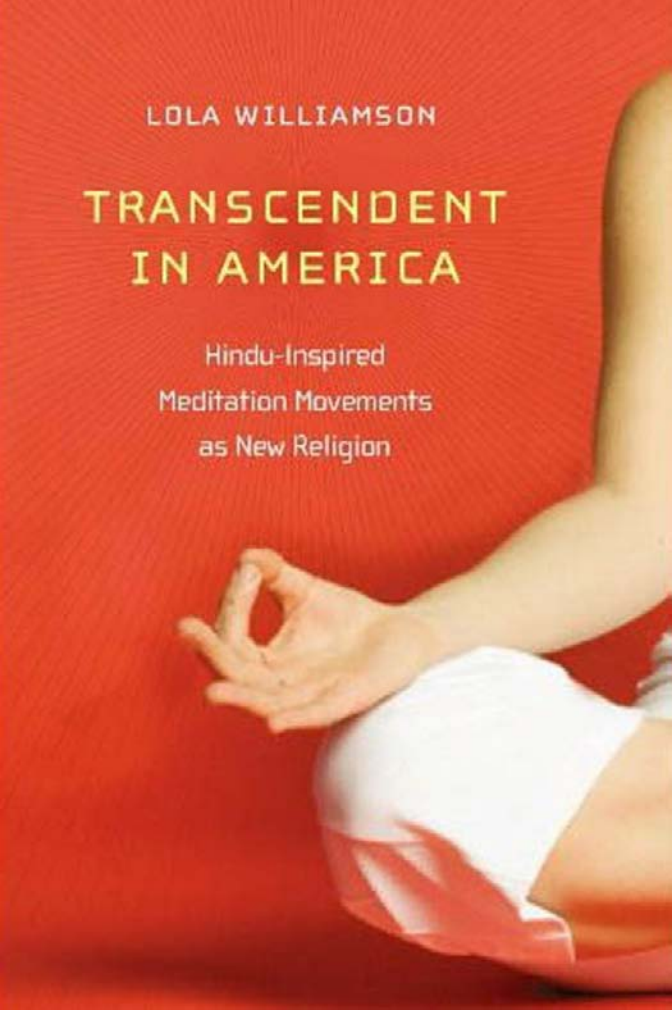
LOLA WILLIAMSON

TRANSCENDENT IN AMERICA

Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion



Transcendent in America

THE NEW AND ALTERNATIVE RELIGIONS SERIES

General Editors: Timothy Miller and Susan J. Palmer

Hare Krishna Transformed
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NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York and London

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York and London
www.nyupress.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Williamson, Lola.
Transcendent in America : Hindu-inspired meditation
movements in America / Lola Williamson.
p. cm. — (The new and alternative religions series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978–0–8147–9449–4 (cl : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0–8147–9449–1 (cl : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978–0–8147–9450–0 (pb : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0–8147–9450–5 (pb : alk. paper)
1. Hinduism—United States. 2. Meditation—Hinduism.
3. Spiritual life—Hinduism. I. Title.
BL1168.U532W55 2010
294.5'4350973—dc22 2009039813

New York University Press books are printed on acid-free paper,
and their binding materials are chosen for strength and durability.
We strive to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials
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Manufactured in the United States of America

C 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
P 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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A Note on Transliteration

Hindi and Sanskrit terms are italicized the first time they appear with the exception of words that are becoming part of the American lexicon, such as "guru" and "ashram." Transliteration of words does not employ diacritical marks (i.e., Shiva and not Śiva, *kundalini* and not *kuṇḍalinī*). Additionally, transliteration follows the custom of the particular movement under consideration. Thus, for example, Śrī Yukteśvar, Yogananda's guru, appears as Sri Yukteswar, which is the spelling used in the literature of Self-Realization Fellowship. Words that traditionally appear together such as *Bhagavadgita* and Rammohun, I render separated (*Bhagavad-Gita* and Ram Mohun) to aid in facility of reading for a general audience.

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Preface

Well before dawn when most Americans are asleep, Walter rises early to sit for meditation. He has been practicing the techniques he learned through Self-Realization Fellowship every day since 1961. "Something essential is missing," he says, "if I don't meditate." Meanwhile, Aaron goes to the "Dome," where he is joined by a thousand others who practice Transcendental Meditation together every day. He is so used to this routine that it has become, in his words, a "biological rhythm." Jennifer, a follower of the Siddha Yoga tradition, enters her meditation room at 5:15 a.m. each morning to chant and meditate. She says, "If I can touch that place of deep stillness, even for a moment, it makes all the difference."

This book is about Walter, Aaron, Jennifer, and others like them who have practiced meditation under the auspices of a Hindu guru for twenty or more years. It is also about the meditation movements in which they participate: Self-Realization Fellowship, Transcendental Meditation, and Siddha Yoga. These are three of many such movements that, taken together, comprise a new hybrid form of religion. This new religion combines aspects of Hinduism with Western values, institutional forms, modes of teaching, and religious sensibilities. Lying at the conjunction of two worldviews, this phenomenon could be called "Hindu-inspired meditation movements," or HIMMs. Through personal, historical, and cultural lenses, this book explores the contours of Hindu-inspired meditation movements and their implications for American culture.

When I first began working on this book in the fall of 2002, I had participated for twenty-one years in Siddha Yoga and viewed myself as a devout disciple of Gurumayi, the current guru of that movement. Before that I had been involved for ten years with Transcendental Meditation. When I discovered meditation at the age of eighteen, I was overjoyed, sensing that my life's purpose had been found. Thus, I began this study with a fair degree of bias. But as I began to investigate the movements in order to write this book, I learned of some disturbing accounts of abuses that had occurred within the Siddha Yoga organization. As I continued to investigate, I found that the phenomenon of abuse—or at least some type of organizational dysfunction—was endemic to many of these groups. I realized that even though I

had practiced meditation and followed the teachings I learned from Hindu gurus for many years, I was—similar to many of those I interviewed for this book—in a sense, an outsider. Neither I nor most of my informants had lived in an ashram, nor did we know the gurus personally. We didn't think that was necessary. The transformation we felt through the spiritual practices and through listening to talks by our gurus and their representatives was enough. In fact, we felt that we should distance ourselves from rumors because negativity would interfere with the tranquility we were trying to cultivate.

Yet I had to investigate these negative rumors if I was to become an expert on the movements. My bias began to take a turn in the opposite direction. It was difficult for me to continue the study because I came to believe that a cultlike atmosphere pervaded many of the movements. In 2005 I abandoned not only Siddha Yoga but also this book.

There is much reflection in the fields of anthropology and religious studies about "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. The rhetoric used by the practitioner of a religious tradition, when compared with the scholarly observer of that tradition, can be vastly different, with the former emphasizing personal experience and the latter emphasizing critical evaluation of concepts and practices. There are advantages and disadvantages to each perspective. The insider is often able to understand the heart of the religious tradition under consideration in a way that the outsider cannot. However, insiders may not have the impartiality necessary to place their views within a broader context. Dedication to their particular faith may prejudice their ability to analyze clearly. Outsiders, on the other hand, may have a more balanced perspective. Yet, their very distance from the subject under analysis may cause them to miss the essence of what makes the faith attractive to its followers.

In 2007 I returned to the investigation of HIMMs, ready to bring a sense of balance between empathy for those pursuing a Hindu-style spiritual path and critical observation of the potential perils of that path. I returned to the research with the understanding that meditation can have many benefits, as it does for those whose voices appear in Part III of this book. But I also realized that some people use Hindu-style meditation and the philosophies accompanying it to escape from facing hard truths about themselves or about people and events around them. I understood that the relationship between guru and disciple can be beautiful and edifying. But this understanding was balanced with the knowledge that giving too much power to a person in an authoritative position can have devastating consequences, both for the person of authority and for the one trusting that authority. I continued my work on this book with increased humility, realizing the complexity of the topic I

had chosen to write about and knowing my conclusions would contain more questions than answers. This volume is meant to bring these questions into public discussion and to help break down the barriers, to the extent possible, between insiders and outsiders.

Because of the intricacies of this topic, multiple viewpoints are presented in this book. One viewpoint arises from people who are close to the inner workings of the organizations and who are loyal to their gurus. Another is from those who were once involved at a close level but who later left, becoming critical of the gurus and movements they once believed in. These two types of informants provided me with information presented in Part II. A third viewpoint comes from those who are intimately involved on a personal and experiential level and yet distantly involved in another sense. They visit ashrams and follow the practices but are protected from some of the difficulties and scandals of which people who are deeply involved at the organizational level may be aware. The viewpoints of these people are presented in Part III.

This book offers several unique contributions to the study of new religious movements. It examines a mid-level category between the broad "Asian religions in the West" and the narrow category of particular movements. Similarities exist among the beliefs and lifestyles of followers of various Hindu-inspired movements in the West, and these thus deserve to be classified as a genre of their own. The construct "Hindu-inspired meditation movements" could be compared to the construct "Hinduism," which has been helpful in identifying certain family characteristics even though particular *sampradayas* (sectarian traditions) often consider themselves to have little in common with other *sampradayas*. The term "Hindu-inspired meditation movements" may, in fact, be more useful than "Hinduism" because it does not encompass as much diversity.

While others have discussed the connection between Hindu elements and Western styles of organization and promotion, I also include Western religious sensibilities as part of that nexus. The American religious ethos derives primarily from Protestantism, which, according to historian of American religion Sydney Ahlstrom, has significantly informed American Catholicism and even Judaism. Most pertinent to this study is Protestantism's emphasis on personal, ecstatic religious experience.

To have a comprehensive view of HIMMs many elements must be considered, including the history and causes of their emergence, their development over the years, and the experiences, lifestyles, and understanding of those involved in them. The book is thus divided into three parts. Part I lays

the foundation for the study of Hindu-inspired meditation movements by defining terms and providing historical background to the phenomenon. Part II examines three historically significant meditation movements. Part III explores the experiences, views, and lifestyles of people who have been participating in one or more of these movements for twenty or more years.

In discussing these topics, I draw on research conducted over two years (2003 and 2004) during which I visited practice sites, spoke with representatives of the movements' organizations, and read their literature. I also conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-seven practitioners, nine from each of the three groups, with a balance between males and females. I made contacts for the interviews in various ways. Since I did not know anyone involved with Self-Realization Fellowship, beginning with one lead, I acquired further contacts, who in turn recommended other possible interviewees. With Transcendental Meditation (TM), I contacted three people that I knew from my previous involvement with the movement. I also visited Fairfield, Iowa, where many TM practitioners live, and made contacts in a bookstore, and again, interviewees then referred me to others. I was involved with Siddha Yoga at the time I conducted the interviews, so I simply called on people I knew. The interviews generally lasted two hours and were conducted over two meeting times. In 2007 and 2008 I conducted more interviews with people who had been closely involved in each of the movements but had left for various reasons. These interviews helped broaden some of the "inside" information discussed in Part II.

I also draw on my own experiences. As noted above, I participated in Transcendental Meditation for ten years (1971–81) as both student and teacher of TM. The teacher training involved a preliminary course called The Science of Creative Intelligence, followed by a three-month course, which I attended in Vittel, France, in 1973. This course consisted of extended periods of meditation, listening to lectures by Maharishi, TM's guru, on audiotapes, discussion, and training in how to teach meditation. Part of the course was taught by Maharishi in person. I also participated in Siddha Yoga for twenty-four years (1981–2005), again as both student and as a leader at Siddha Yoga Centers in several cities. I took part in month-long training programs at the main Siddha Yoga ashram in the United States, which is now called Shree Muktananda Ashram, for three consecutive years in order to take on the leadership responsibilities. During the first of the training programs, I simultaneously participated in a month-long Hatha Yoga teacher training course. I spent part of nearly every summer at this ashram from 1981 until 2004 and visited other Siddha Yoga ashrams in the United States and in India as well.

Many people have helped to bring this book to fruition, and I extend my gratitude to all of them. Particular thanks go to the people who selflessly gave their time to be interviewed. I am also grateful to those who read and offered suggestions for revisions of the manuscript. Among these are Jennifer Hammer of New York University Press, the editors of The New and Alternative Religions Series, Timothy Miller and Susan J. Palmer, my friends and colleagues, Kirin Narayan, Kathleen Erndl, and Charles Hallisey, my brother, Tom Case, and my husband, Greg Williamson.

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Background

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1

What Are Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements?

On a jumbo jet filled with meditators headed for Switzerland, I awakened to the sound of a stewardess's voice. "I have been instructed to wake you twenty minutes before breakfast so you have time to concentrate," she softly intoned over the PA system. Some of us chuckled quietly at her choice of words. Our guru, Maharishi, told us never to use the word "concentrate" for "meditate." But this was 1973, before the word "meditation" had seeped into the international vocabulary. It was a foreign concept to our Swiss stewardess who was only following instructions. Around me I heard people shifting in their seats as they attempted to take a meditation posture in these cramped quarters. Then, slowly, a tangible stillness began to fill the plane as all of its passengers slipped into meditation.

We were one of three such jets headed for the same ultimate destination—the tiny town of Vittel, France, where we would be spending the next three months learning to become teachers of Transcendental Meditation. We were the youngest of the three groups and would be housed in a separate hotel. However, when Maharishi arrived toward the end of the three months, we would all gather together in one place to listen to him speak and to meditate with him.

I remember the feeling on that plane in 1973. We were part of something big, something that was going to change the world. We were going to teach thousands of people to meditate, and they would surely then become inspired to teach others, and soon the whole world would be practicing Transcendental Meditation.

Transcendental Meditation, or TM, is one example of a Hindu-inspired meditation movement. Although Maharishi, TM's founder, never referred to his system as "Hindu," it certainly displays some easily recognizable Hindu elements. The people on this jet practiced meditation using a *mantra* (a sound that has special religious significance to Hindus), the breakfast they

ate was vegetarian, and they all believed they were about to take a giant step forward in their own evolution toward "enlightenment," or as Hindus would call it, *moksha*; that is, liberation from the cycle of rebirth on the earthly plane of existence. Many carried in their suitcases a copy of Maharishi's commentary on the *Bhavagad-Gita,* a popular Hindu scripture.

While all of these elements point to the Hindu religious tradition, we were not Hindus. There is a qualitative difference between people who have been raised in a tradition in which the rituals, the foods, the prayers, and the ethics are second nature, and people who have incorporated only parts of a tradition into their religious style. This is why I use the term "Hindu-inspired" rather than "Hindu" to describe Transcendental Meditation and similar movements. While the religion of Hindu-inspired meditation movements certainly wears some of the garb of Hinduism, Western traditions of individualism and rationalism also influence the style and ethos of these movements.

