that those churches which have a sacramental priesthood resist most strongly the ordination of women to the priesthood. The Christian sacraments are all rites which convey life. Baptism is a rebirth to a new everlasting life, the eucharist is the "bread of life," catechesis and proclamation are compared to "mothermilk and solid food." The sacrament of reconciliation restores life to its fullness. The sacrament of marriage protects and sanctifies the source of natural life. The sacraments, as rituals of birthing and nurturing, appear to imitate the female power of giving birth and of nurturing the growth of life. One would think that, therefore, women would be the ideal administrators of the sacrament.

Yet there appears to exist a deep fear in men that women's powers would become so overwhelming if they were admitted to the priesthood and the sacramental ritual, that men would be relegated to insignifi-

cance. The demand of women to be admitted to the sacramental priesthood is, therefore, often not perceived as a genuine desire of women to live their Christian vocation and to serve the people of God, but as an attempt completely to "overtake" the church. What men are often afraid of is that the change in role and position will not mean a mere shift in the relationship between men and women but a complete destruction of any relationship or a fatal reversal of the patriarchal relationship.

As long as the theology of church and ministry is based on a Christian anthropology rooted in the myth of female power, women will not be accepted into the sacramental ordained priesthood. On the other hand, as long as women are not accepted as ordained priests, the sacraments will not completely lose their magical character in the eyes of many people. As long as the sacraments and the priesthood are understood in magical terms, they are not nurturing, enabling and serving institutions, but they represent the male power over the spiritual life of Christians. The male-female dualism of traditional Christian anthropology thus engenders the clergy-lay dualism of Catholic ecclesiology. This dualism is, however, not inherent in Christian theology, but was only gradually introduced into theology and church.

THE PILGRIM CHURCH

To affirm that Christian faith and theology are not inherently patriarchal and sexist and, at the same time, to maintain that Christian theology and the Christian churches are guilty of the sin of sexism is the task of feminist theology. Christian feminists respond to the ideology and praxis of sexism in the church basically in two different ways. We do not differ so much in our analyses and critique of the cultural and theological establishment as in our spirituality and strategies. Those who advocate an exodus from all institutions of Christianity and religion for the sake of the Gospel and the genuine experience of transcendence point as justification to the history of Christianity and to their own personal histories to prove that the submission of women is absolutely essential to the churches' functioning. In the present Christian structures and theologies, women can never be more than marginal beings.

Christian feminists who hope for the repentance and radical change

of the Christian churches and religion affirm our own prophetic roles and critical mission within organized Christianity. We attempt to bring our feminist analysis and critique to bear upon theology and the Christian church in order to set free the traditions of emancipation, equality, and genuine human community which we have experienced in our Christian heritage. We do not overlook or cover up the oppression and sin which we have suffered because of Christian institutions and traditions, but we point them out in order to change them.

We Christian feminists who still identify with the Catholic tradition and remain within the institutional structures of the Church can do so because we take seriously the Church's self-understanding expressed in Vatican II. The constitution on Divine Revelation, for instance, asserts that only those statements of the Bible are the revealed Word of God which pertain to "our salvation." Cultural and anthropological frameworks are not the content of divine revelation, just as scientific and cosmological statements are only expressions of the human perception and knowledge of the sacred authors. The Council takes seriously the principle of incarnation when it asserts that divine revelation is only given in human, cultural, and societally conditioned language. This principle of incarnation is also employed by various documents of the Council which describe the reality of the Church.

Until there is a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwells (2 Peter 3:13), the Pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions which pertain to this present time takes on the appearance of this passing world. (*Lumen Gentium* 48)

This incarnational principle demands a feminist hermeneutic understanding that is not just directed toward the actualizing continuation and perceptive understanding of Christian tradition and church, but rather toward a critique of Bible, tradition, and church to the extent that they contribute to the oppression and domination of women in a patriarchal and sexist culture and religion. Feminist spirituality has to grow out of a feminist theology as a critical theology of liberation. The task of such a theology is to uncover Christian theological traditions and myths that perpetuate sexist ideologies, violence, and alienation. A Christian feminist spirituality thus has as its theological presupposition our own and the Christian community's constant need for renewal and

conversion. Christian existence, church, and theology are caught in the middle of history and, therefore, are in constant need of prophetic critique.

A positive formulation of a feminist Christian spirituality and identity can, in my opinion, never prescind from theological and cultural critique and demand of women that they forget their own anger and hurt and overlook the violence done to their sisters. In Christian terms, no cheap grace is possible. At the beginning of the Christian life and discipleship stands *metanoia*, a new orientation in the life power of the Spirit. Christian theology and the Christian community will only be able to speak in an authentic way to the quest for feminist spirituality and for the religious identity of women when the whole church, as well as its individual members, has renounced all forms of sexist ideology and praxis which are exhibited in our church structures, theologies and liturgies. The Church has publicly to confess that it has wronged women. As the Christian community has officially rejected national and racial exploitation and publicly repented of its tradition of anti-Semitic theology, so it is still called to abandon all forms of sexism.

An analysis of Christian tradition and history, however, indicates that Church and theology will transcend their own sexist ideologies only when women are granted full spiritual, theological, and ecclesial equality. The Christian churches will only overcome their oppressive patriarchal traditions and their present sexist theologies and praxis if the very basis of these theologies and praxis is changed. If women were admitted to the full leadership in church and theology, the need would no longer exist to affirm theologically the maleness of God and Christ and to suppress the Spirit who moves women to full participation in the Christian church and ministry. Church leaders and theologians who do not respect the Spirit of liberty and responsibility among Christian women deny the church and theology its full catholicity. Only if we, women and men, are able to live in nonsexist Christian communities, to celebrate nonsexist Christian liturgies, and to think in nonsexist theological terms and imagery will we be able to formulate a genuine Christian feminist spirituality.

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Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections

CAROL P. CHRIST

At the close of Ntozake Shange's stupendously successful Broadway play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf," a tall beautiful black woman rises from despair to cry out, "I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely."¹ Her discovery is echoed by women around the country who meet spontaneously in small groups on full moons, solstices, and equinoxes to celebrate the Goddess as symbol of life and death powers and waxing and waning energies in the universe and in themselves.²

It is the night of the full moon. Nine women stand in a circle, on a rocky hill above the city. The western sky is rosy with the setting sun; in the east the

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moon's face begins to peer above the horizon. . . . The woman pours out a cup of wine onto the earth, refills it and raises it high. "Hail, Tana, Mother of mothers!" she cries. "Awaken from your long sleep, and return to your children again!"³

What are the political and psychological effects of this fierce new love of the divine in themselves for women whose spiritual experience has been focused by the male God of Judaism and Christianity? Is the spiritual dimension of feminism a passing diversion, an escape from difficult but necessary political work? Or does the emergence of the symbol of Goddess among women have significant political and psychological ramifications for the feminist movement?

To answer this question, we must first understand the importance of religious symbols and rituals in human life and consider the effect of male symbolism of God on women. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, religious symbols shape a cultural ethos, defining the deepest values of a society and the persons in it. "Religion," Geertz writes "is a system of symbols which act to produce powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations"⁴ in the people of a given culture. A "mood" for Geertz is a psychological attitude such as awe, trust, and respect, while a "motivation" is the *social and political* trajectory created by a mood that transforms mythos into ethos, symbol system into social and political reality. Symbols have both psychological and political effects, because they create the inner conditions (deep-seated attitudes and feelings) that lead people to feel comfortable with or to accept social and political arrangements that correspond to the symbol system.

Because religion has such a compelling hold on the deep psyches of so many people, feminists cannot afford to leave it in the hands of the fathers. Even people who no longer "believe in God" or participate in the institutional structure of patriarchal religion still may not be free of the power of the symbolism of God the Father. A symbol's effect does not depend on rational assent, for a symbol also functions on levels of the psyche other than the rational. Religion fulfills deep psychic needs by providing symbols and rituals that enable people to cope with limit situations⁵ in human life (death, evil, suffering) and to pass through life's important transitions (birth, sexuality, death). Even people who consider themselves completely secularized will often find themselves sitting in a church or synagogue when a friend or relative gets married, or when a parent or friend has died. The symbols associated with these

important rituals cannot fail to affect the deep or unconscious structures of the mind of even a person who has rejected these symbolisms on a conscious level—especially if the person is under stress. The reason for the continuing effect of religious symbols is that the mind abhors a vacuum. Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected; they must be replaced. Where there is not any replacement, the mind will revert to familiar structures at times of crisis, bafflement, or defeat.

Religions centered on the worship of a male God create "moods" and "motivations" that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority, while at the same time legitimating the *political and social* authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society.

Religious symbol systems focused around exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent. This message need never be explicitly stated (as, for example, it is in the story of Eve) for its effect to be felt. A woman completely ignorant of the myths of female evil in biblical religion nonetheless acknowledges the anomaly of female power when she prays exclusively to a male God. She may see herself as like God (created in the image of God) only by denying her own sexual identity and affirming God's transcendence of sexual identity. But she can never have the experience that is freely available to every man and boy in her culture, of having her full sexual identity affirmed as being in the image and likeness of God. In Geertz' terms, her "mood" is one of trust in male power as salvific and distrust of female power in herself and other women as inferior or dangerous. Such a powerful, pervasive, and longlasting "mood" cannot fail to become a "motivation" that translates into social and political reality.