HIMMs comprise a new cultural and religious phenomenon that arose in America around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, and which burgeoned in the 1960s. They continue to be a strong cultural force to the present, and, while individual HIMMs come and go, the phenomenon shows no sign of abating. HIMMs are indeed global in scope, but their characteristics vary depending on the cultural context in which they occur. This book examines HIMMs in an American context, the worldview on which they have had a strong influence, and which became obvious to me when I heard my eighty-one-year-old mother-in-law exclaim her "good karma" upon finding a parking space directly in front of her Episcopal church. I was even more certain of their impact on American culture when, attending my mother's Baptist church, the minister announced that it was "time for meditation," and asked us to close our eyes as a cello soloist set the tone for our inward journey.

Of course, meditation has always been a part of some Christian denominations, with Roman Catholicism having a particularly strong contemplative tradition. In fact, some Catholics have created their own amalgamations of Hinduism and Christianity. Bede Griffiths (also known as Dayananda), a Benedictine monk, established a Hindu-Christian ashram in Tamil Nadu called Shantinavam and wrote books relating Hinduism to Christianity, such as *Vedanta and the Christian Faith* (1973). Since Griffiths's death in 1993, other monks have continued to carry forward his legacy. Bruno Barnhart of the New Canaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, proclaimed at a Monastic Symposium (June 2000) that "The Asian contemplative traditions attract

Christians today by their depth, simplicity and experiential power, and in doing so invite Christianity back to the unity and fullness of its own internal 'East.'"[1] Theologian Francis X. Clooney of Boston College contemplates the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism with books such as *Theology after Vedanta* (1994) and *Hindu Wisdom for All God's Children* (1998). The popular influence of Hindu practices is evident with the interest in Hatha Yoga, which can be found at virtually every local health club.

People who participate in HIMMs have created a system of meaning that has several interwoven components. They display a strong commitment to meditation as a means of attaining inner peace, and ultimately, of attaining a state of consciousness that is described by practitioners variously as liberation, enlightenment, or unity consciousness. They believe that the guru who leads their movement has attained this state of liberation and, therefore, is able to serve as their guide. As a guide, the guru functions as more than a mere teacher of intellectual knowledge. Disciples enter into a deep, personal relationship with the guru, who is a center of charismatic authority. I use the word "charisma" in the sense of its original Greek meaning of "gift of divine grace." Each HIMM sees itself as a sort of "family" centered on a guru. Adherents conceive of their practices and beliefs as more than a religion; it is a universal and spiritual approach to life available to anyone. Participants in HIMMs share common beliefs such as karma (natural law of retribution) and reincarnation and the ideal of "enlightenment." They also share a common lifestyle. Because they believe that a certain amount of purity is necessary for attaining the goal of enlightenment, many follow dietary restrictions (most are vegetarians) as well as restrictions on the amount of stress they will undergo. They seek a balanced life that combines self-effort with a sense of ease, often limiting their exposure to popular culture or types of entertainment they do not view as salutary to their spiritual evolution. Many also believe that self-reflection is an aid to spiritual growth and are involved in various forms of psychotherapy or human potential groups. Followers of HIMMs also share common rituals, myths, and metaphors.

Typical HIMMs

There is always a danger in generalizing. Some would argue, for example, that the term "Hinduism" encompasses such a diversity of traditions that it really has no meaning. Can such diverse forms of religiosity as *adivasi* (tribal) practices and *dvaita* (dualist) philosophy legitimately be categorized together under the rubric "Hinduism"? On the other hand, broad categories are useful

as comparative tools, and this is why we use them. While "Hindu-inspired meditation movements" is not as broad as "Hinduism" or many other religious constructs, some might argue that HIMMs is not broad enough to merit a separate category and would better be considered a subset of Hinduism. Yet if it is to be considered a subset of anything, HIMMs might better be subsumed under "American religion," again a category too broad to have much meaning. Regarding HIMMs as a separate category with its own distinctive features has more heuristic value.

As we examine Hindu-inspired meditation movements as a social and religious phenomenon, we will purposely gloss over some of the differences among the individual movements, even while realizing that most participants in HIMMs would prefer not to be lumped together with other groups, and for good reasons. Each of the HIMMs is a unique world unto itself with its own particular practices and jargon. Followers of a particular HIMM usually feel that they have little in common with followers of other HIMMs. Yet to a large extent, affiliation with a particular HIMM draws a person into the philosophy and attitudes of "HIMMs in general" in the same way that a Hindu may learn about "Hinduism in general" from her affiliation with a particular school of thought and practice (*sampradaya*). In other words, just as differences abound within Hinduism (or Christianity or Islam, etc.), a theoretical construct called "Hinduism" is still possible, and just as there are differences between various HIMMs, a construct called "Hindu-inspired meditation movements" is possible.

Three historically significant groups serve as representatives of the larger phenomenon of HIMMs: Self-Realization Fellowship, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda, who first came to the United States in 1920; Transcendental Meditation, founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who arrived in the United States in 1959; and Siddha Yoga, founded by Swami Muktananda, who made his debut in the United States in 1970.

Paramahansa Yogananda referred to his system of meditation techniques as "Kriya Yoga"—a method for union (yoga) that requires an action or rite (kriya), a term coined by his "great-grandfather" guru (his guru's guru's guru). Yogananda established the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in the United States in 1935 in order to further his mission of teaching Kriya Yoga. He did not leave a guru successor when he died, but the American-born Sri Daya Mata now heads the organization. Although not called a guru, she seems to fulfill a guru role for many followers of SRF.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi coined his meditation technique "Transcendental Deep Meditation," but later changed it to simply Transcendental Medita-

tion (TM). He established the International Meditation Society to spread this technique in 1961. Previously, he taught under the auspices of the Spiritual Regeneration Movement, which he had established in India in 1958. Since many of those beginning the practice of TM were students, Maharishi later established the Students International Meditation Society.

Swami Muktananda called his system for meditation "Siddha Yoga"—union (yoga) experienced by a perfected being (*siddha*), or the path that leads to perfection. In 1975 Muktananda established the organization Siddha Yoga Dham Associates—the abode (*dham*) of Siddha Yoga," or SYDA, which is now headed by his successor, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda.

The gurus of each of these groups spent a significant amount of time in the West. Yogananda took up permanent residence in California, and Maharishi lived in Holland. Gurumayi spends the better part of every year in the United States. Each of the movements has groups of followers who gather to practice meditation and learn the teachings of their guru in major cities throughout the United States.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, also known as the Hare Krishna movement, is significant to the formation of an American style of Hinduism. However, it does not come under the rubric of HIMMs because their followers practice a devotional style of *mantra-japa* (repetition of a sound) by chanting *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna* rather than engaging in silent sitting meditation, as do the groups we discuss in this book. Furthermore, they have attempted to create a particular type of culture that is in many ways antithetical to American culture.[2] Their conscious intention to dress, eat, and socialize in the manner of traditional Indian society—even to the extent of having arranged child marriages—places them in a category of their own. Although they are assimilating more into American society with the upcoming generation, as E. Burke Rochford, Jr., pointed out in *Hare Krishna Transformed,* their devotion to a personal deity differentiates them from followers of HIMMs who meditate to enhance their experience of unity with the transcendent God, or Brahman.

As well, I do not include in the category of HIMMs groups that overtly practice or profess extreme forms of Tantric Yoga. Tantra is a path that attempts to integrate opposites, which manifest in the world particularly as sexual polarity. Tantric cults evoke the feminine energy of the Goddess, or Devi, through symbolical rituals that involve all of the senses. "Right-handed Tantra" stays within the bounds of propriety, while "left-handed Tantra" uses sex, alcohol, and meat-eating as means of transcending the perceived delusory entrapment of renunciation. Tantra developed in part as a reac-

tion against the strict observances of purity by the Brahmin caste, as well as against the practice of renouncing worldly pleasure that is expressed in the *Upanishads,* the major text of Vedanta. Two gurus who have used left-handed Tantra that have attracted an American following—particularly in the 1980s—are Rajneesh (later known as Osho) and Adi Da. The more mainstream right-handed goals of Tantra, such as uniting spiritual and material enjoyment, are prevalent in HIMMs, although this may be due as much to the influence of American materialism as to the influence of Tantra. Even though gurus of some HIMMs may practice left-handed Tantra, they do so secretly and their followers are generally unaware of it. Hindu-inspired meditation movements include only those groups that employ methods of *sadhana* (spiritual practices) that are at least marginally acceptable to mainstream society.

Other HIMMs indeed share the similar core practices and values of these three representative movements. Among these are followers of Sri Aurobindo, Anandamayi Ma, Ma Yoga Shakti, Sathya Sai Baba, Shri Anandamurti, Meher Baba, Papaji, Gangaji, Swami Rama, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, Swami Chetananda, Mother Mira, Swami Vishvananda, Mirabai Devi, Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda, Kaliji, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Ammachi. There are many more. The gurus may be living or deceased. Although most are Indian, they may come from any nationality. Western disciples of Hindu gurus are now gurus in their own right. As more and more disciples become gurus, the lines of transmission continue to proliferate in the West.

Beliefs and Practices

Followers of HIMMs believe that the purpose of life is to attain higher states of consciousness until ultimately enlightenment is achieved. American meditators place tremendous value on the belief that their guru has attained the state of consciousness that they desire. Furthermore, they believe that God is found through meditation on one's own inner "self" rather than through prayer to an external divinity. Although many meditators do pray to a personal God, for the most part God is seen as a form of consciousness, not any different from their own inner consciousness. In this sense, they could be said to be inspired particularly by the form of Hindu philosophy called "Vedanta." Personal prayer is often directed to the guru, who is viewed as a form of God. Because consciousness belongs to everyone, they see the path as universal. These unifying aspects of HIMMs—meditation, Vedantic philosophy, and faith in a guru—are significant. Deriving from the Hindu reli-

gion, they provide the core religious system of Hindu-inspired meditation movements.

Meditation is a technique for allowing the mind to settle into a state of quiet alertness. Many scientific studies have been done on the physiological and psychological effects of meditation, and health care practitioners often recommend it to patients to ease stress and improve physical vitality. This, however, is not the phenomenon we are considering in Hindu-inspired meditation movements. People who begin to practice meditation for health-related purposes often abandon it once they feel better. Our focus is those who practice meditation because it fulfills a spiritual yearning to realize a higher goal in life than earning money, attaining professional achievement, or even enjoying fulfilling relationships. Participants in HIMMs see themselves as travelers on the road to enlightenment and view meditation as the key to their success. They understand enlightenment as the culmination of many human births. They trust that upon attaining enlightenment, they will experience a shift from feeling limited and separate to feeling unlimited and united with all things. They may use the words "Self," "Brahman," "the transcendent," or "the Absolute" to describe the sense of unification they experience during meditation and which they believe will permeate their lives upon attaining enlightenment. From this expanded awareness, they assume that all thoughts and actions will be spontaneously right and in accordance with the laws of nature. The type of meditation that accomplishes this goal varies from one group to another, but the commitment to meditate regularly is consistent among followers of HIMMs. The three people I interviewed whom we met in the preface—Walter, Aaron, and Jennifer—illustrate this type of commitment.

Walter, a retired professor of psychology, is a devotee of Paramahansa Yogananda and practices the techniques and moral guidelines he has learned through Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF). Although he had been practicing meditation for forty-three years, he expressed uncertainty about how much progress he had made. Walter meditates for forty minutes twice daily, first thing in the morning and again before dinner. He attends group sessions at his local center for SRF along with about twenty other disciples of this movement. On Thursday evenings the group meets for ninety minutes of chanting, listening to readings from books by Yogananda, and meditation. On Sunday mornings they sit together for three hours of meditation. Walter has been meditating since 1961 and attending the SRF Center since the early seventies.

I was curious why he had stuck with the practice for so many years if he was not seeing results. He replied, "When I first was introduced to these

practices, I expected it to be easy. For some it is easy. There are spiritually gifted people, but for the rest of us, we try and try and try. I was told I would be able to shut up the senses, but I've only had that experience once." As we continued to talk, however, I understood why Walter had stayed with his commitment. He actually *was* seeing results from his meditation; they were just not the dramatic results he had expected. He admitted later in the interview, "I'm always glad I've meditated after I do it. If I don't meditate, I miss it. It's very subtle; something essential is missing if I don't meditate. I can't describe it in a concrete way. I think sitting for meditation is reminding oneself of the other reality that exists beyond the ordinary reality. It's seeing the world as consciousness, and not as physical reality. It carries over into dealing with the difficulties that come up in life. I'm able to see them in a larger framework, so there's no need to get upset." Walter explained that when he had a massive heart attack several years earlier, he did not experience fear or panic. He attributed this to his many years of practicing meditation.

Aaron follows the practices outlined by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He spent eighteen years as a member of Purusha—a men's monastic community sponsored by the Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement—but now he is an independent sales representative for a dietary supplement firm. He lives in the small city of Fairfield, Iowa, where one third of the nine thousand citizens practice Transcendental Meditation. He goes to the "Dome" located on the campus of Maharishi University of Management to meditate with a large group each morning and again in the evening. Two round buildings—one for men and one for women—with gold-colored domes are used for meditation and other techniques for enlivening consciousness taught by the TM movement. Aaron explained that anywhere from seven hundred to twelve hundred people from the town generally do their practices together on a daily basis. The morning session begins at 7:00 a.m., allowing people time to get to work by 9:00. The evening session begins at 5:15 p.m. and the meditators are home by 7:00 p.m. Aaron spoke of his daily routine as "a biological rhythm." He said, "There is this inward pull to meditate in the morning and evening. Just like when you know it's time to go to bed, I know it's time to meditate."

Jennifer is a practitioner of Siddha Yoga and a devotee of Gurumayi, current guru of the Siddha Yoga meditation movement. She works in public health, coordinating resources and education for family caregivers—primarily those who care for an older adult in their family. She is also a mother of two teenagers. Jennifer sets her alarm each night for 5:15 a.m. so that she will have a good forty-five minutes to meditate the next morning before starting her day. Early in the morning she enters her meditation room, which

she has set aside as a sacred space. She lights a candle in front of a picture of Gurumayi. Often she chants a short hymn that is dedicated to kundalini, the spiritual energy that is said to reside within the "subtle" or "astral" body, believed to be made of energy. Sometimes she chants the mantra, Om Namah Shivaya (I bow to Shiva, understood to be the transcendent, universal God who dwells within the soul) along with a tape recording of the voice of Muktananda, the guru who brought Siddha Yoga to the West. Then she meditates, sitting on a firm cushion on the floor, legs crossed, and back straight. She focuses quietly on her breath and synchronizes it with the mantra she received in her initiation to this path. After about forty-five minutes she gets up and goes to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for her family. She feels that she has to start her day with meditation. "When I don't," she says, "my day is somehow off. If I can touch that place of deep stillness, even for a moment, it makes all the difference." Jennifer supplements her practices at home by attending group chanting and meditation sessions twice a week at the local Center for Siddha Yoga.