In *Beyond God the Father*, feminist theologian Mary Daly detailed the psychological and political ramifications of father religion for women. "If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling his people," she wrote, "then it is the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male dominated. Within this context, a *mystification of roles* takes place: The husband dominating his wife represents God 'himself.' The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and 'Articles of Faith,' and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and which sustain their plausibility."⁶

Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir was well aware of the function of

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patriarchal religion as legitimator of male power. As she wrote, "Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jew, Mohammedans, and Christians, among others, man is Master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse to revolt in the downtrodden female."⁷

This brief discussion of the psychological and political effects of God religion puts us in an excellent position to begin to understand the significance of the symbol of Goddess for women. In discussing the meaning of the Goddess, my method will first be phenomenological. I will isolate a meaning of the symbol of the Goddess as it has emerged in the lives of contemporary women. I will then discuss its psychological and political significance by contrasting the "moods" and "motivations" engendered by Goddess symbols with those engendered by Christian symbolism. I will also correlate Goddess symbolism with themes that have emerged in the women's movement, in order to show how Goddess symbolism undergirds and legitimizes the concerns of the women's movement, much as God symbolism in Christianity undergirded the interests of men in patriarchy. I will discuss four aspects of Goddess symbolism here: the Goddess as affirmation of female power, the female body, the female will, and women's bonds and heritage. There are, of course, many other meanings of the Goddess that I will not discuss here.

The sources for the symbol of the Goddess in contemporary spirituality are traditions of Goddess worship and modern women's experience. The ancient Mediterranean, pre-Christian European, native American, Mesoamerican, Hindu, African, and other traditions are rich sources for Goddess symbolism. But these traditions are filtered through modern women's experiences. Traditions of Goddesses, subordination to Gods, for example, are ignored. Ancient traditions are tapped selectively and eclectically, but they are not considered authoritative for modern consciousness. The Goddess symbol has emerged spontaneously in the dreams, fantasies, and thoughts of many women around the country in the past several years. Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie reported that they were surprised to discover widespread interest in spirituality, including the Goddess, among feminists around the country in the summer of 1974.⁸ *WomanSpirit* magazine, which published its first issue in 1974 and has contributors from across the

United States, has expressed the grass roots nature of the women's spirituality movement. In 1976, a journal, *Lady Unique*, devoted to the Goddess emerged. In 1975, the first women's spirituality conference was held in Boston and attended by 1,800 women. In 1978, a University of Santa Cruz course on the Goddess drew over 500 people. Sources for this essay are these manifestations of the Goddess in modern women's experiences as reported in *WomanSpirit*, *Lady Unique*, and elsewhere, and as expressed in conversations I have had with women who have been thinking about the Goddess and women's spirituality.

The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of Goddess is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power. A woman who echoes Ntosake Shange's dramatic statement, "I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely," is saying "Female power is strong and creative." She is saying that the divine principle, the saving and sustaining power, is in herself, that she will no longer look to men or male figures as saviors. The strength and independence of female power can be intuited by contemplating ancient and modern images of the Goddess. This meaning of the symbol of Goddess is simple and obvious, and yet it is difficult for many to comprehend. It stands in sharp contrast to the paradigms of female dependence on males that have been predominant in Western religion and culture. The internationally acclaimed novelist Monique Wittig captured the novelty and flavor of the affirmation of female power when she wrote, in her mythic work *Les Guerilleres*,

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember . . . you say there are no words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.⁹

While Wittig does not speak directly of the Goddess here, she captures the "mood" of joyous celebration of female freedom and independence that is created in women who define their identities through the symbol of Goddess. Artist Mary Beth Edelson expressed the political "motivations" inspired by the Goddess when she wrote,

The ascending archetypal symbols of the feminine unfold today in the psyche of modern Every woman. They encompass the multiple forms of the Great Goddess. Reaching across the centuries we take the hands of our Ancient

Sisters. The Great Goddess alive and well is rising to announce to the patriarchs that their 5,000 years are up—Hallelujah! Here we come.¹⁰

The affirmation of female power contained in the Goddess symbol has both psychological and political consequences. Psychologically, it means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous. This new "mood" of affirmation of female power also leads to new "motivations"; it supports and undergirds women's trust in their own power and the power of other women in family and society.

If the simplest meaning of the Goddess symbol is an affirmation of the legitimacy and beneficence of female power, then a question immediately arises, "Is the Goddess simply female power writ large, and if so, why bother with the symbol of Goddess at all? Or does the symbol refer to a Goddess 'out there' who is not reducible to a human potential?" The many women who have rediscovered the power of Goddess would give three answers to this question: (1) The Goddess is divine female, a personification who can be invoked in prayer and ritual; (2) the Goddess is symbol of the life, death, and rebirth energy in nature and culture, in personal and communal life and (3) the Goddess is symbol of the affirmation of the legitimacy and beauty of female power (made possible by the new becoming of women in the women's liberation movement). If one were to ask these women which answer is the "correct" one, different responses would be given. Some would assert that the Goddess definitely is *not* "out there," that the symbol of a divinity "out there" is part of the legacy of patriarchal oppression, which brings with it the authoritarianism, hierarchicism, and dogmatic rigidity associated with biblical monotheistic religions. They might assert that the Goddess symbol reflects the sacred power within women and nature, suggesting the connectedness between women's cycles of menstruation, birth, and menopause, and the life and death cycles of the universe. Others seem quite comfortable with the notion of Goddess as a divine female protector and creator and would find their experience of Goddess limited by the assertion that she is not *also* out there as well as within themselves and in all natural processes. When asked what the symbol of Goddess means, feminist priestess Starhawk replied, "It all depends on how I feel. When I feel weak, she is someone who can help and protect me. When I feel strong, she is the symbol of my own power. At other times I feel her as the natural

energy in my body and the world."¹¹ How are we to evaluate such a statement? Theologians might call these the words of a sloppy thinker. But my deepest intuition tells me they contain a wisdom that Western theological thought has lost.

To theologians, these differing views of the "meaning" of the symbol of Goddess might seem to threaten a replay of the trinitarian controversies. Is there, perhaps, a way of doing theology, which would not lead immediately into dogmatic controversy, which would not require theologians to say definitively that one understanding is true and the others are false? Could people's relation to a common symbol be made primary and varying interpretations be acknowledged? The diversity of explanations of the meaning of the Goddess symbol suggests that symbols have a richer significance than any explanations of their meaning can express, a point literary critics have long insisted on. This phenomenological fact suggests that theologians may need to give more than lip service to a theory of symbol in which the symbol is viewed as the primary fact and the meanings are viewed as secondary. It also suggests that a *theology*¹² of the Goddess would be very different from the *theology* we have known in the West. But to spell out this notion of the primacy of *symbol* in theology in contrast to the primacy of the *explanation* in theology would be the topic of another paper. Let me simply state that women, who have been deprived of a female religious symbol system for centuries, are therefore in an excellent position to recognize the power and primacy of symbols. I believe women must develop a theory of symbol and theology congruent with their experience at the same time as they "remember and invent" new symbol systems.

A second important implication of the Goddess symbol for women is the affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed in it. Because of women's unique position as menstruants, birthgivers, and those who have traditionally cared for the young and the dying, women's connection to the body, nature, and this world has been obvious. Women were denigrated because they seemed more carnal, fleshy, and earthy than the culture-creating males.¹³ The misogynist *antibody* tradition in Western thought is symbolized in the myth of Eve who is traditionally viewed as a sexual temptress, the epitome of women's carnal nature. This tradition reaches its nadir in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Evil-Doing Women*), which states, "All witchcraft stems from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable."

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ble."¹⁴ The Virgin Mary, the positive female image in Christianity does not contradict Christian denigration of the female body and its powers. The Virgin Mary is revered because she, in her perpetual virginity, transcends the carnal sexuality attributed to most women.

The denigration of the female body is expressed in cultural and religious taboos surrounding menstruation, childbirth, and menopause in women. While menstruation taboos may have originated in a perception of the awesome powers of the female body,¹⁵ they degenerated into a simple perception that there is something "wrong" with female bodily functions. Menstruating women were forbidden to enter the sanctuary in ancient Hebrew and premodern Christian communities. Although only Orthodox Jews still enforce religious taboos against menstruant women, few women in our culture grow up affirming their menstruation as a connection to sacred power. Most women learn that menstruation is a curse and grow up believing that the bloody facts of menstruation are best hidden away. Feminists challenge this attitude to the female body. Judy Chicago's art piece "Menstruation Bathroom" broke these menstrual taboos. In a sterile white bathroom, she exhibited boxes of Tampax and Kotex on an open shelf, and the wastepaper basket was overflowing with bloody tampons and sanitary napkins.¹⁶ Many women who viewed the piece felt relieved to have their "dirty secret" out in the open.

The denigration of the female body and its powers is further expressed in Western culture's attitudes toward childbirth.¹⁷ Religious iconography does not celebrate the birthgiver, and there is no theology or ritual that enables a woman to celebrate the process of birth as a spiritual experience. Indeed, Jewish and Christian traditions also had blood taboos concerning the woman who had recently given birth. While these religious taboos are rarely enforced today (again, only by Orthodox Jews), they have secular equivalents. Giving birth is treated as a disease requiring hospitalization, and the woman is viewed as a passive object, anesthetized to ensure her acquiescence to the will of the doctor. The women's liberation movement has challenged these cultural attitudes, and many feminists have joined with advocates of natural childbirth and home birth in emphasizing the need for women to control and take pride in their bodies, including the birth process.

Western culture also gives little dignity to the postmenopausal or aging woman. It is no secret that our culture is based on a denial of aging and death, and that women suffer more severely from this denial than men. Women are placed on a pedestal and considered powerful

when they are young and beautiful, but they are said to lose this power as they age. As feminists have pointed out, the "power" of the young woman is illusory, since beauty standards are defined by men, and since few women are considered (or consider themselves) beautiful for more than a few years of their lives. Some men are viewed as wise and authoritative in age, but old women are pitied and shunned. Religious iconography supports this cultural attitude towards aging women. The purity and virginity of Mary and the female saints is often expressed in the iconographic convention of perpetual youth. Moreover, religious mythology associates aging women with evil in the symbol of the wicked old witch. Feminists have challenged cultural myths of aging women and have urged women to reject patriarchal beauty standards and to celebrate the distinctive beauty of women of all ages.

The symbol of Goddess aids the process of naming and reclaiming the female body and its cycles and processes. In the ancient world and among modern women, the Goddess symbol represents the birth, death, and rebirth processes of the natural and human worlds. The female body is viewed as the direct incarnation of waxing and waning, life and death, cycles in the universe. This is sometimes expressed through the symbolic connection between the twenty-eight-day cycles of menstruation and the twenty-eight-day cycles of the moon. Moreover, the Goddess is celebrated in the triple aspect of youth, maturity, and age, or maiden, mother, and crone. The potentiality of the young girl is celebrated in the nymph or maiden aspect of the Goddess. The Goddess as mother is sometimes depicted giving birth, and giving birth is viewed as a symbol for all the creative, life-giving powers of the universe.¹⁸ The life-giving powers of the Goddess in her creative aspect are not limited to physical birth, for the Goddess is also seen as the creator of all the arts of civilization, including healing, writing, and the giving of just law. Women in the middle of life who are not physical mothers may give birth to poems, songs, and books, or nurture other women, men, and children. They too are incarnations of the Goddess in her creative, life-giving aspect. At the end of life, women incarnate the crone aspect of the Goddess. The wise old woman, the woman who knows from experience what life is about, the woman whose closeness to her own death gives her a distance and perspective on the problems of life, is celebrated as the third aspect of the Goddess. Thus, women learn to value youth, creativity, and wisdom in themselves and other women.

The possibilities of reclaiming the female body and its cycles have

been expressed in a number of Goddess-centered rituals. Hallie Mountaintwing and Barby My Own created a summer solstice ritual to celebrate menstruation and birth. The women simulated a birth canal and birthed each other into their circle. They raised power by placing their hands on each other's bellies and chanting together. Finally they marked each other's faces with rich, dark menstrual blood saying, "This is the blood that promises renewal. This is the blood that promises sustenance. This is the blood that promises life."¹⁹ From hidden dirty secret to symbol of the life power of the Goddess, women's blood has come full circle. Other women have created rituals that celebrate the crone aspect of the Goddess. Z. Budapest believes that the crone aspect of the Goddess is predominant in the fall, especially at Halloween, an ancient holiday. On this day, the wisdom of the old woman is celebrated, and it is also recognized that the old must die so that the new can be born.

The "mood" created by the symbol of the Goddess in triple aspect is one of positive, joyful affirmation of the female body and its cycles and acceptance of aging and death as well as life. The "motivations" are to overcome menstrual taboos, to return the birth process to the hands of women, and to change cultural attitudes about age and death. Changing cultural attitudes toward the female body could go a long way toward overcoming the spirit-flesh, mind-body dualisms of Western culture, since, as Ruether has pointed out, the denigration of the female body is at the heart of these dualisms. The Goddess as symbol of the revaluation of the body and nature thus also undergirds the human potential and ecology movements. The "mood" is one of affirmation, awe, and respect for the body and nature, and the "motivation" is to respect the teachings of the body and the rights of all living beings.

A third important implication of the Goddess symbol for women is the positive valuation of will in a Goddess-centered ritual, especially in Goddess-centered ritual magic and spellcasting in womanspirit and feminist witchcraft circles. The basic notion behind ritual magic and spellcasting is energy as power. Here the Goddess is a center or focus of power and energy; she is the personification of the energy that flows between beings in the natural and human worlds. In Goddess circles, energy is raised by chanting or dancing. According to Starhawk, "Witches conceive of psychic energy as a living form and substance that can be perceived and directed by those with a trained awareness. The power generated within the circle is built into a cone form, and at its

peak is released—to the Goddess, to reenergize the members of the coven, or to do a specific work such as healing."²⁰ In ritual magic, the energy raised is directed by willpower. Women who celebrate in Goddess circles believe they can achieve their wills in the world.

The emphasis on the will is important for women, because women traditionally have been taught to devalue their wills, to believe that they cannot achieve their will through their own power, and even to suspect that the assertion of will is evil. Faith Wildung's poem "Waiting," from which I will quote only a short segment, sums up women's sense that their lives are defined not by their own will, but by waiting for others to take the initiative.

Waiting for my breasts to develop
Waiting to wear a bra
Waiting to menstruate

...
Waiting for life to begin, Waiting—
Waiting to be somebody

...
Waiting to get married
Waiting for my wedding day
Waiting for my wedding night

...
Waiting for the end of the day
Waiting for sleep. Waiting ...²¹

Patriarchal religion has enforced the view that female initiative and will are evil through the juxtaposition of Eve and Mary. Eve caused the fall by asserting her will against the command of God, while Mary began the new age with her response to God's initiative, "Let it be done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Even for men, patriarchal religion values the passive will subordinate to divine initiative. The classical doctrines of sin and grace view sin as the prideful assertion of will and grace as the obedient subordination of the human will to the divine initiative or order. While this view of will might be questioned from a human perspective, Valerie Saiving has argued that it has particularly deleterious consequences for women in Western culture. According to Saiving, Western culture encourages males in the assertion of will, and thus it may make some sense to view the male form of sin as an excess of will. But since culture discourages females in the assertion of will, the traditional doctrines of sin and

grace encourage women to remain in their form of sin, which is self-negation or insufficient assertion of will.²² One possible reason the will is denigrated in a patriarchal religious framework is that both human and divine will are often pictured as arbitrary, self-initiated, and exercised without regard for other wills.

In a Goddess-centered context, in contrast, the will is valued. *A woman is encouraged to know her will, to believe that her will is valid, and to believe that her will can be achieved in the world*, three powers traditionally denied to her in patriarchy. In a Goddess-centered framework, a woman's will is not subordinated to the Lord God as king and ruler, nor to men as his representatives. Thus a woman is not reduced to waiting and acquiescing in the wills of others as she is in patriarchy. But neither does she adopt the egocentric form of will that pursues self-interest without regard for the interests of others.

The Goddess-centered context provides a different understanding of the will than that available in the traditional patriarchal religious framework. In the Goddess framework, will can be achieved only when it is exercised in harmony with the energies and wills of other beings. Wise women, for example, raise a cone of healing energy at the full moon or solstice when the lunar or solar energies are at their high points with respect to the earth. This discipline encourages them to recognize that not all times are propitious for the achieving of every will. Similarly, they know that spring is a time for new beginnings in work and love, summer a time for producing external manifestations of inner potentialities, and fall or winter times for stripping down to the inner core and extending roots. Such awareness of waxing and waning processes in the universe discourages arbitrary ego-centered assertion of will, while at the same time encouraging the assertion of individual will in cooperation with natural energies and the energies created by the wills of others. Wise women also have a tradition that whatever is sent out will be returned and this reminds them to assert their wills in cooperative and healing rather than egocentric and destructive ways. This view of will allows women to begin to recognize, claim, and assert their wills without adopting the worst characteristics of the patriarchal understanding and use of will. In the Goddess-centered framework, the "mood" is one of positive affirmation of personal will in the context of the energies of other wills or beings. The "motivation" is for women to know and assert their wills in cooperation with other wills and energies. This of course does not mean that women always assert their

wills in positive and life-affirming ways. Women's capacity for evil is, of course, as great as men's. My purpose is simply to contrast the differing attitudes toward the exercise of will *per se*, and the female will in particular, in Goddess-centered religion and in the Christian God-centered religion.

The fourth and final aspect of Goddess symbolism that I will discuss here is the significance of the Goddess for a reevaluation of woman's bonds and heritage. As Virginia Woolf has said, "Chloe liked Olivia," a statement about a woman's relation to another woman, is a sentence that rarely occurs in fiction. Men have written the stories, and they have written about women almost exclusively in their relations to men.²³ The celebrations of women's bonds to each other, as mothers and daughters, as colleagues and coworkers, as sisters, friends, and lovers, is beginning to occur in the new literature and culture created by women in the women's movement. While I believe that the revaluating of each of these bonds is important, I will focus on the mother-daughter bond, in part because I believe it may be the key to the others.

Adrienne Rich has pointed out that the mother-daughter bond, perhaps the most important of woman's bonds, "resonant with charges . . . the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other,"²⁴ is rarely celebrated in patriarchal religion and culture. Christianity celebrates the father's relation to the son and the mother's relation to the son, but the story of mother and daughter is missing. So, too, in patriarchal literature and psychology the mothers and the daughters rarely exist. Volumes have been written about the oedipal complex, but little has been written about the girl's relation to her mother. Moreover, as de Beauvoir has noted, the mother-daughter relation is distorted in patriarchy because the mother must give her daughter over to men in a male-defined culture in which women are viewed as inferior. The mother must socialize her daughter to become subordinate to men, and if her daughter challenges patriarchal norms, the mother is likely to defend the patriarchal structures against her own daughter.²⁵

These patterns are changing in the new culture created by women in which the bonds of women to women are beginning to be celebrated. Holly Near has written several songs that celebrate women's bonds and women's heritage. In one of her finest songs she writes of an "old-time

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woman" who is "waiting to die." A young woman feels for the life that has passed the old woman by and begins to cry, but the old woman looks her in the eye and says, "If I had not suffered, you wouldn't be wearing those jeans/Being an old-time woman ain't as bad as it seems."²⁶ This song, which Near has said was inspired by her grandmother, expresses and celebrates a bond and a heritage passed down from one woman to another. In another of Near's songs, she sings of a "a hiking-boot mother who's seeing the world/For the first time with her own little girl." In this song, the mother tells the drifter who has been traveling with her to pack up and travel alone if he thinks "traveling three is a drag" because "I've got a little one who loves me as much as you need me/And darling, that's loving enough."²⁷ This song is significant because the mother places her relationship to her daughter above her relationship to a man, something women rarely do in patriarchy.²⁸

Almost the only story of mothers and daughters that has been transmitted in Western culture is the myth of Demeter and Persephone that was the basis of religious rites celebrated by women only, the Thesmophoria, and later formed the basis of the Eleusian mysteries, which were open to all who spoke Greek. In this story, the daughter, Persephone, is raped away from her mother, Demeter, by the God of the underworld. Unwilling to accept this state of affairs, Demeter rages and withholds fertility from the earth until her daughter is returned to her. What is important for women in this story is that a mother fights for her daughter and for her relation to her daughter. This is completely different from the mother's relation to her daughter in patriarchy. The "mood" created by the story of Demeter and Persephone is one of celebration of the mother-daughter bond, and the "motivation" is for mothers and daughters to affirm the heritage passed on from mother to daughter and to reject the patriarchal pattern where the primary loyalties of mother and daughter must be to men.