Walter, Aaron, and Jennifer follow different gurus and engage in different spiritual practices and methods of meditating. Yet even with these differences they all share a strong commitment to a daily practice of meditation. Even though most of the gurus who come to America tell people that they can continue to practice their own particular brand of religion and simply add meditation to their daily routine, most do leave their religions upon becoming involved in a HIMM, if they had not already done so. Most of those I interviewed were raised in the Christian or Jewish faiths. Those who were not raised in a specific religion were culturally indoctrinated into the Judeo-Christian worldview. All of them expressed that their upbringing did not teach them how to gain access to the transcendent realm that lies beyond form. More than any other single factor, having regular access to levels of awareness beyond the mundane, attracts people to HIMMs. Even those who continue to practice a traditional religion feel that their involvement with a HIMM offers them something that they do not receive in a church or synagogue.

Of the people discussed above, Walter was raised as a Roman Catholic and reported that it was a slow process for his worldview to "adjust" to his new path. Aaron was raised as a Methodist, and between Sunday services, Wednesday night dinners, Thursday night choir practice, youth fellowship, and some evening services, he had attended church seven to eight times a week. He rejected his church before he set out to find a new way. Jennifer was raised as an Episcopalian and left the church after she was confirmed at

the age of twelve because she was tired of "all the talk about God 'out there.'" Participants in HIMMs tend to feel that what they left behind was "religion" and what they are now engaged in is "spirituality." They view spirituality as superior to religion because they understand it to be based on inner experiences rather than dogma.

Spirituality or Religion?

When I first began my research for this book, I explained to a woman who resided in an ashram of Siddha Yoga that I was exploring followers of Hindu gurus as a religious phenomenon. "Religion!" she exclaimed. "I thought religion was what I was trying to get *away* from when I came here." Religion has been defined many ways, but most scholars agree that it contains certain basic components, even if the specific terminology varies. The religious historian Ninian Smart proposes that religions contain six dimensions: experiential, mythical, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, and social.[3] HIMMs contain all of these dimensions.

Gurus and followers of HIMMs prefer to focus on the dimension of experience. The gurus' conviction in the superiority of inner experience over outer forms of religion is evident in their words. Yogananda, guru of SRF, stated, "Different dogmatic 'isms' have kept mankind divided. . . Unity among various religions may be brought about only when the individuals who practice those religions become actually aware of God within."[4] Maharishi, founder of the TM movement, said, "Fortunate are they who live in union with God . . . They are above the limitations of religion or race."[5] Swami Muktananda, the founder of the Siddha Yoga movement, stated, "Religion builds walls and tries to keep people in. My goal is to tear down all walls because God lives in everyone." Gurumayi, the current head of Siddha Yoga, said, "Most people think of a religion as a set of rules enforced by a god who punishes you for every mistake. It is a very limited understanding. . . Siddha Yoga is the inner journey to the heart."[6] The resounding refrain is that religion can be bypassed because only the experience of the heart or of transcendence leads directly to knowledge. The gurus associate the word religion with the "outer" elements of a tradition and assert that if people focus on the universal and "inner" aspects of the heart, then division among religions would cease.

There are several problems with the assertion that the beliefs and practices of HIMMs are universal. First, it does not acknowledge that many religious practitioners do not believe that God dwells within a human being or that union with God is possible or even desirable. The view that differences

can be transcended if everyone would simply experience the state of unity awareness is itself a belief system, even if it arises out of personal experience. What leaders and followers of HIMMs are really asserting is that there would indeed be unity among religions, or even better, religion could be bypassed completely, if everyone accepted the HIMM worldview.

The assertion that HIMMs are "beyond the limitations of religion or race" presents another problem. While its followers favor experience, other religious elements also play an important part in the movements. As outsiders observe Hindu-inspired meditation movements, they must appear to be just as concerned with external rituals and dogma as any other religion, for *only the external can be observed*. People compare the inner depth of their own religious system to the outer expression of another. Thus, the other religion is viewed as more superficial. As people begin to defend their religion against the accusations of others, they take up the term "religion" as it has been used by their opponents, and eventually, "religion" becomes associated with mechanical rituals or heartless dogma.[7]

Participants in HIMMs often do not choose to view their beliefs and practices as religious because they do not want to place their spiritual path on an equal footing with other religions that are "outer," and therefore "superficial." Yet even a cursory examination of these Hindu-based movements reveals that they display all of the characteristics of what is normally associated with religion. Practitioners of meditation choose to privilege the experiential element without realizing the extent to which this element is intertwined with outer religious expression.

Usually Hindu-based guru groups are called "movements," and I have also used this term to describe them, but I use the word to indicate a characteristic of the larger religious phenomenon. Movements come and go. Religion, on the other hand, has the connotation of stability over time. For this reason, the term "religion" must take on a slightly different connotation when considering HIMMs. In fact, religion *is* taking on a different connotation in the twenty-first century. The most recent PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life survey in the United States (2008) revealed that people unaffiliated with a particular religion make up slightly more than 16 percent of the American population. The unaffiliated are the fourth largest group in America, and if Christian groups are considered together, it is the second largest group. It is interesting to note that, while 90 percent of the unaffiliated seldom or never go to a religious service, a full 41 percent consider religion to be "very important" or "somewhat important" to their lives. We may need to redefine the term "religion" in the coming years as more and more people cease to iden-

tify with Christianity or another established religion and instead begin to associate with "movements" or simply with being religious in their own way.

It is the succession of movement after movement that creates the religion of HIMMs. The Transcendental Meditation "movement" arose in the 1960s, peaked in the '70s, and began to diminish in the '80s. Many who had been involved in TM joined other groups. The Siddha Yoga "movement" arose in the 1970s, peaked in the '80s and '90s, and began to show signs of diminishing around the turn of the millennium. New movements, such as the currently popular Art of Living Foundation of guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, are always poised to take the place of those that fade into oblivion.[8] Some HIMMs possess a measure of stability over time. The Vedanta Society has been in existence for over one hundred years, and Self-Realization Fellowship has existed for close to one hundred years. Neither shows sign of abating. It is the aggregate of all of these groups that I consider a religion. While each movement has unique characteristics, taken together, they have enough family resemblances and enough differences from other religions to be considered a new category.

Hindu Influences on HIMMs

Most adherents of HIMMs do not view their particular group as Hindu. Practitioners of TM are particularly quick to point out that it does not derive from Hindu sources, but rather from Vedic sources. This may be because European Orientalists and missionaries in India, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, imagined a pristine Golden Age, identified with the ancient scriptures of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. They contrasted this with a later perverse and degenerate age, which they believed began with the growth of Tantra in the Middle Ages. During the Hindu Renaissance (also referred to as the Bengal Renaissance) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hindus accepted this viewpoint as their own and helped to propagate it. To further appeal to a contemporary audience, followers of Maharishi refer to their scriptural and cultural source as "Vedic science" rather than Vedic religion.

Practitioners of SRF, following the lead of their guru, also point to their practices as "scientific." Emphasizing science can also be traced to the Hindu Renaissance when Western-educated Indians formulated their reformed Hinduism with an eye toward its universality. Just as the laws of science are the same regardless of the culture in which they are studied and used, so the philosophy of Vedanta and the practice of meditation are believed to have universal applicability.

Followers of Siddha Yoga point to their roots in the esoteric philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, which arose in the eighth century. Like Vedanta, Kashmir Shaivism posits a monistic worldview. But whereas Advaita Vedanta refers to the material world as *maya*, or illusion, Kashmir Shaivism proposes that the material world is not separate from *chit*, or consciousness. Philosophically oriented followers of Siddha Yoga study scriptures of Kashmir Shaivism such as the *Shiva Sutras*. While HIMMs attempt to distance themselves from the Hindu religion by focusing on philosophy, the attempt falls short since Hinduism includes philosophical dimensions. HIMMs are particularly influenced by the practice and philosophy found at the Yoga-Tantric nexus.

In the West, the word "yoga" has come to be associated with Hatha Yoga, which involves psycho-physical techniques for purifying the body and mind. This is just one of many forms of yoga, and HIMMs are beginning to adopt it as the practice gains wider acceptance in the United States. Traditionally in India only certain ascetics practiced Hatha Yoga. Retreats for urban people who want to relax and procure its health benefits became common only after such retreats were well established in the West. Similarly, meditation was not, and is not, widely practiced in India. The type of yoga one encounters in India most often is Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of devotion, which finds expression through songs, poems, plays, and stories about Krishna or Rama, two very popular *avatars*, or human incarnations, of the great god Vishnu. While HIMMs engage in Bhakti Yoga in a minor way, they draw more on Guru Yoga, Laya Yoga, Mantra Yoga, and Raja Yoga. These yogas do not operate in neat separate categories and are often connected with Tantra as well.

In Guru Yoga, the spiritual aspirant is a "devotee," one whose existence is completely involved in learning from and serving a guru. The devotee views the guru as more than a human personality. The guru is an emanation of God. The *Guru Gita,* chanted daily in ashrams of Siddha Yoga, expresses the devotion and surrender needed in a guru-disciple relationship. The scripture begins with Parvati, Shiva's wife, asking to be initiated into the path of the Guru. The rest of the scripture comprises Shiva's answer. He begins by saying, "Brahman is nothing other than the Guru. O beautiful one, this is the Truth." Later he says, "*Gurubhava* (absorption in the Guru) is the most sacred place; every other place of pilgrimage is meaningless." Followers of Guru Yoga believe that initiation creates a divine link between the guru and devotee that can never be broken. They also believe that the disciple must become empty of selfish desire in order to receive spiritual transmission from the guru. This can be accomplished only through complete faith in the guru.

Laya means "dissolution." The goal of Laya Yoga is to dissolve desires and sensory experiences in order to increase awareness of the transcendent. The path involves a progressive withdrawal from the outer world of form to an inner unification with one's Self, or *atman.* Laya Yoga is related to Hatha Yoga and to Kundalini Yoga as all of these forms of yoga are concerned with "psycho-energy" and the "subtle" body, rather than only transcendence. Followers of these types of yoga believe that a spiritual force called kundalini lies dormant within the subtle body in the lowest *chakra* (spiritual center) at the base of the spine. The subtle body is believed to contain an intricate system of channels, or *nadis.* The nadis might be compared to veins, but instead of circulating blood they circulate a life force called *prana*. The nadis cross at certain points, the most complex convergences occurring in the area that corresponds to the spine. There are seven of these centers, or chakras. When kundalini is "awakened" through meditation or breathing exercises or the guru's grace, it is believed to travel up the central channel (nadi) called the *sushumna,* which corresponds to the spine in the physical body. When the kundalini (conceived as a feminine force, also called *shakti*) reaches the *sahasrara* chakra (thousand-petaled lotus wheel) at the top of the head, it is said to join Shiva, the supreme Lord of Tantra.

Tantric teachings are sometimes called *mantra shastra,* the scriptures of mantra. Mantra Yoga is concerned with the recitation of mantras—potent forms of thought that are believed to have been revealed to yogic masters. They carry no power unless they are enlivened through the process of initiation from guru to disciple. The ancient scriptures of India, the *Vedas,* are believed to have been cognized directly from the atmosphere, and Hindus consider them to be powerful mantras. The most important mantra of the Vedas, widely venerated throughout all forms of Hinduism, is *om*. Hindus believe om is a nonsectarian, universal sound that forms the foundation of the cosmos. *Hamsa* is another widely used mantra. Yoga practitioners hold that it is the sound the breath makes, as well as the natural vibration of the Self (*atman*). Hamsa also means swan, which is a symbol of spiritual achievement. A meditator thinks "ham" on the in-breath and "sa" on the out-breath. Since the breath continually goes in and out, it can also be reversed to *so'ham*. *So'ham* translates as "I am He," meaning "I am Brahman." Both Self-Realization Fellowship and Siddha Yoga use this mantra. HIMMs may also use one-syllable Tantric mantras, called *bija* (seed) mantras, for meditation. Each bija mantra is associated with a particular deity, as well as with subtle organs of the human body.

Raja Yoga means "Royal Yoga," and is usually associated with Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra,* compiled in the second century CE. After the *Bhavagad-Gita,* this is one of the most widely read Hindu texts among American practitioners of yoga. The *Yoga Sutra* is a compendium of different ideas and practices, and thus represents the long development of yoga. It outlines the "eight limbs" of yoga, beginning with ethical morality, continuing to the practice of meditation, and culminating in the experience of *samadhi,* or ecstatic absorption. The *Yoga Sutra* also covers the development of supernormal powers called *siddhis.* Maharishi, for example, has experimented with this portion of the *Yoga Sutra* in an attempt to help his disciples learn to "fly." Although they never learned the siddhi well enough to actually levitate or fly, many of his followers include siddhi practices as part of their daily routine.

Like yoga, Tantra encompasses a huge array of scriptures and practices. Employing mantras and kundalini energy are part of both yoga and Tantra. Another influence of Tantra on HIMMs involves secret practices performed by some gurus. As mentioned earlier, so-called left-handed Tantra includes illicit sexual practices for the purpose of attaining powers. Because left-handed Tantra has been, and is, more widely practiced in India than revisionist Hindus would like to admit, it is probably used by gurus of HIMMs more than their followers would want to acknowledge.[9] However, left-handed Tantra is *not* a part of the practice or belief system of followers of HIMMs, which derive in large part from Neo-Hinduism.

"Neo-Hinduism," a term made popular by the German Indologist Paul Hacker, is often used to refer to a blending of worldviews that developed during the Bengal Renaissance. In an attempt to revitalize their religion in keeping with modern sensibilities, intellectual Indians in Bengal experimented with new ways of understanding and expressing Hinduism. They attempted to conceptualize Hinduism in a succinct way so that it could compete with Christianity. Traditionally, people do not convert to Hinduism but are simply born into it. Neither do they leave it. Christianity, however, with its strong missionary emphasis, changed that. Hindu reformers thus attempted to formulate a rational alternative to the Christian choice. Since only those born into the upper three social levels (*varnas*) of India were considered Hindu, they also attempted to universalize the religion so that it could include all people.

The Bengal Renaissance has had a significant impact on the beliefs and practices of the middle and upper classes of Indian Hindus who live in cities, but it has not filtered to the vast majority of Hindus living in agricultural villages. Yet, these ideas have had a major impact on Western perceptions

of Hinduism and on HIMMs, which could perhaps more properly be called Neo-Hindu-inspired meditation movements.