The symbol of Goddess has much to offer women who are struggling to be rid of the "powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations" of devaluation of female power, denigration of the female body, distrust of female will, and denial of the women's bonds and heritage that have been engendered by patriarchal religion. As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will, and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the Goddess would reemerge as symbol of the newfound beauty, strength, and power of women.

NOTES

1. From the original cast album, Buddhad Records, 1976.
2. See Susan Rennie and Kristen Grimstad, "Spiritual Explorations Cross-Country," *Quest*, 1975, I (4), 1975, 49-51; and *WomanSpirit* magazine.
3. See Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," in this volume.
4. "Religion as a Cultural System," in William L. Lessa and Evon V. Vogt, eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 206.
5. Geertz, p. 210.
6. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974, p. 13, italics added.
7. *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parsleys (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).
8. See Grimstad and Rennie.
9. *Les Guerilleres*, trans. David LeVay (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 89. Also quoted in Morgan MacFarland, "Witchcraft: The Art of Remembering," *Quest*, 1975, I (4), 41.
10. "Speaking for Myself," *Lady Unique*, 1976, I, 56.
11. Personal communication.
12. A term coined by Naomi Goldenberg to refer to reflection on the meaning of the symbol of Goddess.
13. This theory of the origins of the Western dualism is stated by Rosemary Ruether in *New Woman: New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), and elsewhere.
14. Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger (New York: Dover, 1971), p. 47.
15. See Rita M. Gross, "Menstruation and Childbirth as Ritual and Religious Experience in the Religion of the Australian Aborigines," in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 1977, 45 (4), Supplement 1147-1181.
16. *Through the Flower* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), plate 4, pp. 106-107.
17. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), chaps. 6 and 7.
18. See James Mellaart, *Earliest Civilizations of the Near East* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 92.
19. Barbry My Own, "Ursa Maior: Menstrual Moon Celebration," in Anne Kent Rush, ed., *Moon, Moon* (Berkeley, Calif., and New York: Moon Books and Random House, 1976), pp. 374-387.
20. Starhawk, in this volume.
21. In Judy Chicago, pp. 213-217.
22. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Journal of Religion*, 1960, 40, 100-112, and reprinted in this volume.
23. *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1928), p. 86.
24. Rich, p. 226.
25. De Beauvoir, pp. 448-449.
26. "Old Time Woman," lyrics by Jeffrey Langley and Holly Near, from *Holly Near: A Live Album*, Redwood Records, 1974.
27. "Started Out Fine," by Holly Near from *Holly Near: A Live Album*.
28. Rich, p. 223.

American Reincarnations: What the Many Lives of Past Lives Tell us about Contemporary Spiritual Practice

Courtney Bender

This paper explores how contemporary "past life" and "reincarnation" practices in the United States draw upon and reproduce visions of divine connection formed in nineteenth-century metaphysical investigations. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with spiritual seekers in Cambridge, MA, in 2002-04, I demonstrate how contemporary past life beliefs and practices resonate with older concerns, questions, and understandings of the self in history. These practices allow contemporary American spiritual seekers to augment and creatively rethink (and replace) their relations with intimate others, providing rich experiential resources for placing the self in history and relation. At the same time, these practices displace practitioners' interests in the metaphysical histories that scholars of religion have been most interested in recovering, raising new questions for historians and sociologists alike about how traditions are carried and recognized.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN new age has been viewed by scholars as a jumble of post-modern religious bricolage built on

Courtney Bender, Department of Religion, Columbia University, 80 Claremont Avenue, Room 103, New York, NY 10027, USA. E-mail: cb337@columbia.edu. This research was supported by a grant from the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, Columbia University. Many thanks to Jonathan Dworkin, Erika Dyson, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on previous drafts, and to John Modern for coordinating the joint metaphysical submission.

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individual seeking, experience, appropriation of "exotic" religious ideas and practices and organized only by individual seekers' whimsy (Donaldson 1999; Lau 2000; Carrette and King 2005). Spiritual practitioners' own claims that their religious paths are governed by personal choice, inspiration and experience generally confirm such interpretations (Heelas 1996; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999), resulting in a portrait of the "new age" as a quintessentially modern, cosmopolitan religion built out of ruptures from the past (Hervieu-Leger 2000). Reincarnation and past life beliefs are often noted as representative of modern seeker spirituality's ability to appropriate and refashion religious elements from other sources to their own liking and for their own private use (Walter and Waterhouse 1999; Walter 2000).

Here as elsewhere, scholarly consensus obscures as much as it illuminates. In fact, American reincarnation beliefs are much more complex and storied than such views suggest. As numerous historians have recently shown, much of the contemporary expression and practice of reincarnation and past lives is solidly within the religious genealogies of American spiritual exploration (Fuller 2001; Schmidt 2000, 2005; Albanese 2006). In fact, contemporary reincarnation beliefs and practices owe as much to nineteenth and early twentieth-century interpretations as they do to more contemporary encounters with Asian texts and ideas. Part of this paper's goal is to trace how earlier arguments and visions about reincarnation continue to resonate in the practices of turn of the twenty-first century seekers.

Nonetheless, the academic project of narrating genealogies of American metaphysical reincarnation beliefs and practice raises further questions. Academics who write such histories and articulate these genealogies build on very different practices of past-making than do reincarnation practitioners and metaphysical believers. Given that most contemporary practitioners themselves seem little aware of (and only marginally interested in) the genealogies that historians and religious studies scholars introduce, we might further ask how and in what respects historical projects and practices are relevant to contemporary practitioners. Thus, although historians' projects contribute greatly to our understandings of the place of metaphysical traditions in contemporary America, they also raise further questions about the various pasts that American spiritual seekers themselves understand as authoritative or even relevant to their own religious lives.

This paper focuses less on the theological or ideological content of reincarnation beliefs (that is, varying views of the unconscious, memory, and the nature of the divine) than on the practices through which metaphysical practitioners observe, sense, and know their various

past lives, and their place within various histories. Numerous scholars have noted how metaphysical ideas as diverse as channeling and "experienting" contribute to the development of ahistorical, mystical, universal time (Proudfoot 1985; Brown 1994; Bender 2007), and reincarnation practices similarly challenge the authority of material, genealogical history. Reincarnation practices do not, however, simply remove individuals and groups from material history. Rather, these practices can best be seen as supplementing genealogical histories with mystical histories, in ways that place contemporary spiritual practitioners in dynamic relations to multiple pasts. Thus, American reincarnation practices present a uniquely fruitful entry point into considering the complexities of interpreting metaphysical traditions.

This paper proceeds by reflecting on the multiple pasts of past lives in several ways. I begin by tracing the emergence of a progressive, scientific, and social reincarnation that emerged in late nineteenth-century arguments about afterlife, and pay particular attention to the ways that these aspects shaped ways of reading, interpreting, and verifying past lives. As I note, these practices of interpreting and reading past lives favor mystical histories that displace the genealogies of these practices, including the practices that historians and other scholars might use to link past to the present. Given contemporary practitioners' lack of awareness of these histories, I argue that a tradition of American reincarnation practice is passed on not through conscious recognition of religious lineage, but rather through the reproduction of practices. In this case, these practices participate in a "tradition," albeit one that becomes powerful by occluding references to its genealogy. By marking practices as the carriers of tradition, we can think more clearly about the ways that practices of history and past making shape spiritual practitioners' identities as seekers or religious agents (Bakhtin 1981, 1984; Lambek 2003) and likewise consider how these practices of history making themselves carry and shape traditions (Olick 1999; Chakrabarty 2000).

Turning to ethnographic field research conducted in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I then demonstrate how contemporary spiritual practitioners mobilize reincarnation practices that resonate with the ideas, arguments, and concerns of earlier reincarnation proponents. In particular, we hear how ideas of the soul's progress, the role of science in "proving" the existence of past lives, and the tantalizing and powerful ideas of "soul mates" actively shape both the religious selves and worlds that seekers live within, and the types of pasts in which those worlds continue. In turning to these daily uses, we see how the idioms and practices of past lives become engaged with and bound up in genealogies of which practitioners are little aware. Likewise, we see how individuals draw on

their "mystical" visions of the past to read and evaluate their "genealogical" pasts, and in doing so, open up creative space for practitioners to rethink their position in the world. The "many lives" of Americans' contemporary and historical investigations and explorations into reincarnation theories thus include both the interplay of spiritual practitioners' interpretations of their own "mundane" and "mystical" pasts, and thus reveal the largely unacknowledged but continuing resonance of early twentieth-century metaphysical understandings of history and selfhood. As I note in the conclusion, sustained ethnographic and historical attention to the ways that these prosaic and mystical practices shape "spiritual" selves and their place in relation to America's metaphysical selves raises questions and new possibilities for analyzing contemporary spiritual practice.