The task of these reformers was not easy. The tremendous diversity of Hinduism includes influences and traditions from four sources: the original inhabitants of India, who today are referred to as tribals, or *adivasis*; the Indus Valley Civilization (2500–1500 BCE); the highly developed Dravidian culture seen in Tamils today; and the Vedic religion of Aryans. Each of these traditions has in turn taken multiple forms in what today is called Hinduism. Close contact with Islam and Christianity has also transformed Hindu traditions. Yet even with this diversity, it is possible to discuss general characteristics that belong to "traditional Hinduism" and contrast them with characteristics of Neo-Hinduism.

Traditional Hinduism changes over time, like all religions, but at the same time maintains continuity with the very distant past—indeed, as far back as the Stone Age. Neo-Hinduism, on the other hand, grew out of a lost faith in traditional Hinduism, and thus broke rather suddenly with many of its traditions. Downplaying the mythology and ritual of traditional Hinduism, Neo-Hinduism defines itself as a philosophical religion. It emphasizes ideas found in the *Upanishads* that deal with atman and brahman (the universal substrate of existence) in contrast to traditional Hinduism, which values the epics, the *Ramayana,* and the *Mahabharata,* and the *Puranas,* ("old stories" about the creation of the universe, incarnations of gods, and legends of sages and kings). Traditional Hinduism does not have an overarching organizational structure and therefore myths and practices often vary from village to village. Neo-Hinduism, on the other hand, attempts to define itself as unified. Although there was much trial and error throughout the nineteenth century as Hindu intellectuals reformed and redefined their religion, Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta as an experiential and universal religion is probably the most widely accepted version of Neo-Hinduism today. Beginning in 1893, Vivekananda promoted this universal Vedanta to an American audience.

Methods of spreading religion can also be contrasted.[10] Traditional Hinduism was spread by ascetics who wandered from village to village offering stories and teachings. Traveling "poet-saints" also spread the religion through their music and poetry. Pilgrimage sites (*tirthas*)—in the form of a temple honoring a deity, the burial site of a saint, a sacred river, or even a city such as Varanasi (Banaras)—attracted people who communally reinforced one another's beliefs and rituals. The main way traditional Hinduism was passed on, and the way it continues to be passed on today, is through the family.

Those of the younger generation learn rituals and stories from their elders and they, in turn, pass them on to their own children. Hindu women's roles are extremely important in this form of religious teaching. Ann Grodzins Gold, an anthropologist of religion who has done extensive fieldwork in the North Indian state of Rajasthan, comments,

> [w]omen were far better sources for the meanings of, and practices associated with, calendrical or life-cycle festivals than were men. If I asked a man what happens on such and such a day, the most common answer would be 'We eat pudding' or some equivalent. It was women who readily explained what gods were worshiped, what stories were told, what results were expected—and they were the ones who knew the pudding recipe too.[11]

When Neo-Hindus needed a vehicle to spread their philosophy, they looked to Christian missionaries as their model. Although schools were a part of traditional Hinduism, they were only for the upper Brahmin caste, and their purpose was to train priests to conduct rituals, which included instruction in the Sanskrit language. Priests are unnecessary for Neo-Hinduism, however, since ritual is almost completely lacking and people can read scriptures in translation. Schools became an important means of transferring knowledge, not only to youth but also to adults who would train to be educators and preachers themselves. Neo-Hindus often held social gatherings for youth and organized conferences for adults. They also held regular congregational worship services in a manner similar to Christian services, complete with prayers, hymns, and sermons. When Hindu gurus came to the United States, they simply continued to use these forms already familiar to Americans. They would, though, eventually add another ingredient that they learned from American institutions, and that was to charge fees for the classes, conferences, and social gatherings. Paying fees seemed appropriate to Americans since they did not see themselves as receiving religious instruction, but instruction in universal principles and "techniques."

Traditional and Neo-Hinduism can also be contrasted in terms of their intended audiences. Traditional Hinduism was, and is, for Hindus only. Many traditional Hindus conceive of their religion as culturally based to the extent that a person not born into the caste system of India cannot be a Hindu, nor can that person enter sacred places of worship in some areas of India. The idea of converting foreigners to Hinduism does not exist for many traditional Hindus.[12] Neo-Hinduism, on the other hand, was devised for an

international audience. Like Christianity, it was, and continues to be, a missionary religion.

A key difference between the two forms of Hinduism involves the use of language. Traditional Hinduism is based on Sanskrit and on local vernacular languages. Neo-Hinduism is based, in large part, on English philosophical and religious terms that the Bengali intelligentsia learned in Christian missionary schools. According to Paul Hacker, "To a very large extent modern Indians think in concepts associated with English words. Even when they write in an Indian language, their mind is moving in the framework of these concepts." Since writing in English was taboo, they would often use Sanskrit words to express the meanings of English words, thus dramatically changing the original meanings.[13]

The goal of these Indian reformers—to harmonize the different sects of Hinduism (and even the religions of the world) into one eternal and unified "natural" religion—was never realized. Traditional Hinduism maintains its various sects and diverse forms of worship, and the world has certainly not become religiously homogeneous. Nevertheless, gurus and followers of Hindu-inspired meditation movements today view their message and practices as part of a natural and universal system that lies beyond religion. Similar to Neo-Hindu reformers, they see their views and practices as an expression of *sanatana-dharma,* a universal "philosophy" that cuts through geographic and ideological boundaries.

Rituals of traditional Hinduism that commemorate life-cycle events and changing roles within society, as well as rituals that honor seasonal changes or daily phases of the sun, are generally not a part of HIMMs. Rituals most valued by HIMMs center on the practice of meditation and initiation into this practice. Meditation for householders is not found in traditional Indian Hinduism but is reserved for monks and renunciates, whereas in HIMMs it is touted as the essential spiritual practice for people from all walks of life. Neo-Hindu influence is evident in HIMMs' rational explanation of myths as representative of inner psychological processes. Followers of HIMMs are usually not devoted to a Hindu deity or deities, although they may participate in chanting the name of a Hindu deity to enhance their evolution. Although followers of HIMMs embrace the devotional quality reminiscent of Indian bhakti movements, the love and devotion is directed toward the guru rather than to a deity. Finally, caste distinctions, an important religious dimension for many traditional Indian Hindus, obviously have no relevance for Americans.

American Religion's Influences on HIMMs

When American followers of HIMMs rebel against their religious heritage by choosing to follow an Indian guru, they are in actuality expressing the tradition of religious freedom of choice that became important in the United States during the eighteenth century. When followers of HIMMs reject what they perceive to be dry dogma and stale ritual in favor of spiritual experience, they are conveying the religious character of Protestantism that emphasizes personal religious experience. Since Protestantism plays such a large role in defining the American religious character, it is not surprising that some Americans question orthodox values and turn to the types of personal experiences that HIMMs offer.

Sydney Ahlstrom, a historian of American religion, has argued that the expression of religious choice of the 1960s and 1970s was "a continuation of a venerable tradition."[14] That tradition can be traced to the Protestant Reformation, which Ahlstrom calls "a momentous landmark in the history of toleration and the rise of new religious impulses."[15] The expression of the Protestant principle—that is, the questioning of doctrine and authority—has played an inextricable role in American history. Almost from its inception, America has been the home of the notions of religious choice, inner experience, and a plurality of belief systems, all of which find their source in Protestantism. The first Puritan community of Plymouth Bay Colony sought a unified religious fellowship bonded together by common geography and belief, but their dream did not last long. As diverse immigrants arrived and as expansion westward scattered the faithful, diversity and choice became hallmarks of the American religious experience. Various denominations arose and vied for the commitment of pioneers, and the touchstone of all of these denominations was the personal, ecstatic religious experience.

Two "Great Awakenings," the first between the 1720s and the 1740s, and the second, beginning in the 1790s and lasting for around fifty years, had a profound effect on the national character of American religion. A spokesperson for the first Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, argued that experience rather than theological ideas or moral practice constituted the essence of religion. Edwards had a mystical sensitivity evident in his definition of God as "being in general." A champion of Christian orthodoxy, Edwards was later called a "pantheist" by the Unitarian William Ellery Channing.[16] Much of Edwards's theology was based on his mystical experiences about which he wrote in his

Personal Narrative. There he spoke of "holy affections" that arise from a spiritual and divine source. For him, personal experience of God comes first, and ethical behavior follows. The religious life begins on the "inside" and then moves naturally to a righteous life. As we will see, this is precisely the ethical philosophy of HIMMs.

The emphasis on baptism of the spirit in the Awakenings established a pattern in American religion that accentuates moments of inner ecstasy. They also established an anti-intellectual bias in which theology was to be downplayed. People were viewed as free in any moment to choose how they would relate to their personal God. So strong were the effects of these Protestant Awakenings that they would be felt in the Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths as well.[17] Protestantism, to a large extent, has defined the American religious tradition.

In 1787, shortly before the advent of the second Great Awakening, the first Unitarian Church was established at Kings Chapel in Boston, marking a growing liberalism within the mind-set of New England Christians. However, liberalism existed in direct opposition to the revivalism mind-set. Unitarians did not believe that a precise conversion experience was necessary to Christian faith but professed "a continuous rational process of self-dedication."[18] They resisted emotional displays within the church, and even the sermon took on the quality of a well-styled lecture. They believed in religious freedom and congregational independence. They not only rejected the idea of the Trinity but Calvinist predestination as well, viewing God the Father as benevolent and human beings as free agents. This rational form of religion was soon to have a profound effect on some intellectual Bengalis, most notably Ram Mohun Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen, thus contributing to Neo-Hinduism, which was, in turn, to become a part of the HIMMs worldview.

Unitarians were influenced by a rational form of religion known as Deism. Drawing on Enlightenment ideas, Deists believed that reason and scientific knowledge could and should inform religion. The ideas of Deism began in pre-Revolutionary America and expanded throughout the eighteenth century. Applying concepts from the philosophy of Locke and the cosmology of Newton, rational religion came to be known as "natural religion."[19] Deists were influenced not only by French liberalism and British rationalism but also by translations of texts and descriptions of travelers that were arriving from China and India. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams are among those who read scriptures and accounts of "the East."[20]

Acculturation

Acculturation is often understood as one culture adapting to a more dominant culture, but it can also be defined as the mutual exchange between two cultures and the resulting adjustments that each makes. As Hindus and Christians, Indians and Americans, interact, each religion and culture draws inspiration from the other. Such is the case with the idea of "natural religion" based on rationality. It begins with Enlightenment ideas in Europe and America, travels to India through the British, becomes part of the Hindu Renaissance, and then returns to America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the teachings of Hindu gurus.

The very type of rationalism and cosmopolitanism embodied in the ideas of Adams and Jefferson was evident in the first generation of British to serve in India. Indian intellectuals were exposed to this rationalism as they were educated in Western philosophy through British-run schools, as well as through those Orientalists who had a sincere desire to understand Indian culture. According to the South Asian historian David Kopf, "Orientalists formed enduring relations with members of the Bengali intelligentsia to whom they served as sources for knowledge of the West and with whom they worked to promote social and cultural change in Calcutta."[21] This interaction propelled the initiation of reforms by Hindu intellectuals that resulted in the development of Neo-Hinduism.

The encounter with Western science and technology also contributed to reform. Both in liberal Christian traditions and in reform Hinduism, the idea that religion should be "scientific" took hold. Science was connected to experimentation, and Hinduism, particularly Vedanta, was viewed as having an experimental basis. Experiencing the inner soul (atman) was presented as a type of scientific experiment that could be repeated with verifiable results. Vivekananda and other Neo-Hindus brought this form of rationalism back to the United States as they developed and taught their philosophies to their Western followers. The idea of meditation as a scientific technique, the results of which can be verified through the scientific method, would later be taken up by Paramahansa Yogananda and Maharishi.

British and American Unitarianism played a key role in the acculturation process of the nineteenth century as Bengalis incorporated ideas from Western culture in reformulating Hinduism. One of these was Ram Mohun Roy, founder of a Hindu-based society called the Brahmo Samaj (Divine Society). Ram Mohun Roy sought a rational religion that would be grounded in Hindu roots but that would also include the teachings of Jesus. He sought

inspiration from both the *Upanishads* and Jesus' ethical teachings. Together with the Baptist minister William Adam, Ram Mohun established a Unitarian Church.[22] But later, he and his associates decided that it was better to build a movement more closely aligned with Hinduism, and they founded the Brahmo Samaj. This move did not diminish the mutual influences between the Unitarians and the Brahmo Samaj. Unitarians were anxious to learn about Vedantic theism, and Ram Mohun corresponded at length with American Unitarian ministers William Ellery Channing and Henry Ware.

Three men followed Ram Mohun Roy as leaders of the Brahmo Samaj: Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chunder Sen, and Protap Chundar Mazumdar. Each of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj took the movement in a different direction, even breaking off to form new movements, but still they shared certain ideals that set them apart from traditional Hinduism. All of the leaders, for example, mistrusted outer forms of religion and focused instead on inner spirituality. Ram Mohun Roy asserted, "[F]alsehood is common to all religions without distinction."[23] Dabendranath Tagore contrasted inner spirituality to outer forms of worship, saying, "God is to be worshipped only in spiritual ways. Hindu asceticism, temples, and fixed forms of worship are unnecessary."[24] They also believed that inner intuition was superior to scripture as a means of attaining knowledge.

Eclectic use of texts to support one's views was sanctioned by the Brahmo Samaj. The now-Unitarian minister William Adam said of Roy,

> Ram Mohun Roy, I am persuaded, supports this institution [the Brahmo Samaj] not because he believes in the divine authority of the Ved, but solely as an instrument of overthrowing idolatry. To be candid, however, I must add that . . . in my mind . . . he employs Unitarian Christianity in the same way, as an instrument for spreading pure and just notions of God, without believing in the divine authority of the Gospel.[25]

Roy used texts selectively in the same way that modern gurus do today: ideas are given legitimacy by finding scriptural support. For example, Ram Mohun was in favor of religious egalitarianism and sought support for this in authoritative Hindu texts such as the *Kularnava-tantra* and the *Mahanirvana-tantra,* and also in Shankara's teachings. In order to do this, he had to choose passages selectively and pass over obvious restrictions such as texts that dealt with the concept of *adhikara* (qualifications for religious instruction).[26] Ram Mohun's assertion that "absolute truth" should be made available to everyone, regardless of qualification, is a radical innovation that separates

him from traditional Hindu thinking, and this innovation has been eagerly taken up by gurus who have traveled to the West. Thus, the willingness of gurus in America to teach meditation to those without proper preparation is anathema to more traditional gurus in India.