AMERICAN REINCARNATIONS: BUILDING METAPHYSICAL PASTS

American and Continental metaphysical writers began to argue about the possibilities of "regeneration," the transmigration of souls, past lives, and reincarnation in the last decades of the nineteenth century, at a time when the metaphysical heavens were burgeoning with countless ghosts, astral beings, angels, spirit guides, and ascended Masters. The evident impetus for metaphysical interest in reincarnation was the growing popular attention to Asian philosophical and religious texts, carried forward by interpreters as diverse as Emerson and Helena Petrova Blavatsky, Swami Vivekananda, and Yogi Paramhansa (Hanegraaff 1998; Versluis 1993). Reincarnation beliefs took shape within a field already rich both with metaphysical possibilities (Jackson 1975) and with internecine conflicts over their truths (Prothero 1993; Godwin 1994; Albanese 2006). Several related strands of reincarnation ideology took shape in this period, and although they remained related, they were at times quite at odds with each other. The Theosophical position, for example, stressed a universal law of karma that was in line with Blavatsky's rejection of a "personal God," and furthermore summarily rejected the possibility that people could recall past life memories or experiences. Although Blavatsky's writings (1970) on reincarnation influenced the thinking of numerous New Thought writers, Spiritualists, Rosicrucians, and esoteric Christians (Albanese 2006), her strong position on the absence of a personal God and her refusal to allow that past lives could be remembered set her ideas apart from most others'. In contrast, many other writers inspired by Asian texts discovered in reincarnation a progressive and scientific principle

wherein souls moved toward perfection and union with God through multiple lives, and in which knowledge of past lives would come to play an important role in interpreting the present. The reincarnation that these writers promoted was "peculiarly modern, conforming to the latest findings of modern science and even prefiguring Darwin's theory of evolution" (Jackson 1975: 531).

The emphasis that these writers placed on the progressive and scientific nature of reincarnation was unquestionably shaped by relentless criticisms from both mainstream Christians and other metaphysical believers who viewed reincarnation as a "repulsive ... unnatural" and "loathsome" abomination (Moore 1977; Godwin 1994: 340). To counter these claims, proponents established that reincarnation was discernable in all religious texts (although often not at first blush), and proponents taught their audiences how to discern these truths by analyzing them in light of their own perceptions. While nineteenth-century arguments about reincarnation were far from unified, the elements of progressive or evolutionary reincarnation, the scientific truths, and the central role of soul mates provided discrete resources and practices that worked to bolster claims for its truths, and simultaneously shaped proponents' understandings of their own place in history. Uncovering the esoteric truths of the past through reading, interpreting experiences, and acknowledging soul connections not only "proved" the truths of reincarnation, it also positioned metaphysical believers within universes populated with known souls working together toward perfect union with the infinite.

Progressive Reincarnation, Scientific Veracity, and Soul Mates

Many early proponents of reincarnation emphasized its natural place within progressive Christianity, and further argued that such truths were evident to all those who read the scriptures in the proper way. As Maitland and Kingsford noted in their lectures on esoteric Christianity, "the doctrine that all creatures whatsoever represent incarnations, though in different conditions, of one and the same universal soul, would not now need to be re-declared" had the Christian tradition not long ago lost their way (1890: 23-24). The different "conditions" of various souls notwithstanding, all souls moved progressively through multiple lives toward union with the divine. The karmic demands of rebirth, in this view, were "grist" that refined souls, as popular New Thought author Charles B. Newcomb opined. "The mills of the gods grind so slowly that the grist of to-day may have been put into the hopper in some incarnation far remote; but doubtless by the man's own hands, for it is only our own grist that comes to us through the mill of life"

(Newcomb 1900: 110). Nonetheless, most progressive reincarnationists adamantly agreed that each lifetime represented a step closer to spiritual perfection. Thus, even as they noted that the *Bhagavad Gita* presented evidence of the universal truths of reincarnation, they also held this text at arm's length, criticizing its depictions of reincarnation and its "lack" of understanding of reincarnation's progressive nature. New Thought Writer Paul Tyner was not alone when he criticized "Asian" views that humans could reincarnate as animals. In the world of American, progressive reincarnation interspecies transmigration was an affront and clear evidence of the need to recover the true meaning of karma. He wrote, the "true meaning of the doctrine ... the human ego can no more retrograde by reincarnating in brute form than, according to the Darwinian theory, man can degenerate into a monkey, or a monkey into a mosquito" (quoted in Jackson 1975: 532). Responding to a query of whether a person could descend rather than ascend on the spiritual path toward union with God, French Spiritist Allan Kardec said "as regards his *social position*, yes; but not as regards his degree of progress as a spirit" (Kardec [1875] 1976: 532, italics in original). Maitland and Kingsford also averred, arguing, "man ... has a divine spirit; and so long as he is man—that is truly human—he cannot redescend into the body of an animal or any creature in the sphere beneath him, since that would bean indignity to the spirit" (46).

These Asian "corruptions" of the doctrine's truths were generally considered to be the result of debased and degenerate Asian social norms, a charge that was mirrored in reincarnationists' views of the suppression of the doctrine in Christian texts. Proponents worked vigorously to explain that their views on the matter aligned with the universal truths embedded in the Bible and the *Bhagavad Gita* alike, but doing so demanded interpretive strategies that sought out the "universal" continuities between traditions and at times explicitly rejected material, historical readings. Reincarnationists honed metaphysical reading strategies that allowed them to distinguish the truths of scriptures using esoteric keys that unlocked the true meaning of text. These strategies at times consciously dismissed interpretations that were mired in the material or in "history." Maitland and Kingsford cautioned that the truths of scripture would remain inaccessible to those who remained rooted in the "phenomenal and objective." In contrast, for "those initiated, the mind is no longer concerned with history; the phenomenal becomes recognized as the illusory—a shadow projected by the Real, having no substance in itself" (ix).

Ultimately, these universal truths and metaphysical comparisons encouraged readers to discover the truths of reincarnation within their

"own" tradition. Writing under the pen name Yogi Ramacharaka, for example, New Thought writer William Walker Atkinson counseled American Christians to seek out the wisdom of the hidden and mystical gospels, established by the Essenes and the Gnostics, and to recover for Christianity this lost, universal wisdom. As the Yogi Ramacharaka explained, readers did not need to look to India for these truths but rather could use the doctrine of reincarnation and karma as a key that would unlock the most mysterious aspects of Christian doctrine. With karma as an orienting guide, he explained, Christians could finally learn that the Virgin Birth referred not to Mary's chaste body but rather to Jesus' uniquely non-reincarnated spirit (Yogi Ramacharaka 1907: 15).

These metaphysical interpretive strategies were particularly amenable to the growing emphasis and interest in the science and psychology of religious experience that flourished at the turn of the century (Moore 1977; Taves 1999; Schmidt 2000; White 2006). Given the growing, widespread interest among metaphysical proponents and liberal Protestants to prove the truths of religions through scientific means and investigation, it is no surprise that reincarnation's proponents claimed that these newly developing techniques would prove the fact of these "universal laws." Echoing numerous others writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, Yogi Ramacharaka claimed triumphantly that emerging theological and scientific methods, namely the "Higher Criticism," the "Criticism of Science" would "prove the truths of [mystical Christianity's] fundamental principles" (267).

As early as the 1860s, reincarnation proponents identified numerous types of personal perceptions and experiences, and hinted that these experiences presented scientific proof of past lives. Inexplicably strong dreams, déjà vu experiences, unaccountable fears or phobias, and the experience of being inexplicably attracted to a stranger all confirmed their realities. Proponents encouraged individuals to trust these numerous sensations and experiences, and claimed that the most spiritually advanced souls would be able to remember details from their pasts, perhaps due to the soul's proximity to the next spiritual plane. Nonetheless, even the most prosaic experience provided evidence for transmigration and ample material with which to ponder what had happened in past lives that prompted these experiences.

Within this class of potential past life experiences, "soul mate" encounters became the most important and intriguing. Refashioning the Spiritualist notion wherein each soul was complemented and completed by a singular spiritual and physical companion in both life and death (Albanese 1992), reincarnationists' understandings of soul

mates invoked "life to life" relationships that mattered to one's own destiny. Kardex therefore explained that "chance" encounters were, on the contrary, the ineluctable work of souls searching out their true mates, unbeknownst to the thinking mind. "[T]he attraction resulting from the ties of a former existence is often the cause of the most intimate unions of a subsequent existence. ... It often happens that two persons are drawn together by circumstances which appear to be merely fortuitous, but which are really due to the attractions exercised ... by two spirits who are unconsciously seeking each other amidst the crowds by whom they are surrounded" (159). Finding one's soul mate rendered mystical history an unfolding intersubjective and social project. The soul made progress only in the company of true intimates, who took on a variety of roles (lover, friend, teacher, and child) from life to life. Among other things, these ideas strongly suggested that one's true obligations were to one's soul mates, and likewise suggested that those demands and obligations were so strong that they would overcome all obstacles. As Matland and Kingsford counseled, "[t]rue Love is stronger than a thousand deaths. For though one die a thousand times, a single Love may yet perpetuate itself past every death from birth to birth, growing and culminating in intensity and thought" (308-309).

The tropes and theologies of nineteenth-century reincarnation pur-suits continue to resonate (albeit rarely with citations) in contemporary American past life memoirs, autobiographies, and how-to manuals. Before considering how contemporary practices resonate with past theories of spiritual progress, scientific "verification," and the hopes of spiritual intimacy, we turn to twentieth-century strategies that made inquiry into the specifics of past lives possible and likewise deflected attention from nineteenth-century metaphysicals' role in shaping these theories.