The Brahmo Samaj is responsible for popularizing the view that Hinduism is a universal religion. While missionaries were busy trying to convince Indians that the one universal truth could be found in the Christian faith, Hindu reformers asserted that Hinduism contained a universality superior to that of the Christian faith for it, unlike Christianity, could include all other faiths. The Hindu tradition was presented as flexible and adaptable. Ram Mohun responded to the challenge of a foreign religion by incorporating parts of it into his own. This was a radical innovation on his part because traditional Hinduism views the foreigner as *mleccha* (barbarian; someone who does not belong to the Hindu culture). Keshub Chandra Sen emphasized the universality of inner experience by collecting documents regarding intuition and experience from all the religious traditions, and then declaring the "religion of experience" as universal.[27]

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Americans were exposed to Hinduism as a result of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhavagad-Gita* being translated into English. Edwin Arnold's *Bhavagad-Gita,* titled *The Song Celestial* (1885), was widely read. Sir Charles Wilkins' first English language edition of the *Bhavagad-Gita* (1785) also came to light, and this was the translation that inspired Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802–82). They, along with others of the New England Transcendentalist movement, stimulated by Hindu philosophy, Chinese scriptures, Neoplatonism, and mystics such as Emanuel Swedenborg, wrote of the ultimate unity of all things, the innate goodness of humans, and the supremacy of insight over logic—all themes that later became a part of HIMMs.

Thus we can see that interest in Hindu ideas and practices in the twentieth century did not arise in a vacuum. Rather it represents the accumulation of intellectual exchange between Indian and Western religion and philosophy that had been occurring for centuries. The modern phenomenon of HIMMs grows out of that exchange.

2

Laying the Foundation for American-Style Hinduism

While my classmates in eleventh-grade English class yawned their way through Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays, I could hardly contain my excitement. My inclination toward idealism blossomed upon discovering Emerson. The idea that spirit is more real than matter, and that everything is somehow bound together in one unified whole touched the recesses of my being. Emerson's poetic words from his essay "Over-Soul" seemed to me those of a prophet:

> We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one.[1]

It was not until many years later that I learned of Emerson's love for Hindu scriptures. I discovered that he was one of many who played a role in synthesizing Hindu and American religious worldviews. In 1836, just eight years after Ram Mohun Roy had established the Brahmo Samaj in India, Emerson and his cohorts founded the Transcendental Society in Boston, Massachusetts. Links between the worldviews of Americans and Indian Hindus were being made and a new fusion, unknown before the nineteenth century, was emerging. The Theosophical and New Thought movements were to add their voices to the synthesizing process. This new amalgam worldview helped to prepare the ground for the emergence of HIMMs in America.

Hindu-inspired meditation movements were prominent in the American public eye during two historical periods: first in the early part of the

twentieth century, particularly the 1920s, and again in the 1960s and '70s. Just as Christian missionaries had flowed into India from Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and from the United States in the nineteenth century, Indian emissaries (albeit in smaller numbers than the missionaries to India) began to travel to America. The influx of missionaries (and other Asian immigrants) was halted with the Immigration Act of 1924, which drastically limited the number of immigrants allowed into the United States. The act was repealed in 1965 with a new Immigration Act, marking the beginning of the second wave of Hindu people and ideas entering the United States—a wave that continues to get stronger with time.

The story of the emergence of HIMMs in America begins with Vivekananda's lectures at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, which spurred a speaking tour that lasted for four years. Yet even before that event several American figures and movements helped to create willing reception to Vivekananda's message. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the first prominent American to create a hybrid-style American religion based on Hindu ideas. In the same way that Bengali intellectuals had clothed Western ideas in Sanskrit language, so Emerson clothed Hindu ideas in English words. Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and New Thought—three hybrid East-West movements helped pave the way for the emergence of HIMMs. By the time Vivekananda gave his first address in 1893, many of the Americans in attendance were enthralled. In 1920 Paramahansa Yogananda arrived in Boston and spoke to the International Congress of Religious Liberals. Within the same year he founded the Self-Realization Fellowship. For the next several years he lectured on the East Coast and in 1924 traveled throughout the United States, lecturing to audiences of thousands.

After a lull from the 1930s to the 1950s, Americans again became intrigued by Hindu ideas following the 1965 reversal of the Immigration Act of 1924. This legal change coincided with the hippie era when a generation of youth broke away from established tradition to explore free love, psychedelic drugs, and the "mystical East." Remembered for phrases such as "flower power," "summer of love," and "power to the people," the hippies also staged establishment-defying events—campus protests, peace rallies, demonstrating at the Democratic National Convention, and outdoor concerts with the smell of marijuana wafting through the air. The era is also remembered for its images of gurus—Swami Satchidananda at the Woodstock music festival, for example, or Maharishi Mahesh Yogi posing for a photograph with the Beatles.

"[T]he effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed."[2] This is Ralph Waldo Emerson's version of karma. Brahman, the Hindu word for the unchanging, transcendent ground of the universe, Emerson called the "over-soul," and maya, (illusion), he dubbed the "shadow." Eighteenth-century religious freedom offered choices only within the bounds of Christianity, and it was not until Emerson challenged core Christian beliefs during the mid-nineteenth century that the American spirit of religious innovation truly began to emerge. Perhaps no one was as influential in bringing Hindu ideas into Americans' awareness as Emerson. It was he who helped pave the way for Americans' openness to Vivekananda's teachings later in the century. Emerson was highly regarded by both American and Indian intellectuals. Shortly after Emerson's death, Mazumdar, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj and a speaker at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, commented that "Emerson had all the wisdom and spirituality of the Brahmins."[3]

Emerson began his career as a minister of the Unitarian church, which had already broken with some of the doctrines of Christianity, including the Calvinistic focus on original sin, the divinity of Christ, and the belief in a predetermined elect. The Unitarian Church, however, still contained elements that Emerson found problematic enough to cause him to leave the ministry and begin a career as an independent writer and lecturer.

Emerson called his philosophy Transcendentalism, which he claimed was really just another word for "Idealist." Teaching that there is more to life than meets the eye, he explained that the Idealist does not deny what the senses present, but that the person sees *more*. The Idealist sees everything and every event as spiritual and the material world as a "world of appearance" or as a "shadow" (i.e., *maya*). Beginning with the view that the world is consciousness, Emerson developed an ethical system based, in large part, on the understanding that people create their own reality.[4]

To appreciate the radical innovation of Emerson's ideas we must understand the conservative nature of American religion in the mid-nineteenth century. Politically, Americans were not afraid to break with tradition, but religiously they had become timid and orthodox. The French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville traveled throughout America in 1832, the same year in which Emerson resigned as pastor of the Unitarian Church, in order to write about democratic ideals in action. Tocqueville observed in his classic *Democracy in America* that Americans display certain habitual behaviors and

attitudes such as accepting tradition *only* when it applies to present inspiration; seeking answers only within oneself; and condemning outer forms that place a veil between themselves and the truth.[5] However, Tocqueville also perceived that because of the separation of church and state, a peculiar thing happened. While laws and political institutions grew and changed, religious institutions remained fixed. Although Christian sects diversified and modified themselves continually, Christianity itself was an established fact. It was neither attacked nor defended; it simply was not a topic open for discussion. Furthermore, it became associated with America (as it still is today). What Emerson did, then, took tremendous courage and creative genius, for by initiating discussion on the philosophical basis for Christianity, he challenged the very foundations of American society. He brought the inquiring spirit of Protestantism to its apex by questioning not only specific doctrines and practices of Christianity but the very foundation of Christianity. For Emerson, the source of knowledge did not come from authoritative figures, doctrines, or scriptures, but from one's own inner intuition, which, he proffered, is known through quiet contemplation.

Emerson found fuel for his thinking that so boldly challenged the status quo, in part, from his exposure to Hindu texts. He voraciously read oriental texts, including Hindu, Arabian, Persian, Buddhist, Confucian, and Zoroastrian literature. Yet of these, he considered Hindu philosophy to contain the essence of Eastern thought. From 1830 until his death in 1882, he steeped himself in Hindu ideas by reading and rereading the *Vedas, Upanishads, Bhavagad-Gita, Laws of Manu,* and other Hindu scriptures.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the influence of Hindu ideas in the United States grew. The Theosophical Society, founded in New York City in 1875, played an important role in popularizing Hindu and Buddhist religious and philosophical ideas. Their views were based on an amalgamation of ideas that combined Asian and Western mystical traditions along with the ideas of the leaders of the movement, particularly those of Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–91). Blavatsky, Russian by birth, traveled around the world for twenty years and claimed to have spent seven of those years studying in Tibet under Hindu sages. In 1873 she went to New York City where she began her association with Colonel Olcott, a lawyer and newspaperman. At that time, Spiritualism, a religion whose members purport to contact the dead, had about eight million members. Spiritualists were naturally attracted to Madame Blavatsky, who claimed to have received written communication from two dead Tibetan *mahatmas* (great souls). She was later accused of being a fraud after the London Society of Psychical Research investigated her claims. Blav-

atsky died in 1891 and Olcott in 1907. British-born Annie Besant then became the new international president of the society. Besant had worked with the clairvoyant theosophist Charles Leadbeater since 1894, and she herself also claimed to have become clairvoyant in 1895. Besant and Leadbeater wrote several books together on various occult topics that they reportedly discovered through their clairvoyance.

In 1909 Leadbeater spied a young boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti, while walking on a beach of the Adyar River in India, and declared that the boy had the most unsullied aura he had ever seen. Leadbeater believed that he had discovered the new "World Teacher" ; he and Besant took custody of the boy and his brother, and raised Jiddu to become a spiritual teacher. Leadbeater and a few of his associates worked closely with Krishnamurti at the theosophical compound in Madras (today Chennai), India, grooming him for his position. Later the society sent Jiddu and his brother to Europe to further their education. An interesting twist to the story occurred when Jiddu Krishnamurti adamantly rebuked his role as a world teacher, saying, "All authority of any kind, especially in the field of thought and understanding, is the most destructive, evil thing. Leaders destroy the followers and followers destroy the leaders. You have to be your own teacher and your own disciple."[6] Ironically, Jiddu Krishnamurti did indeed become a world teacher of sorts, speaking to audiences around the world and publishing many books with ramifications for education, psychology, religious studies, and consciousness studies. The American branch of the Theosophical Society survives today with about five thousand members and an influential publishing business.

Theosophy means "divine wisdom." Drawing on mystics from both the West and the East, Theosophy explores pantheism, monism (the view that all existence is one), transmigration, the merging of the individual soul with the cosmic soul (called Universal Over-Soul in Theosophy, as it was in Transcendentalism), and experiential contact with levels beyond the mundane through meditation, intuition, and revelation. Like Neo-Hinduism, Theosophy turns to the *Upanishads* and the *Bhavagad-Gita* for inspiration. The Theosophical Society stresses the comparative study of religion and the idea of a "universal brotherhood" that accepts anyone without distinctions of race, caste, sex, or creed. Like HIMMs of today, it does not view itself as sectarian but as universal, containing the essence of the highest truth found in any religion. Also like HIMMs, theosophists stress a level of reality called the "Transcendent Principle" that lies beyond the range of thought. It cannot be conceived; it cannot be spoken; but it *can* be experienced. Theosophists also teach the interrelated doctrines of karma (cause and effect), *samsara*

(the wheel of birth and death associated with suffering), and *moksha* (liberation). They believe that reincarnation marked by suffering (samsara) continues to occur because of attachment to good and bad actions (karma) until one attains liberation (moksha) through meditative practices.

The Theosophical Society intertwined with an array of movements during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the "I AM" Activity, Rosicrucianism, the Liberal Catholic Church, Unity, Psychiana, and New Thought. The "I AM" Activity, founded in the early 1930s by Guy and Edna Ballard, teaches that the "I AM Presence" exists as a person's Higher Self, and can be realized by accessing an inner violet light. At one point (1938) the movement had about one million followers and retains a somewhat smaller following today. Rosicrucianism is a secret society of mystics, allegedly formed in medieval Germany. A revival of Rosicrucianism occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has several subsects, including one associated with Christian principles. The Liberal Catholic Church, which is not connected in any way to the Roman Catholic Church, espouses a form of Christianity open to theosophical ideas, including reincarnation. Unity Church, also known as Unity School of Christianity, founded in 1889 by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, professes holistic Christian principles within the New Thought movement and focuses on the power of positive prayer. Psychiana began as a New Thought denomination 1928. Its founder, Frank Bruce Robinson, sent out mail-order lessons that focused on positive thinking, self-help, and mental healing. He taught that his students would be rewarded for their practices with health and prosperity. Robinson viewed himself as a prophet and believed his movement would become a worldwide force for change.

Although the theosophical movement and its leaders were often looked down upon by some of the early Hindu gurus to come to the United States—particularly Vivekananda—it did have an impact on the emergence of HIMMs by inculcating Hindu philosophy into American consciousness. For example, Yogananda interacted with some of these groups and was likely inspired by them to spread his teachings through a mail-order correspondence course. His use of healing affirmations was very much in line with the practices of these groups.

The general worldview and ethos resulting from the combined effect of all of the groups that broadly and nebulously incorporated Hindu and Buddhist thought affected the birth of HIMMs. Sydney Ahlstrom characterized a major force in modern American religion, which he calls "harmonial religion." It is associated with the mystical tradition of the West but (as it revived

in the nineteenth century) adds an emphasis on living in harmony with the natural world. Besides inner peace and communion with God, good health and material abundance are believed to be the natural benefits an individual can enjoy from this form of religion. This is precisely the worldview of followers of HIMMs. Ahlstrom states that "Harmonial religion encompasses those forms of piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person's rapport with the cosmos."[7]

While harmonial religion is evident in the philosophies of all the groups mentioned, it is perhaps most evident in the loosely structured, mind-healing philosophy of New Thought that originated in the United States in the nineteenth century. The groups and individuals professing New Thought were small and diverse; nevertheless, their influence was widespread. New Thought's ideas are evident in many twentieth-century religious movements, including HIMMs, New Age religions, and in the faith-healing aspects of some Christian denominations. It is based on idealism—the belief that ideas are more real than matter. In developing this philosophy, New Thought found inspiration not only in Plato, the quintessential idealist, but also the Swedish scientist and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and the German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). (To note once more the intertwining of Hindu and Western philosophies, Hegel was also influential in the British-established Indian universities. His notion of the "Absolute Spirit" resonated with the Vedantic notion of Brahman.)