From Past Life Sensations to Knowable Pasts

Most people were only able to access the truths of reincarnation through passing sensations and thoughts, and many reincarnation writers suggested that there was little to be gained from knowing the details of past lives. Yet it was also the case, according to numerous writers, that the most highly progressed souls and spiritual adepts could recall numerous details of their pasts, and often encountered them within trances, dreams, or other meditative states. For such people, knowledge of past lives became valuable tools for claiming spiritual prowess and also for interpreting how the current life marked a spiritual advance over past lives and their accomplishments. For example, Charles

Fillmore, founder, with his wife Myrtle, of the Unity Church, claimed that he was the reincarnation of the Apostle Paul (Braden 1964; Vahle 2002). This past life experience bolstered Fillmore's spiritual status and allowed Fillmore's biographers to interpret Fillmore's accomplishments as even greater than those of Paul's. With the logic of progressive incarnations operating in full force, Fillmore's life is a referendum on Paul, whose spiritual limitations are read in "hundreds of admissions of his disobedience, weakness, ambition and double-mindedness," all traits that Fillmore had presumably overcome (quoted in Vahle 2002: 65).

While Fillmore's visions suggested that knowing details about past lives might allow people to better comprehend their purpose in this one (Fillmore 1999: 392), trance-channeler and healer Edgar Cayce channeled information about his clients' past lives in order to heal their psychological and relationship problems (Sugrue 1942; Cerminara 1950). Cayce's visions often located important past lives in Atlantis or the far reaches of time, and in comparison with Fillmore's visions were often short on specific details that might place them in "history" (Melton 1994). Nonetheless, Cayce's messages strongly suggested that knowing and understanding the details of karmic connections would result in more fruitful lives in the present and also suggested that it was not only the spiritually advanced who had to gain from interrogations of past lives. Nonetheless, recovering those pasts was not simple, and depended on trances, meditations, and "perceptions" rather than on "scientific" techniques.

Many nineteenth-century reincarnationists claimed that past lives were open to scientific investigation, but the tools for such study remained primarily inductive, and the topic itself gained little interest among psychical researchers. Indeed, the American Society for Psychical Research remained resolutely disinterested in reincarnation well into the twentieth century, owing most likely to the Society's emphasis on testing Spiritualists' claims of life after death, and reincarnation's connection with Theosophy (which the British Society had "exposed" as fraudulent in 1885). The Society's *Annals* and *Proceedings* only mention reincarnation in passing in its first few decades, and these references tend to be derogatory and dismissive (e.g., Edmunds 1915). Nonetheless, as hypnosis became used as a psychological tool for curing psychological neuroses in the years after World War I, psychical researchers and amateurs began to "find" that hypnosis could regress individuals past birth and into previous lives. Hypnosis became a viable strategy of "recovering" past lives, and these recovered memories could then be explored and verified through historical investigation (e.g., Bernstein 1956). Memories recovered under hypnosis presented rich

details that simultaneously healed individuals of neuroses and obsessions and verified the realities of remembered pasts, insofar as memories could be linked to an historical record. Hypnotic technologies presented new ways to uncover and experience pasts that earlier proponents had argued and counseled were lost forever, and thereby democratized past life knowledge. Now everyone, and not only the most spiritually advanced, could uncover their pasts. All the same, hypnosis brought with it the charge and concern that it was nothing more than a parlor trick and a technique that preyed on the preternaturally weak-minded, and that it merely brought to life a subconscious, not a past consciousness. Newly emergent practices of learning about past lives sought to answer and fend off some of these problems and criticisms; these practices of verifying past lives actively reinforced the *sui generis* aspects of past life knowledge and effectively buried the proximate histories of past life investigators in favor of apprehended and experienced pasts.

Mid- and late-twentieth past life experiencers (and hypnotists) simultaneously apprehend the experience of past lives and the possibility of past lives. Cayce's hagiographers, for example, recount how Cayce had never heard even of the possibility of past life recollection until he had one himself (Sugrue 1942; Germinara 1950). This trope that makes the "experience" of past life experiences the primary source for knowledge about them is repeated in numerous mid- and late-twentieth-century texts (e.g., Bernstein 1956; Fiore 1978; Weiss 1988). In these texts and testimonials, individuals simultaneously apprehend their own pasts and confront the possibility that such pasts are possible. In addition, these books employ perennialist interpretive strategies that share much with earlier metaphysical writers' interpretations of scriptures, and effectively demonstrate to contemporary readers how to verify the "truths" of experiential knowledge.

Brian Weiss's 1988 bestseller *Mary Lives Many Masters* presents a particularly good example of current reincarnation practices, and many of the tropes and practices in his book are mirrored in numerous other contemporary volumes (e.g., Grant and Kelsey 1967; Fiore 1978; Netherton and Shiffrian 1978; Yarbrow 1979). The book opens as Weiss, an "Ivy-League trained" psychiatrist, is struggling with a difficult case, namely a patient whose neuroses do not respond to conventional treatments. Failure looming Weiss turns to hypnosis and "in a series of trance states" inexplicably and surprisingly regresses his patient to a past life. Weiss is surprised by this and also, he tells his readers, quite dubious. But he also notes that once his patient recalls the traumatic events of a past life, her symptoms begin to abate.

Weiss notes his own scientific skepticism and his patient's conservative Catholic beliefs as a way to claim to that neither he nor his patient has either prior interest in or knowledge about past lives. Weiss's patient's "experience" is also his own experience, one that can be dismissed or explored further. Given his patient's diminished neuroses, Weiss tells his readers that he became more and more curious about past lives. Weiss then turns to the printed "historical" and "scientific" and reports that reincarnation is in fact quite a common view among large numbers of religious groups and others. Notably, Weiss's consultation of the historical record remains firmly in the territory of the "West," and he notes no Asian sources or explications of reincarnation in this first book. More typically, he tells readers that "the early church fathers ... [t]he early Gnostics—Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Saint Jerome, and many others ... believed that they had lived before and would again" (35).

As Weiss makes the claim for the science of past lives, his sources and examples resonate with New Thought and Theosophical ideas. Much of Weiss's book is given over to conversations he has with highly evolved "spirit entities" and Masters (10) whom his patient also channels under hypnosis. The Masters have messages for Weiss and explain, with language that resonates with the full spectrum of the nineteenth-century astral imaginary, that only advanced souls can remember their pasts without assistance (such as hypnosis), that all souls progress (but some faster than others), and that death and history are but illusions.

Weiss's historical sources (in particular, the absence of Asian texts of any kind), his insistence on the progressive nature of reincarnation, and numerous other elements resonate strongly with nineteenth-century reincarnation discourse that he never mentions. Contemporary reincarnation practitioners like Weiss participate in genres and practices that resonate with nineteenth and early twentieth-century emphasis on apprehension, mystical and esoteric readings of history, and practical applications through soul mates connections likewise excludes "mundane" historical understandings of past lives. As in the past, it is in reproducing such practices and the experiences they engender that individuals' reincarnated selves take shape.

LIVING PAST LIVES IN THE PRESENT

It goes without saying that contemporary past life practices and genres differ from those of the past: among other things, psychological and hypnotic "technologies" make a close reading of previous lives possible, opening up their content for "healing" or "learning" about

life's purpose. Nonetheless, the desires, arguments, and musings of Newcomb, Atkinson, Kardec, Fillmore, and Blavatsky continue to haunt and shape these contemporary practices; visions of the soul's progression toward perfection within the company of familiar souls continue to shape metaphysical believers' destinies, and the times and spaces in which they are lived out. Past religious concerns continue to shape American spiritualities that are rarely ceded a history (either by scholarly observers or by practitioners themselves). To demonstrate how the past works on the present, I turn now to ethnographic field research among spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, and in particular focus on the interactions among a loosely connected group of spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, who used various practices to individually and collectively explore their "soul connections" and past lives.¹

Physical reincarnation was a normal and acceptable idea within many of the networks of spiritual practitioners in Cambridge, where I conducted fieldwork in 2001–04. During my fieldwork, I attended numerous public activities, rites, readings, ceremonies, classes, and healing services in order to map contemporary spirituality's social and cultural organization. I also formally interviewed almost seventy participants and spoke with hundreds more. In the field, I often heard people publicly discuss past lives, refer to others' pasts (in joking and serious ways) and draw links between "soul mates" and other soul connections. Although reincarnation was never the central focus of my research, nearly three-quarters of my interview respondents told me about their past lives, with varying degrees of detail. None of the people I spoke with rejected the possibility of physical reincarnation, although a number remarked that it was not part of their current sense of "reality."

In Cambridge, contemporary past life discourse and practice situates people in multiple pasts. Determining or discussing a past life does not merely extend a person's history back in time, it additionally adds another "layer" of mystical history and connection to a person's genealogical history. Most of the people I met were less interested in

¹ The dozen men and women who regularly attended the group were all between 30 and 50 years old and European-American; all had at least a college degree. Most actively participated in several spiritual groups in Cambridge, and three were also active in local Protestant congregations. Concentrating on an interconnected subset of individuals from my larger sample allows me to present a textured depiction of how contemporary past life practices both shape relations among individuals and likewise do so through drawing on and reproducing idioms and ideas central to earlier reincarnationists' writings. For examples of recent sociological texts that employ similar methods, see Moon (2005) and Smilde (2003). All respondent names and some details (including names of past life personae) have been changed. Quotations from audio-taped interviews are represented in italics. Non-italicized quotations are indirect quotations recorded in field notes.

interrogating the specific details of past lives than in figuring out how their current friends and family members fit (or did not fit) into lifelong networks of "soul mates" and "soul clusters." These activities were far from solitary: indeed, past lives were thoroughly social, and linked individuals in mystical historical connections that subverted and supplemented mundane, genealogical history. While there may indeed be large numbers of Americans who "believe" in reincarnation without engaging in these or similar social practices (as Walter and Waterhouse [1999] suggest), my respondents made reincarnation a social practice with social consequences. The pasts that my respondents evoked were actively lived out in a variety of interpretive practices and link their selves not only to mystical, imagined pasts, but also to the metaphysical pasts I have laid out in the preceding pages.