Phineas P. Quimby (1802–66), a practitioner of mesmerism—what is today known as hypnotism—founded New Thought by developing a system of mental and physical healing based on the idea that all illnesses reside, ultimately, in the mind. New Thought held several congresses around the turn of the century (1894, 1908, and 1914) to develop and clarify its theology. Its main tenets are the inherent divinity of human beings, the ability of God's power to open one to peace, health, and prosperity, the spiritual nature of the universe, and that all illness is due to incorrect thinking. New Thought ideas were spread through numerous periodicals and books, ranging from Ralph W. Trine's *In Tune with the Infinite* (1897) to Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952). It also spread through various groups such as Unity (Unity School of Christianity). While Unity considered itself to be in line with the teachings of Christianity, it also accepted the Hindu concepts of reincarnation, samsara, maya and moksha, or "Christ-consciousness." Psychiana and the I Am movement also espoused New Thought. Both of these groups, along with New Thought, were influenced by Theosophy, which was

heavily informed by Hinduism and Buddhism. The cross-influences between Indian and Western worldviews are densely interwoven in New Thought and in the groups with which it was associated.

New Thought teaches that divinity can be accessed through personal experience and that this ability is open to all, regardless of class, gender, nationality, or any special religious or moral preparation. Conversions to this way of thinking often took place quite suddenly as the result of some form of healing that occurred after practicing positive thinking. The American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910) studied the personal accounts of practitioners of New Thought in the context of his study of religious experiences in general, which was published as *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). His description of the phenomenon elucidates not only the strength of the movement but also the sources on which it drew:

> To my mind a current far more important and interesting religiously than that which sets in from natural science towards healthy-mindedness is that which has recently poured over America and seems to be gathering force every day. . . There are various sects of this "New Thought," . . . but their agreements are so profound that their differences may be neglected for my present purpose, and I will treat the movement, without apology, as if it were a simple thing.
>
> It is a deliberately optimistic scheme of life, with both a speculative and a practical side. In its gradual development during the last quarter of a century, it had taken up into itself a number of contributory elements, and it must now be reckoned with as a genuine religious power.
>
> One of the doctrinal sources of Mind-cure is the four Gospels; another is Emersonianism or New England transcendentalism; another is Berkeleyan idealism; another is spiritism, with its message of "law" and "progress" and "development"; another the optimistic popular science evolutionism of which I have recently spoken; and, finally, Hinduism has contributed a strain. But the most characteristic feature of the mind-cure movement is an inspiration much more direct. The leaders in this faith have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind. [8]

James then relates the testimonies of several people who became believers because they experienced the results of prayer and positive thinking. The source of the healing is understood to be the "divine Life" or "cosmic intel-

ligence." In order to become aware of this cosmic intelligence, a person must consciously turn his or her attention toward it.

New Thought has affected the development of HIMMs by influencing the general "harmonial religious" worldview that is available to Americans and by providing a platform for those early speakers from India. It was in its heyday at the same time that Americans were introduced to the religions of South and East Asia at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. When Vivekananda returned to the United States the second time, he spent six months in 1899 and 1900 lecturing to both New Thought and Unitarian groups in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas.[9] These two groups were also to host Paramahansa Yogananda a generation later.

Vivekananda and the Vedanta Society

Vivekananda was so nervous when it was his turn to speak at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago that he had to excuse himself until he could calm his nerves. After a few other speakers took their turn, he felt he was ready. He stood and began simply, "Sisters and Brothers of America . . ." but had to pause, this time not because of nerves but because the audience had risen to their feet to applaud. This was Vivekananda's debut in the West, just ten years after Emerson's death. Since Transcendentalism, Theosophy, and New Thought had prepared the minds and hearts of many Americans to hear his message, a mostly American audience of seven thousand received his presentation with warm appreciation. Not everyone was receptive though. Some Christians did not want to hear about a "universal religion" since they were convinced that they already had one, and by definition, there could not be two universal religions. One of Vivekananda's critics was the Reverend Joseph Cook of Boston, who had met Ramakrishna, Vivekananda's guru, and Keshab Chunder Sen, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, in India is 1882. Cook had already publicly criticized the Unitarian and Transcendentalist efforts to broaden Christianity's doctrines, and now he had a new enemy with which to contend.

Cook was unsuccessful in dampening the spirits of those Americans who were eager to hear a new perspective, and after the World Parliament Vivekananda spent many years lecturing to enthusiastic audiences in much the same way that Emerson had done—in fact, reiterating many of the themes about which Emerson had spoken. Like Emerson, he exhorted people to think independently, to look to their own experience as the source of wisdom, and then to act on that wisdom courageously. The missionary road was not always

Vivekananda (1863–1902)

smooth for Vivekananda. Not only did he have to confront the conformity of Americans as did Emerson, but he also had to flout many traditions of his own compatriots. Once, in his frustration at failing to divert his *gurubhais* (fellow disciples) from their devotional and renunciate lives in order to work for the welfare of others, he went so far as to renounce his own guru. On another occasion, when trying to convince a reluctant *gurubhai* to travel to the West, after several ineffective appeals, he began to weep and said, "Dear Haribhai, can't you see I have been laying down my life, inch by inch, in fulfilling this mission of the Master, till I am on the verge of death! Can you merely be looking on and not come to my help by relieving me of a part of my great burden?"[10] Vivekananda's early death at age thirty-nine was probably due to the strain he endured with the burden of constant traveling and lecturing.

Vivekananda could be considered the founder of the first Hindu-inspired meditation movement in America. He proffered the idea of a universal religion and stressed the importance of intuition and inner authority in the same way other teachers and movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had done. But he also taught that the guru-disciple relationship, an essential element of HIMMs, was to be part of this universal religion. Although Madame Blavatsky had spoken of her Tibetan gurus, for Americans to have a living guru in their midst was new.

Vivekananda's own mystical awakening occurred when his guru, Ramakrishna, touched him:

> I was aghast to realize that there really was nothing whatever in the entire universe but God. . . [F]rom then on, I kept having the same experience, no matter what I was doing—eating, drinking, sitting, lying down, going to college, strolling down the street. It was a kind of intoxication; I can't describe it.
>
> When that first intoxication lost part of its power, I began to see the world as though it were a dream. . . When I did at last return to normal consciousness, I felt convinced that the state I had been in was a revelation of non-dualistic experience. [11]

Later Vivekananda's task was to interpret this experience in a Western context. His Western education taught him the value of progress, a value that had not been shared by his own guru. Placing his personal experience together with this faith in humanitarian progress, he sought to spread the message that the "non-dual" experience could provide the basis for social

progress. When he came to the United States, he deliberately framed his message in language that was palatable to his new audience. He de-emphasized the mythology and deities of Hinduism and employed Western forums for teaching. But he never compromised his Vedantic vision that the nondual experience of unity consciousness is the basis of a healthy society. This view, he adamantly insisted, is directly opposed to the destructive Christian belief that human beings are sinners.

Vivekananda struggled with how to speak about his guru to an American audience. Ramakrishna was a simple, uneducated man who had undergone sadhana (spiritual discipline) with a female Tantric guru, Bhairavi. Although Ramakrishna probably did not engage in the sexual aspect of Tantra, he did engage in other transgressive acts, including eating fish that had been cooked in a human skull and tasting rotting human flesh.[12] It was through his study with Bhairavi that Ramakrishna had the transformative realization that the powerful Goddess, whom he worshipped in the form of Kali, exists in all things, whether pure or impure. Later he engaged in questionable initiation tactics. In a state of ecstasy, he would often place his feet "in the lap" (i.e., on the penis) of young boys.[13] Ramakrishna lived at a time when the British colonial power and its "Orientalists" were expressing abhorrence toward Tantra in all of its aspects. They imagined the ancient Vedic Age as a utopian Golden Age in contrast to the Tantric-tainted medieval age of debauched degeneration. Vivekananda, having been educated in British schools and thus exposed to these ideas, was among the many Bengalis who attempted to "clean up" Hinduism's history. In doing so, he had to reinvent his own guru. When he spoke of Ramakrishna, which was rarely, it was of an Advaita Vedantist who was well-versed in Shankara's nondualism, an orthodox philosophical system that tends to eschew the material world as an illusion while asserting the transcendent Brahman as the one true reality. Hugh Urban, a scholar of comparative religion, sums up the project of Vivekananda and other Bengali intellectuals:

> Tantra was for Vivekananda—and for many reformers of the early twentieth century—a crucial element in the reimagining of both the Hindu religion and the Indian Nation. It was a shameful reminder of all that was most embarrassing about Indian's past and that stood in the way of her strength, autonomy, and independence. As we can see in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, the *avatar* for a new age of Hindu renaissance, the *tantra* would remain a dark secret at the very heart of the tradition.[14]

Both Indians and Westerners have criticized Vivekananda, claiming his synthesis watered down Hinduism and Vedantic philosophy to the point that they were no longer recognizable. An obituary on Vivekananda in *The Statesman and Friend of India* stated, ". . . in India his departure from the ceremonial law of Hinduism detracted very greatly from his influence."[15] Later on, the French intellectual René Guenon (1886–1951) wrote, "This so-called Vedanta . . . which pleased the West all the better the more completely it is distorted, has practically nothing left in common with the metaphysical doctrine the name of which it bears."[16]

Yet it seems that Vivekananda's intention, like that of Ram Mohun Roy and even of Emerson, was to create something entirely new that was easily accessible and that united aspects of Hinduism and Western values. Perhaps his major task was to convince Indians of the value of work and to convince Americans of the value of nondualism. Vivekananda emphasized the idea of "practical Vedanta" for Westerners and in doing so, he attempted to disassociate his message from institutional religion and thus universalize it. He based his teaching on the quintessential statement from the *Upanishads*, "Thou art that," meaning that the individual soul is no different from the universal soul. Vivekananda told his audience that truth can be realized easily and does not require one to become a renunciate, nor does it require one to take up a particular religious belief system. "Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in *anything else*," was his message. Belief in self, he taught, would lead very "practically" to success in intellectual, spiritual, or commercial ventures.

Vivekananda's message was well received by his admirers in the United States—at first, more completely than in India because, perhaps, Americans were familiar with philosophical Hindu texts such as the *Upanishads,* and not with the bhakti (devotional) Hinduism that was prevalent in India. It could also be that his message found resonance with the Protestant work ethic. Service to others did eventually become a very important part of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math (monastery) that Vivekananda established for monks in India. In an ironic twist, social work has never played an important part in the Vedanta Society in the States. While India's Ramakrishna Mission has emphasized Christian-style good works, America's Vedanta Society has emphasized Hindu philosophy.

Vivekananda assumed several things about the nature of religion that were later to be taken up by HIMMs. He proposed that religion is an inner experience, or at least, this is the part of religion that can unite different approaches. He assumed that the goal of religion is the same for all people, and that goal is union with the transcendent. He also proffered that the way to that goal is

the path of yoga. These same assumptions form the basic understanding of HIMMs in America today. Followers of HIMMs do not think that belief in a God who is separate from human beings is wrong or bad; it is simply not the highest vision of nondual unity. On the other hand, they believe everyone will eventually attain that highest vision. The belief in reincarnation supports this view. If a person needs to worship a personal god in this lifetime, perhaps in the next lifetime, that person will begin to meditate and find union with the impersonal absolute. This view gives meditators an accepting attitude toward other religions.

Although Vivekananda died in 1902, his legacy lives on in America in the form of the Vedanta Society. After Vivekananda's death, other disciples of Ramakrishna were sent to the United States to open independent centers and to expand the work that Vivekananda had begun with the two Vedanta Societies he had established in New York City and San Francisco. In 1906 Vivekananda's newly established Vedanta Society built the first Hindu temple in America. The Vedanta Society of Southern California established the Vedanta Press, which was to play a large role in disseminating Hindu ideas in America. The society has maintained a steady presence in the United States from its founding in 1894 to the present day. Currently there are nineteen centers in the United States.

The Vedanta Society modeled itself on Western institutions and practices such as the Sunday worship service, public lectures and classes, paid membership, and the distribution of newsletters and magazines. Wendell Thomas's dissertation, *Hinduism Invades America* published in 1930, offers detailed information about the Vedanta Society in the early years of the twentieth century. Thomas described the demographics and "character" of Vedanta adherents based on personal acquaintances and questionnaire letters:

> Their ages run from 35 to 70, with an average of 48. Two-fifths are unmarried, and more than three-fourths of the group are women. . . Of those who came from religious homes, about two-thirds strayed away from the church of their parents into other cults even before they had heard of Vedanta, and of these, many changed their connection several times. For example, one Unitarian became an Episcopalian, then dropped out of the Church altogether, then took up in turn New Thought, Christian Science and Theosophy before coming to rest in Vedanta. If we add to this number those who had no church to begin with, we find that almost all of the group were religious wanderers, restless souls who passed through many "borderland" cults till they found Vedanta.[17]

Thomas described a Sunday service he attended in New York City, which took the outer appearance of a Christian worship service. The message of the "sermon" was, naturally, very different from that of a Christian service. About twenty-five people, most of them women, attended the service. The room was tastefully decorated and dimly lit. Pictures of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna adorned the walls. A small altar to Ramakrishna held flowers, candles, and incense. There were bookcases containing thousands of books, most of them by "Western Idealists." Swami Jñaneshvarananda, one of the monks in residence, dressed in a golden robe, led the group in a short meditation. Then he chanted briefly in Sanskrit, afterward giving the translation in English: "May that One who is called Shiva by the Shaivites, Vishnu by the Vaishnavites, Brahman by the Vedantins, Allah by the Muslims and God the Heavenly Father by the Christians, inspire our hearts with love for all mankind. Peace! Peace! Peace!" He then spoke about Vedanta, describing three propositions: that Reality is universal Love, the underlying unity manifested in variety; that the world is an illusion; and that the "I" is identical with the ultimate reality. He also discussed three levels of practice depending on one's attainment and beliefs. Finally, a collection plate was passed and announcements given.[18]

The second foundational HIMM of the early twentieth century was the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), which flourished in the early twentieth century. Yogananda stated in his autobiography, "During the decade of 1920–1930 my yoga classes were attended by tens of thousands of Americans."[19] The fervor for gurus and Eastern philosophies of the 1920s and '30s died down by the middle of the twentieth century, and by the 1950s hard work and steadfastness were viewed as the keys to creating material success, a stable family, and a stable society. The Beats, a small movement clustered primarily in bohemian artist communities in San Francisco and New York City, advocated withdrawal and protest against conventional society, but this was an exception to the general milieu of conservatism in American society in the fifties.