Discovering Max

On a soggy morning in October 2002, I settled into Cathy Morton's living room sofa and started to listen the story of her spiritual journey. During two interviews (totaling five hours), she told me about her most recent past life as a German Jewish scientist who had narrowly escaped the Nazis in 1939. Cathy's discovery began with a trance she experienced while providing a Reiki treatment to a cancer patient, an older Jewish woman who had left Europe on the *Kindertransport*. In the trance she saw her client as a young girl, waving from a train window. From this vantage, Cathy realized

I'm seeing things from the point of view of a man, and he's trying to get his family out. He's saying, 'We must get the children out!'—and I'm thinking, this is English with a German accent. You know, it's like, why am I hearing this in English with a German accent? It doesn't make any sense. But I know that he's a professor, I can see them with their bags. It's not all their worldly goods. It's just some suitcases.... I can tell it's a life or death situation for them, and they're trying to save their lives by getting out of Berlin. I know it is Berlin. And then later on, I see them, in my mind's eye, trying to get to a warehouse at night under cover of darkness. And if they get to the warehouse they'll be OK. I don't, didn't know where that was but it was like—a port, a warehouse in a port. Berlin's not a port, but—but it makes sense later. And I'm like, 'Who is this?' And the name Max M.—was just in my mind. It's like, somebody told me that's what it was. And I wrote it down.

Cathy dutifully recorded Max's name in her client's chart, even though her client had never heard of a man named "Max M—." Max would turn out to be a person important for Cathy herself: indeed, she

had been Max, and these memories and encounters were her own. Cathy did not realize this, however. A few months later, Cathy said, she became interested in past lives, having picked up Brian Weiss's books. *"I'd read Brian Weiss's books and I said, well, until I experience it, it's not going to be real for me."* Cathy decided to visit a hypnotherapist who practiced past life regression therapy and in a series of vivid sessions *"returned"* to sixteenth-century Switzerland where she had lived as a "healer" before being banished to the woods to die alone and impoverished. Cathy said that merely learning about this past life lifted a "huge weight off her chest," and also explained why in this life she felt compelled to volunteer with "old cranky ladies." Despite these experiences and connections, however, Cathy soon became impatient with her therapist whom Cathy said was less interested in seeking out proof of this healer's existence than in using the story as a pathway to Cathy's improved psychological health.

Despite the huge psychic weight that lifted off Cathy after the recovery of this sixteenth-century memory, Cathy remained dissatisfied. She did not deny the therapeutic value of this experience and like Weiss, she recognized the therapeutic value of these activities. Nonetheless, she was not content to accept the "healing" she experienced as the proof of past lives' realities. Cathy wanted proof that her past lives had been real, and thus started to search for an historical Max. To do so, she investigated both the inner recesses of her memory through self-hypnosis. She learned that Max was married with children, and was a professor. She asked, *"a professor of what? And what I got was a professor of semiotics ... I had heard of semiotics but I didn't know what it meant."* Cathy started to research German universities before the war, and shared her limited and frustrating findings with the Mystical Experiences Discussion Group, an informal and independent coterie of mystics that she had joined the previous year.

Cathy attended a week-long workshop with Brian Weiss at the Omega Institute, a holistic spa in Rhinebeck New York. After each morning lecture, she retreated to her room to practice past-life regression with her roommate. Cathy *"returned"* to the train station, *"talking in a German accent in English. ... And my roommate asked what's happening I said, 'We have to get the children out.' And I started to get—my chest started to tighten and I couldn't breathe, and it was very frightening. She backed away. ... She didn't have the confidence to have me process the negative emotions."*

Even as Cathy acknowledged that the German accent sounded fake, she also found that feeling Max's anxiety in her body brought a sense of confirmation that she was Max. Having felt Max's feelings, Cathy

redoubled her interest and desire to discover whether Max had been a real, historical person and verifying his existence became an all-consuming concern. In guided meditations, she would ask *"is my energy—is the energy that's in Cathy the same energy that's in Max?" The answer I got was yes. ... So I'm tapping into this other dimension. But I still [didn't] have proof."*

Cathy began to search in earnest for historical information about Max. She tried her hand at automatic typing. These searches yielded little in the way of "facts," but she did get more "information" about him. This information would prove important after she learned Max's identity, but in the meantime, she told me, she and her friends at the discussion group were tiring of her search. The group, populated with individuals variously influenced by Spiritualism and Swedenborgianism, gently suggested that Max might be a spirit guide or angel visitor rather than a past life memory, but she persevered.

Returning home from the group, one evening, she glanced through a printed out page of Google "hits" for Max and noticed for the first time a *"variant spelling"* of Max's last name, one that she had not used before. She rushed to her computer and received over 600 "hits" for *"Albert 'Max' M—,"* a Nobel Prize winning German Jewish scientist and physician who had made a hurried escape to the United States with his wife and children at the onset of World War II. Several Web sites described the family's harrowing journey to the United States. Cathy now had independent evidence of Max's existence, and many of the details fit her memories. With triumph she told me *"that was a huge epiphany, it was like: You got this intuitively. It's a real person. He existed."* This epiphany of an historical discovery solidified Cathy's belief in her mystical past. Cathy continued to pursue hypnosis to better understand her own past, and likewise continued to read these experiences against what she learned by reading Max's published memoirs, modern German history, and (as far as she was able) some of his scientific papers.

Cathy continued to read her current life in relation to her memories and growing knowledge of Max's, but she did so with a clear understanding that her current life represented a more spiritually enlightened, advanced position than her previous life as Max. Cathy's hypno-therapist asked her about the purpose of Max's life, and she told me *"what came to me was something kind of mundane, it wasn't very, particularly spiritual. It was, 'It's OK to run away to save yourself.' I think Max felt very guilty about leaving behind colleagues, students, and you know people of his culture, to die in Germany. I think that really weighed very heavily on him. But what he learned was that it was OK to save*

yourself." Cathy mused, "There's got to be something that he wanted to do that he didn't get to do, or some growth that his soul needs to go through that didn't get addressed in that lifetime. What I feel is for me now is integrating science with faith, because it's my impression that many lifetimes before were spent in spiritual communities. And he had a very scientific and outwardly non-spiritual life."

Cathy claimed that both her memories of Max and her methods of determining that they are past memories arose *sui generis*: at numerous junctures through her narrative she establishes that neither her knowledge of Max nor her knowledge of past lives could be traced to anything in her "mundane" biography. Both came to her independently of a genealogy that she, or I, might trace, and her practices thus curtail investigation of the religious genealogies that have shaped her understandings about how reincarnation becomes verifiable and valid, and how past lives can be read against the present. In very real ways, her practices work to undo the claims of mundane historical explanations by placing them in conversation with "mystical" histories that can be uncovered only through other means.

This displacement does not mean that Cathy forgot or dismissed her place within more ordinary historical narratives. Nonetheless, Cathy's multiple histories and their effects on her sense of herself can best be interpreted if we decenter "mundane" biological history. Reincarnation practices and their articulation of the realities of mystical histories do not replace mundane history so much as complicate it: reincarnation practitioners, thus, live in multiple pasts and multiple understandings of the present. While Cathy's practices present one way in which pasts are intensely read against the present through hypnosis and text, we can also see similar complications of biography and the past unfolding in more "prosaic" and daily encounters with past lives.

Prosaic Pasts

Cathy investigated her past lives by following the techniques laid forth in Brian Weiss' books. She was highly invested in the process, and spent both money and time to learn hypnosis in order to learn details about her pasts. In contrast, most people I met in Cambridge who talked about (and knew about) their past lives engaged in idioms and practices that would have been more familiar to Kardec or Newcomb. In short, they knew very little about the specifics of their past lives, and experienced these pasts not through intense interrogations like Cathy's but through "sensations" and *déjà vu* experiences, or by determining that another person was a "soul mate" or other connected soul. In contrast to Cathy's detail-ridden past life, which gained their power in

Cathy's ability to link details to an external historical record, "soul mate" connections became powerful through social acknowledgment of a soul connection. Among the Cambridge practitioners I met, these two methods of learning about and verifying past lives likewise gave ballast to each other: Cathy's detailed investigations, for example, were taken as proof that less protracted "sensations" and *déjà vu* experiences could also be connected to an actual, historically verifiable past life. Likewise, the more prosaic "*déjà vu*" experiences of soul connections reinforced the claims that hypnosis and other techniques were not merely suggestion. Each practice of past life encounter reinforced the other, and in doing so, the metaphysical strategies of the past were likewise reproduced, becoming less evident but nonetheless present aspects of the multilayered and complex pasts in which contemporary metaphysical believers live and act.

I became more aware of the interanimation of these two types of past life experience in the months following my interviews with Cathy. In early December, Cathy called me to report that three single women had appeared at the mystical experiences group the night before. Crystal, Annette, and Marcy had each recently moved to the Cambridge and learned about the group in a local holistic health tabloid. Everyone in attendance remarked on the auspiciousness of their joint appearance, Cathy told me, adding "something drew them all to Cambridge." These women started seeing each other regularly, inviting each other to spiritual activities they attended and hanging out. Cathy often joined them, and in December, they determined in a joint channeling session that Annette had been Max's (Cathy's) wife. Their joint discovery was further bolstered by the revelation several weeks later that Crystal and Marcy had also spent many lives together as friends.

Marcy told us that during an "energy treatment" session, she learned that they had been close friends in many lifetimes, receiving glimpses "like snapshots" of other lives and relations. Crystal had similarly noted a "sensation" which she added was "*not just a sensation but a deep knowing*." Neither had a clear sense of when these lives had been, but they were certain that they had a "lives long" commitment. After they acknowledged that the sensation had been mutual, Crystal told me, "*we've been hanging out and doing lots of things together, and it is just, it's just like—when I am with her, I get this feeling of coming home.*"

Marcy and Cathy apprehended their past lives through bodily sensations and "deep knowing." Their joint pasts were apprehended together and the "facts" of the past, while murky and lacking in specifics, were over time confirmed and made real through their fast intimacy and strong friendship. For both women, as well as for Cathy and

Annette, finding a soul connection allowed each to call on the other for favors and emotional support that extended well beyond that of casual acquaintances. These new connections expanded commitments to family beyond those links fashioned in biology and blood, and enfolded new people into stories of (past) consanguinity even as it challenged the dominance of current family ties. Soul connections demanded that these women reinterpret current responsibilities and commitments in light of "lives long" responsibilities. At times they struggled to fulfill the duties they felt to both mystical and mundane families.