The 1960s and the Search for Self-Fulfillment

The 1960s saw a much larger protest against conventional mores with the hippie movement. Now a portion of the younger generation began to change its focus from achieving worldly success to achieving self-fulfillment. The desire for material success and stability were replaced with desires for more intangible rewards such as self-expression and peace of mind. This shift involved a change in the way many people viewed themselves. A primarily social view of

the self changed into a psychological view and then into a primarily spiritual view. Surveys comparing responses to questions posed to young people in 1957 and 1976 found that there was "a sharp decline in social connections and a shift in the 'locus of control'—that is, a sense of self more of their own making than created by a conformist culture. An older culture of self-denial that had long guided Americans was giving way to a psychological culture concerned with feelings, with self-expressiveness, with personal adaptation, and therapeutic solutions."[20]

Wade Clark Roof, a scholar of contemporary American religion, analyzed the changes in attitudes that occurred during this period based on a large-scale survey of baby boomers. He classified two basic types of religiosity among people who came of age during the 1960s. One is an orthodox mind-set, and the other embraces the free-style and eclectic mood of those years. Yet both groups have surprising commonalities, such as valuing experience over beliefs, desiring personal fulfillment, cherishing community, distrusting institutions, and being fluid in allegiances.[21]

The reason for the change in values toward the direction of self-fulfill-ment can be attributed in part to the sociological circumstance surrounding the baby boom generation (those born between ca. 1946 and 1964). Raised during a time of economic prosperity and with their material needs met, this generation was able to turn their attention to other matters. Many were brought up in a way that made them feel as if they were at the center of the universe; child rearing became more permissive, and due to the sheer num-bers of children, society became more child-centered. Thus, the baby boom-ers identified with peer groups more than with an extended family of diverse ages. These peer groups defined themselves through shared music, values, and lifestyles. They began to turn away from time-honored institutions in order to search for new identities that would give them feelings of self-fulfill-ment. For some, drugs and music combined to serve as a new form of group identification.[22]

While this change in values began with the younger generation, it quickly spread to encompass the majority of Americans. The sociologist Daniel Yan-kelovich wrote in 1981, "all national surveys showed more than seven out of ten Americans (72 percent) spending a great deal of time thinking about themselves and their inner lives—this in a nation notorious for its impa-tience with inwardness. The rage for self-fulfillment, our surveys indicated, had now spread to virtually the entire U.S. population."[23] Robert Bellah et. al. reported similar findings in *Habits of the Heart*. This book, based on in-depth interviews, attempts to characterize attributes that are essentially American.

The authors found that radical individualism is rampant in modern American society causing "temptations and pressures to disengage from the larger society."[24]

And too, in the 1960s the trend toward unification of nations, ideas, and lifestyles evident in the 1940s and '50s began to reverse itself. Local ethnic groups asserted their own traditions; the civil rights movement, women's liberation, and gay and lesbian rights movements took hold, and the right of the United States to assert its authority in foreign lands was questioned. While the early twentieth century reveled in dualism epitomized by the communist/democracy bifurcation, in the 1960s many Americans began to embrace pluralism. The enemy was no longer clearly defined, and people questioned long-held values and beliefs. This questioning was accompanied by a decline in institutionalism. Jews and Christians alike abandoned their churches and synagogues in record numbers, so by the 1980s lack of affiliation with an organized religion was commonplace. A survey conducted in 1988 reported that 88 percent of Americans felt that it was not necessary to attend a church or synagogue in order to be a good Christian or Jew, and 76 percent felt that it was better if a person were independent of any religious institution.[25]

During this period education, too, began to change from its traditional role of dispensing Western culture to teaching students multiple worldviews. Many students became more interested in the humanities than in the hard sciences. *Time* magazine reported in 1967 that "Last year nearly a third of engineering openings in the U.S. went unfilled."[26] Radical shifts continue to occur today as education attempts to make a place for pluralistic viewpoints. For the past twenty years new courses and majors have been offered in gender studies and ethnic and minority studies. Martha Nussbaum wrote a nuanced account and defense of these changes in her *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), in which she offers specific examples of how all types of schools, public and private, rural and urban, are expanding their curricula to include the culture and achievements of non-Westerners as well as minorities within the United States. As a result of these changes, many students find claims of exclusivity in religion unacceptable.

A pluralistic worldview was accelerated by the arrival of gurus and masters from different Eastern traditions. After the repeal of the Asian Immigration Exclusion Act in 1965, immigration from Asian countries suddenly and drastically increased. At the same time, advances in the technologies of travel and communication added to the global sharing of religious beliefs and practices. Americans such as Richard Alpert (Ram Dass), Thomas Merton, and Alan Watts traveled to various Asian countries and shared their new understand-

ings about Hinduism and Buddhism with a wide public. Today, no longer do people automatically accept the tradition of their parents. Instead, Americans taste bits and pieces from the global offering of spirituality until they settle on one that "feels right." Some transfer their allegiance from one group to another; others choose not to align themselves with any particular group at all but instead develop their own personal home-style form of spirituality. Yet others choose a very specific path of religious expression, either of a traditional or new variety, and commit themselves wholeheartedly to it. Almost all disavow that they are traditional in their approach. Americans typically break away from the religion in which they are raised, even if to rejoin it voluntarily at a later time with renewed enthusiasm. Whether people choose an evangelical church, a traditional church or synagogue, or one of the various New Religious Movements, everyone seems to be searching for a religion that first and foremost is able to affect personal transformation.

The religious spirit of these unsettled years was epitomized in a journalist's description of a Rosh Hashanah celebration in the early 1970s. The event was led by Rabbi Zalman Schachter, better known as "Reb Zalman," founder of the Jewish Renewal movement that draws inspiration from various traditional and nontraditional sources. The journalist reports:

> His two-day Rosh Hashanah retreat has the emotional intensity of an encounter group marathon, and Schachter uses Gestalt techniques to shift figure and ground in our sense of what is real. But there are also moments of Eastern-style cross-legged meditation, a somber walk to the beat of a Zen drum down to a lake for Tashlikh, the casting out of sins, and even Jewish chanting and circle dancing around two men who do Sufi spinning.
>
> An equally wide range of non-Jewish spiritual influences is represented in the group around Schachter, though most are Jewish by birth. One man, a dentist in the orange shirt and trousers of a Swami, is on his way to Muktananda's ashram in India; a schoolteacher has done Transcendental Meditation; several people wear Hindu meditation beads; two men have come from a Gurdjieff community in West Virginia. Whatever their spiritual practices during most of the year, however, they come together as Jews for the High Holy Days, gathering around Schachter because he is one of the few rabbis who is pleased to make use of so many varied energies and influences.[27]

The 1960s saw many advocates for the wisdom of the East. As in the previous Beat movement, the philosophy was often connected to freedom from

the constraints of society and a focus on "the here and now." Supporters of "Eastern spirituality" promoted the mystical state of transcendence as a universal experience that anyone could achieve. People began to forego the rituals and dogma of a particular religion and aim directly for the state of transcendence promised by the religion. One of the great advocates for experiencing the freedom that this new paradigm could bring was Alan Watts (1915–73). Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero, both scholars of American religion, referred to him as "perhaps the most influential popularizer of Asian religions of his generation."[28] Watts refers to his own hybrid form of spirituality as "between Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism, with a certain leaning towards Vedanta and Catholicism, or rather the Orthodox Church of Eastern Europe."[29] He wrote twenty-six books and gave thousands of lectures on the topic of "Eastern spirituality." For some he served as a role model for having left his position as an Anglican priest in order to explore and teach Eastern mysticism and religion.

Watts and other writers such as Herman Hesse (1877–1962) created a literary lure for the mystical East. What is often done in this type of East/West dichotomizing is to juxtapose the mystical and transcendent aspects of Eastern religious traditions to the outer rituals and dogmas of Abrahamic religions. In fact, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism are often viewed in the American popular imagination as if they exist outside of cultural and sociological realities. This is in part due to those Asian teachers who came to the West and presented only the mystical practices of their traditions, calling them empirical or scientific. The result of disassociating the practice of meditation from its cultural and religious environs is that the different religious traditions that arrived in America in the twentieth century have become homogenized in the minds of many Westerners.

The Theosophical Society, still active in the late twentieth century, had always mixed Hinduism and Buddhism so that both became rather nebulous terms. The very different meditation traditions that exist in Japan, Tibet, India, and Southeast Asia were often lumped together as "wisdom of the East." This may be how the term "enlightenment," widely used by followers of HIMMs even though it is a Buddhist term, came into use. It may also be why some American Buddhists speak of getting in touch with their soul, when a basic tenet of Buddhism is that there is no soul. The Healthy, Happy, Holy movement, an adaptation of the Sikh tradition, and the practice of Tai Chi were also added to the mix of Eastern wisdom. The different philosophical systems began to be reduced to the simplest common denominators. This eclectic offering, combined with messages from deceased spirits sent

through channelers, was dubbed the New Age in the 1980s. The freedom to choose in the latter half of the twentieth century, therefore, was not always associated with choosing a singular religion but with choosing to be "spiritual," a concept often associated with, but not limited to, Eastern religious traditions.

The youth of America were particularly affected by the changes of the 1960s, and many began to reject their own traditions in all their manifestations, including religious expressions. As in early America, they sought personal and ecstatic experiences, caring little for doctrine or rituals. While for their parents, religion often centered on social commitment; for the youth, religion centered on spiritual quest and transformation. The clamoring for experience in the 1960s and the sudden appearance of psychedelic drugs combined to make it an era of experimentation. Drugs—particularly those psychedelic drugs such as mescaline and LSD—gave young people a taste of mystical experience and a craving for more of the same. So common was drug use that Maharishi made one of the few prerequisites for learning TM the abstinence from drugs for at least two weeks prior to initiation. The sociologist Benjamin Zablocki reported that 96.4 percent of people living in "Eastern ideological communities" had previously used drugs of some kind.[30]

Would the Hindu-inspired meditation movements have had the draw that they did in the 1970s if there had been no drug experimentation in the 1960s? It is impossible to answer this question, but many meditators point to drug use as the door that opened their minds to new possibilities of expanded awareness. The psychiatrist Stanislov Grof conducted long-term studies on the effects of LSD in Czechoslovakia and the United States through 2,500 sessions of LSD trips. His conclusions also draw on another 800 cases conducted by colleagues in Prague and Baltimore. The findings led him to conclude that experiences typically occur in ever unfolding stages of insight. Grof found that in the third and highest stage, people had profound mystical and religious experiences:

> Everyone who experientially reached these levels developed convincing insights into the utmost relevance of spiritual and religious dimensions in the universal scheme of things. Even the most hard-core materialists, positivisitically oriented scientists, skeptics and cynics, uncompromising atheist and antireligious crusaders such as the Marxist philosophers, became suddenly interested in spiritual search after they confronted these levels in themselves.[31]

Grof's conclusions indicate that drug experimentation did lead to interest in mystical experience. When Richard Alpert, who had been dismissed from his position at Harvard University for his drug experimentation, returned from India with the new name of Ram Dass and the message that meditation—not drugs—offered a path to higher states of consciousness, many of the younger generation were ready to listen. They had tried enough drugs to know that the effects of mystical experiences did not last, but the negative side effects did. Ram Dass's message was heeded.

The Human Potential Movement

The genre of "spiritual experience," found in books such as Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* and Carlos Casteñeda's *The Teachings of Don Juan,* was a seventies sensation, but so was a new genre of "self-help" books, which continue to be popular. *I'm Okay, You're Okay* hit the *New York Times* best-seller list in 1972 and remained there for two years, selling an estimated fifteen million copies. Wayne Dyer's *Your Erroneous Zones* sold an estimated thirty-five million copies. Interest in self-help and in meditation grew simultaneously, each influencing the other. One interviewee described how his divorce led him to pursue self-help books, and how this eventually took him to the practice of Transcendental Meditation:

> One book that caught me at this time was *How to Be Your Own Best Friend*. It's a short book about how important it is to be good to yourself before you can be good to anybody else. This book helped me with guilt. Everything will fall into place if you're good to yourself. When I got into TM, Maharishi says the same thing. He says, "All love is directed to the self. You just have to become cosmically selfish." Then I got into psychology and went to night school. I read *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. Then I read Abraham Maslow, and he talked about meditation. After that I saw an ad with Maharishi's picture, and I said, "I'll do this because it's popular, then I'll get into better ones later." But here I am, still doing TM.

The intrigue with self-help did not suddenly appear in the seventies; its history began in the early part of the twentieth century with New Thought and its affiliated movements and continued to grow in the forties and fifties with the development of "encounter groups." The herald of the trend to discover one's own potential was Aldous Huxley (1894–1963). Just as Ram Dass inspired hippies to replace drugs with meditation, so Huxley inspired

them to explore human potentiality. In 1945 he wrote *The Perennial Philosophy*, which discussed the teachings of renowned mystics of the world. Then in 1954 he wrote *The Doors of Perception*, which did much to foster openness to drug experimentation. When Huxley moved to the United States in the sixties, he began to lecture in colleges and universities throughout California about his vision of using the full range of human potential— emotional, creative, and rational. In this way he helped to prepare Americans for humanistic psychology, which was gaining increasing momentum.

At the same time Huxley spoke in general terms about human potential, specific techniques for increasing people's ability to interact effectively gained popularity. Newly formed "encounter groups" employed "sensitivity training," which involved intensive group discussion over a prolonged and often continual time period. Participants were expected to be open and honest about their feelings and avoid theorizing. Encounter groups, widespread by the 1960s, were used in schools, church boards, and corporations.

Shortly after World War II a group of psychologists began to study healthy rather than neurotic individuals, leading to the development of humanistic psychology, which also contributed to the increasing focus on self-fulfillment. In the 1960s humanistic psychology combined the prevailing interest in personal transformation with the practice of becoming centered in the present moment. Its main center of propagation was the Esalen Institute, founded in 1962 at the Hot Springs on the coast at Big Sur, California. Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, and Wilhelm Reich stand out as seminal figures in this movement as each developed unique therapies for opening people's awareness to their full potential. Maslow, for example, made a special study of a concept he called the "peak experience." These are moments in which a person's full potential is felt as a state of ecstasy or bliss. Wilhelm Reich developed a technique called "bio-energetics" for increasing the flow of vitality, called "orgone energy."