Cambridge mystics sometimes told stories about people they knew who had affairs with soul mates and the notion itself elicited a sense of erotic *frisson* (Dixon 2001), but very few of the people I learned to know well felt compelled to fully disrupt their family life to follow a soul mate. Mystical connections rarely supplanted biological ones: more frequently "soul" connections demanded that practitioners reimagine the "purpose" of a difficult relationship, or the "lessons" that they might learn from it, even though these reinterpretations took place within the comforting (if not yet fully realized) embrace of a mystical soul family. Marcy often spoke about the challenge of learning to practice "loving kindness" to her estranged father and sister, and about her expectations that this practice would be rewarded with more balanced relationships in a future life, even if her love was not reciprocated in this one. In a different way, Annette received a message that her choice to divorce her husband signified a spiritual advancement. Although their attraction to each other had been "lives long," it was more physical than "spiritual." Overcoming it was a sign of personal advance toward spiritual perfection, and girded her on the path to finding a more redeeming soul mate.

One night in the spring, Cathy invited a dozen of the regular discussion group attendees to her house to celebrate the spring equinox. The interlinked play of mystic and biological families played out in the rituals of dinner overshadowed the "ritual event" that took place after dinner in the living room. Cathy's husband was out of town on business and she had dispatched her son to a friend's house. As we waited for the lamb roast to finish, Eric and his wife talked with Doug about their mystical movie club, and Marcy regaled us with stories of her trip to Tunisia. Crystal poured wine and Cathy pulled a strawberry trifle out of the refrigerator, setting it on the dining room table set with fine china and crystal. Anticipating a question Cathy said, "Oh yes, I've made Easter dinner one week early."

The not-quite Easter dinner began as Annette took Cathy's husband's chair at the head of the table and the rest of us flanked this

mystical couple: Eric sat at Cathy's right in the position of honored guest and his wife next to him. Doug sat next to me on Cathy's left, Marcy and Crystal flanked Annette. Cathy's daughter also sat at the table, a few others filled out the table. More so than the ritual proceedings that took place later in Cathy's living room, this dinner solidified the presence of this "soul cluster" and likely heightened the tensions leading up to its dissolution. For even as Cathy, Crystal, Marcy, and the others usually talked with me about the more friendly and familial aspects of these past life connections, coursing just beneath the surface were thoughts and whispers about more passionate and romantic connections.

The "soul mates" described in Spiritualist, New Thought, and other early twentieth-century literature cultivated ideals of romantic intimacy that have developed into a robust literature of its own. Dozens of best selling books offer advice about how to identify one's soul mate and offer advice (that ranges from the most conservative to the most libertine) on what to do if one is in a relation with someone who is not. Most of the people I met in Cambridge seriously believed that their life could be fulfilled in all respects by a singular soul mate or "twin flame." Not content with good looks or even a physical compatibility, mystics were on the look out for the person who (as Vivica, a thirty-five-year-old yoga instructor put it) "*will connect with every part of my soul, not just my brain or my body.*"

This possibility also harbored the worrisome challenge that current spouses and lovers were not "the one" or, worse, a possible hindrance to spiritual perfection. Yet even as much (past and contemporary) literature mentions this possibility, most of this literature is conservative, and cautions against disrupting current relationships in pursuit of a spiritual twin. Even a disappointing or unhappy marriage might be necessary for spiritual advance, as Edgar Cayce's biographer Gina Cerminara explains. Even though "cosmic law" (karma) makes marriage "less sacrosanct than many people might think," people should nonetheless take seriously any commitments taken in good faith. "The obligations which are [nowadays] so lightly disregarded ... are not merely meaningless; they have their true binding force in the corporate nature of humanity." Individuals "must learn to accept [marriage's] difficulties and frustrations in a sacrificial spirit, realizing that our lesser self is on trial so that our great Self may be born" (Cerminara 1950: 191).

Nonetheless, the real possibilities that a soul connection might be so strong as to make such disruption "unavoidable" fascinated many of my respondents. Cathy, for example, had a respectful and loving

arriage, but she also told me, and many others, that she "knew" that Eric was her soul mate. She had determined that she had lived "many lives" with Eric, and he apparently shared this view, basing their impression on shared interests, personal "synchronicities," and even geographical parallels. Eric and Cathy had embarked on several successful joint mystical projects, and this pushed Cathy to ponder whether their "work together" was part of something more. She talked to me regularly about whether being spiritually fulfilled would involve more intense involvement with Eric, or whether she should keep her distance. Eventually Cathy decided that her fascination with Eric and their "connection" was counterproductive to their relationship. Nonetheless, the idea that these soul-linked connections were as powerful, and important as filial commitments was not merely imagined: through such links contemporary practitioners lived in expanded pasts wherein they regularly considered the proper scope of spiritual demands on their daily lives.

These considerations were made powerful through acts that traced and conjured contemporary spiritual practitioners' connections within numerous pasts. Although mystical connections were very powerful in the lives of Cambridge's spiritual practitioners, their power often concentrated in their ability to augment and complicate "mundane" family and work relationships. Past lives raised consideration for a set of additional albeit murky identities that were related in equally murky ways, to daily life. Cambridge's mystics live in and through many histories and realms, from the fantastic and mystically recalled to the mundane and physically present.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century understandings of reincarnation strongly shape these pasts as well, and resonate strongly within the contemporary practice and understanding of new age "past lives" notions. Cathy, Annette, Eric, Marcy, and the others interacted together in a field of current and past lives that are shaped by an understanding that reincarnation is progressive, that souls reincarnate in clusters or pairs, and that these pasts influence the present in a number of ways. Beyond this, we can also see that contemporary past life practices are shaped by, and reproduce, ways of engaging the past (both historical and mystical pasts) that, like earlier proponents, emphasize sensations and experiences, inductive approaches, as well as adopting the more "scientific" claims of hypnotic regression. Contemporary past life practice and belief notably emerges and is reproduced through engaging in numerous pasts, both marked and occluded, and numerous practices that position reincarnation practitioners in conversation with several interlinking histories.

CONCLUSION

Believers in past lives are, not surprisingly, intensely interested in their pasts, even though they are not always interested in the pasts that scholars are most focused on. This paper's ethnographic and historical exploration of the practices of past-making embedded in American reincarnation beliefs calls attention to the complicated projects of narrating stories about contemporary spirituality and analyzing the scope and shape of its practice. At one level, drawing attention to the proximate of occluded pasts of reincarnation belief in the United States (and the continued resonance of these pasts within contemporary practice) calls into question the sociological notions that the "new age" is new and traditional, or that its traditions are more invented and somehow less authentic than others. This claim in itself is not new, however, and reaffirms what numerous historians of American religion have demonstrated in recent years. This ethnographic account (and the larger project from which it develops) thus presents a case in which we can see these "traditions" circulating, and also calls attention to the ways that metaphysical practices contribute to contemporary practitioners' (and perhaps scholars') amnesia about these traditions. Reincarnation and past life practices (as well as other metaphysical practices) actively contribute to personal and social narratives that displace attention from metaphysical practices' genealogical pasts, in part by placing their "truths" in timeless, perennial stories. The allure of these practices is in part their ability to sustain claims that they are not bound by material, rational history; as a consequence, these practices and their narratives tend to efface their own genealogical narratives, and the authority that such genealogies confer.

All the same, the reincarnation practices of contemporary practitioners do not so much negate "illusory" mundane history (as Maitland and Kingsford demanded) as transform it. Even though the practices of past lives occlude their more proximate genealogical connections to New Thought, Spiritualism, Theosophy, and other traditions, few contemporary or past reincarnation practitioners give up their places within material history, their obligations to regular life and family, or a sense of their life purpose. In fact, it is through encountering "remembered" pasts that practitioners actively come to consider their obligations within "mundane" and everyday life: indeed, in encountering authoritative mystical pasts, my respondents did not find "escape" from the present but rather actively and creatively considered their place in the world. Engaging in past life practices and narratives effectively expanded individuals' and groups' horizons of their obligations to each other. For example, Cathy reads Max's life in ways that

allow her to meditate on the purpose of her life and to imagine a sustaining moral purpose for her choices; Kardec demands that reincarnation requires that we treat all persons with the respect we accord our closest intimates, and even as Atkinson (as the Yogi Ramacharaka) counsels Christians to look to their "own" Christian history to discover the "timeless truths" of karma. While these engagements may or may not seem reasonable to us, they nonetheless are all practices that open up space for moral creativity by way of repositioning the authority of genealogical history.

These practices interanimate several forms of history and past making practices, and in doing so provide an evocative example through which scholars of American religion might further consider the limits and possibilities of writing about and representing both the genealogies and enchantments that shape American metaphysical traditions, and their contemporary iterations. In this spirit, we might proceed by remaining attentive to the ways in which religious and spiritual pasts are recalled and felt, imagined and forgotten, and likewise remain attentive to the proliferation of "pasts" that take shape within various practices of imagining, remembering, and forgetting. Such an approach does not leave the various practices of past making at the margins of our work, but rather attends to the ways that the past is structured [through ongoing dialogues both "about the particular past," and how "the past can be remembered" (Morson 1994; Olick 1999: 21)] into the center of conversations about religious traditions and their lived histories. Greater attention to the ways that such pasts are interlinked within lived experience will undoubtedly present new critical possibilities for interpreting American spiritualities and their positions within American religious history.

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