Another school, transpersonal psychology, which had been slowly developing throughout the twentieth century, blossomed in the sixties. Besides exploring subconscious attitudes and motivations, transpersonal psychology adds the element of higher states of consciousness. Higher consciousness is conceived as an awareness that transcends and witnesses the mind, body, and emotions and was a natural outgrowth of Maslow's work on "peak experiences" and "self-actualization." Assagioli's techniques of "psychosynthesis" also provided a natural transition into this new emphasis. He taught clients to repeat silently in a relaxed state: "I *have* a body, but I *am not* my body. I have an emotional life, but I am not my emotions or my feelings. I have an

intellect, but I am not my intellect. I am I, a center of pure consciousness . . . of awareness, will and power."[32]

The goal of transpersonal psychology is not only to experience "wholeness" through integration of body and emotions, but to experience transcendence of the wholeness as well. All of the strands of the human potential movement have borrowed ideas and techniques from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, but transpersonal psychology subsumed the most. It incorporates into its philosophy karma and reincarnation, as well as the idea that God is the ground of one's own being.

Many followers of HIMMs frequent human potential retreats and therapy centers, and many are themselves therapists. The twenty-seven people I interviewed were chosen randomly, the only qualification being that they had practiced meditation for a number of years under the guidance of a guru of one of the three HIMMs of this study. Among the twenty-seven, nine either are or had been therapists and/or psychologists who employed therapies connected with human potential. All felt that they were guided in their work by intuition gained not only through psychological therapies but also through the practice of meditation and sometimes through inner guidance received from their gurus.

Correlations can be found between the goals and the means of HIMMs and human potential groups. The goal of life according to most human potential groups is "self-actualization," which is similar to the goal of "self-realization" of HIMMs. In both groups the goal is not to gain something one does not already possess, but simply to open one's awareness to the full potential of what one already has. While there are similarities between the human potential movement and HIMMs, there are also differences. The low commitment required for involvement in the different therapies of the human potential movement could be contrasted with the long-term commitment expected by HIMMs. In fact, involvement in HIMMs is assumed to be a lifetime commitment, although it often does not turn out to be that way. Involvement in HIMMs also assumes the obligation of a daily practice of meditation, often accompanied by other disciplines as well. The human potential movement, on the other hand, does not require a daily practice or allegiance to any one group. As Donald Stone pointed out, "Groups that exert strong pressure for organizational loyalty or orthodoxy of belief and ritual can be considered on the fringes of the movement."[33] However, because many of the human potential groups and practices are considered physical or psychological therapies, they are not perceived as conflicting with following a particular guru. For this reason, many followers of HIMMs are involved in various human poten-

tial activities. Even though many HIMMs discourage involvement with these therapies, practitioners employ them, even if covertly.

Differences in the philosophies of the two movements are apparent as well. The guru-disciple relationship underlies the philosophy of HIMMs. Thus, while trusting one's intuition is important in both movements, a follower of a HIMM is not free to follow the dictates of his or her own intuition completely. To a large extent, life is lived according to the standards outlined by the guru of the HIMM. The philosophical source of humanistic psychology, on the other hand, lies partly in existentialism in which the meaning of "Being" is found through the particular choices that each individual makes in complete freedom. Adherents of the human potential movement believe that reality is personally constructed by each individual, and, further, the individual has complete freedom to construct it in the way that will bring out the most hidden potential. Followers of HIMMs, on the other hand, believe that the growth of consciousness will proceed along an established route that their guru has experienced and made clear.

A New Age

New Thought and Theosophy continued into the twentieth century, but in altered forms. New Thought survives as a denominational family of churches that include Divine Science, Unity School of Christianity, Homes of Truth, Church of Truth, and Religious Science.[34] Theosophy splintered into many separate theosophical organizations but still survives. Both of these movements, along with Spiritualism and Eastern religious traditions, had an effect on what was to become known as the New Age. Like New Thought, New Age is difficult to define. Its practices include believing in personal and global transformation, using crystals for physical and psychological healing, receiving guidance from supra-mundane sources through "channelers" (mediums), and eclectically combining different mystical traditions. Some overlap exists between the New Age movement and HIMMs as many of the same attitudes and events were instrumental in the rise of both of these movements. Followers of HIMMs, like followers of New Age, value personal transformation. Followers of both use spiritual disciplines and therapies in order to develop body and mind. Adherents of both may adorn their homes and bodies with crystals and healing stones, or they may have their horoscopes read by an astrologer. Practitioners of both believe that the human race has entered a "golden age" in which spirituality plays a prominent role (even though for many followers of HIMMs, it is perceived as a golden age within the *kali yuga,* a dark age). Yet

there are also distinct differences between them. On the one hand, New Age is eclectic in its approach, seeking spiritual guidance wherever it is available. It may be channeled from a deceased person through a medium or it may come from alien beings. Spiritual guidance for followers of HIMMs, on the other hand, comes only from the particular guru or guru lineage of the HIMM.

Many interviewees had read books on topics of spirituality and the occult before becoming involved with a HIMM. Once they made a commitment to a guru, however, they focused their reading on the words of the guru or books recommended by the guru. Followers of SRF, for example, read the SRF correspondence course as well as books by Paramahansa Yogananda and his ordained monks and nuns. One interviewee reported that she had heard an SRF monk say, "You can read other materials and 80 percent of it may be right. But why would you want to do that when you can read material that you know is 100 percent correct?" Many practitioners of Transcendental Meditation listened to Maharishi speak from his home in Holland every Wednesday via satellite TV. Those on the Siddha Yoga path read and reread books by Muktananda and Gurumayi. All of the HIMMs have audio and videotapes of the gurus, which provide another source for imbibing the gurus' teachings. The gurus or other leaders within the HIMMs frequently warn devotees that listening to other teachers or channelers will cause confusion.

Followers of HIMM feel they should not become sidetracked by the New Age spiritual smorgasbord, yet it is this very milieu that enabled HIMMs to get their start in the United States. As Paramahansa Yogananda traveled to different cities, he often spoke to audiences in churches established by various offshoots of the New Thought movement. Maharishi spoke wherever he found an open audience as, for example, at the Jen Sen Tao Buddhist Association.[35] When Muktananda first arrived in the United States, he spoke at lectures set up by Ram Dass. The second time he traveled to America he spoke to students of Werner Erhard, founder of the human potential seminar training known as *est* (Erhard Seminars Training).[36] If it had not been for the existing networks already established through offshoots of New Thought, Buddhist groups, or the human potential movement, it would have been much more difficult for the gurus to find a venue. In the early stages of the development of HIMMs, there was an interweaving of the various groups, but once the gurus had a following of their own, they established an exclusive atmosphere, requiring that different approaches to the spiritual path not be mixed. Interestingly, none of them denied their followers involvement in established religions because these very institutions were viewed as cultural traditions that did not conflict with an experiential approach to the truth.

The Hindu gurus played their own part in the New Age vision, believing that their work in the West—and particularly in the United States—would help to bring it about. In fact, Vivekananda viewed America as a sort of Promised Land for the founding of his Neo-Vedantism. In a lecture delivered in San Francisco on April 8, 1900, he spoke of the possibilities of a "true religion" that eschewed myths and superstitions. He envisioned everyone in the United States being swept away by Vedanta, the true religion. Paramahansa Yogananda envisioned a new age in which there would be no division between East and West. In his autobiography he wrote, "The great masters of India . . . know that, until there is better assimilation in all nations of the distinctive Eastern and Western virtues, world affairs cannot improve. Each hemisphere needs the best offering of the other."[37] Maharishi Mahesh Yogi sought to establish an "Age of Enlightenment," and announced its dawn in 1975. Muktananda also intended to create a new world order through spreading the practice of meditation. When he embarked on his second world tour in 1974, he told a crowd at Mumbai's Santa Cruz airport that he was about to initiate a "meditation revolution." These pronouncements indicate that the gurus of HIMMs truly believe in a New Age, which they will help to bring about. In this New Age, meditation will be commonplace. It will not be seen as a religious system, but as a universally verifiable way of experiencing the oneness of reality.

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II

Three Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements

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3

Self-Realization Fellowship

The first passenger boat sailing from India to America after the end of World War I carried a man who, like Vivekananda, was to stir the imaginations of thousands as he delivered public lectures throughout the United States. The year was 1920, and the person aboard the ship was Paramahansa Yogananda. He came to America with a mission given to him by his guru, Sri Yukteswar, to teach yoga and the harmony between Krishna and Christ.

Both Vivekananda and Yogananda came from Bengal, the area of India in which Neo-Hinduism developed, and the vision of these two gurus was similar. Each felt the time in history was favorable for opening the path of Hindu meditation to all people, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or previous religious preparation. Vivekananda and Yogananda tried to show the underlying unity of all religions, and each had a vision of the United States as fertile soil for the growth of this idea. Neither arrived in America with an established plan for how they would implement their ideas. In fact, they arrived without the money to sustain them for any length of time. They relied on the people they met, by chance or destiny, to help them accomplish each step in fulfilling their missions.

Vivekananda and Yogananda were successful in transplanting their own versions of Hinduism to America, each using his own unique style. While Vivekananda preached the good news of an impersonal God based on Vedanta, Yogananda stressed heartfelt devotion to a personal God. Vivekananda was intellectual; Yogananda was devotional to the core. Vivekananda was at times moody and acerbic; Yogananda, although strict with his disciples, had a buoyant personality that audiences adored.

Before leaving India, Yogananda, while looking across the Ganges River to Dakshineshwar, the Sri Ramakrishna Mission and Math that Vivekananda had founded years earlier, told a friend, "I will make mine bigger than theirs." He was referring to an ashram he planned to build. It seemed to his friend that Yogananda was competing with Vivekananda.[1] But it might have been that Yogananda felt inspired by Vivekananda's success and wanted to expand

on his work. Yogananda's boyhood friend, Satyananda, reported that the two of them sometimes stayed up all night talking of Swami Vivekananda's work, and Yogananda clearly paid homage to the powerful path Vivekananda had begun to lay out for others.[2]

It would be difficult to say whether Vivekananda or Yogananda had a greater impact on America. But it is clear that Yogananda's influence on contemporary followers of HIMMs is enormous. Almost all interviewees had read Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, though most were unfamiliar with Vivekananda.[3] This personal autobiography, first published in 1946 and now in its twelfth edition, is a religious literature classic. For many participants in HIMMs, reading this book gave them the inspiration to search for a guru, whether Yogananda or someone else.

By 1920 when Yogananda arrived in Boston, Vivekananda's Vedanta Society was in its twenty-sixth year, and the Theosophical Society was in its forty-fifth year. New Thought had been a vibrant force in America for more than forty years. All of these movements helped to pave the way for American religious liberals to hear Yogananda's message. Before leaving India, his father asked him when he would return. Yogananda replied, "In four months, unless America needs me." Apparently, America needed him. He spoke to capacity audiences for many years. In 1925 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles had turned away thousands who were waiting to get in after the three thousand seats were filled. The paper described Yogananda as "a Hindu invading the United States to bring God in the midst of a Christian community, preaching the essence of Christian doctrine."[4] With the exception of several months spent in Mexico and two years in India (1935–36), Yogananda remained in the United States until his death in 1952.

Kriya Yoga

It was a warm Sunday morning in Madison, Wisconsin. I watched as a dozen men and women performed physical exercises together in silence in the parking lot of an office complex. After the exercises were completed, we entered an office of one of the devotees, which temporarily served as a holy temple for their meditation practice. A table had been draped with a white cloth, on top of which pictures of the gurus I had come to recognize as Yogananda's *guru-parampara,* the lineage of teachers who went before him, were displayed. We sat together on folding chairs in silence, they performing the techniques of Kriya Yoga (the name for the meditative techniques Yogananda taught), and

I, the techniques I had learned from my path. The silence felt good—deep and nourishing after a long week. Forty-five minutes later, it was broken by a woman's voice reading from a book that Yogananda had written. Then she began to play a harmonium, an Indian instrument that has a keyboard like a piano. While the fingers of the right hand played a melody, the left hand pumped a bellows, creating a sound halfway between an accordion and an organ. This instrument, often associated today with Indian music and chanting, was introduced to India by Christian missionaries—another reminder of the interweaving of cultures that marks the modern era. The woman sang a few lines to a simple melody: "Open Thy cover; let me discover. . . ." The others in the room repeated the same words in response. Then she sang, "My beloved Lord in my heart of hearts." This was also repeated, and the call and response continued for about ten minutes, after which we again sat in stillness. This alternation of meditation with reading and singing continued for three hours.

The people in this group gather together every Sunday morning and have since the early seventies. Most of them are not from the original group, but the Sunday three-hour practice has continued unbroken for more than thirty years. They also meet on Thursday evenings. Outside of these gatherings, they each meditate on their own twice daily. Many keep a book by Yogananda on their bedside tables. They might read his poems, *Whispers from Eternity,* or perhaps a few verses from *God Talks with Arjuna,* Yogananda's translation and commentary of the *Bhavagad-Gita.*

These disciples of Yogananda show tremendous dedication to their daily practices. This may be, in part, because they came to Kriya Yoga in stages, and were not given initiation until they had already shown willingness to maintain a daily meditation routine. To receive initiation into Kriya Yoga, one must receive Yogananda's correspondence course, referred to as the Lessons, for twelve months, and have begun a regular practice of the preliminary techniques taught in the Lessons. Another prerequisite entails making a pledge to God and the six gurus of the Self-Realization Fellowship lineage of "unconditional love, reverence, and loyalty forever." Conversely, no prior allegiance or preparation is required to receive initiation in TM or Siddha Yoga; one simply pays a fee and shows up, and dedication to the guru usually comes *after* receiving initiation. Yogananda once told a disciple seeking initiation that this unconditional commitment is necessary because "in the beginning of the spiritual path one's will is guided by whims and fancies.. . . It was only when I attuned my will to [my guru's] wisdom-guided will that I attained freedom. In the same way, if you will attune your will to mine, you, too, will find freedom."[5]

Kriyabans, as Kriya Yoga practitioners are called, revealed that they took this oath seriously. One person told me that one night she had fallen asleep while reading in bed. Waking up in the middle of the night, she realized she had not performed her evening meditation and promptly got out of bed and meditated. She had made a pledge to Yogananda that she would meditate twice a day for the rest of her life, and nothing could keep her from this.

As with all HIMMs, the guru-disciple relationship is the cornerstone of the SRF path. While Yogananda often spoke of the "scientific" aspects of Kriya Yoga, the path is primarily one of devotion and of surrender to the guru. The kriyaban makes a conscious and deliberate choice to surrender to Yogananda's lineage (parampara). Yogananda stressed that his was a path of Guru Yoga when he said, "He who cannot learn through the wisdom and love of his God-ordained guru will not find God in this life. Several incarnations at least must pass before he will have another such opportunity."[6] Here, "God-ordained guru" is an interesting choice of words. It is almost as if the disciple has no choice but to surrender to the inevitable. Indeed, many interviewees indicated they felt that Yogananda had pulled them into a relationship with him. They did not proselytize because they felt that those who were meant to become disciples would, and those who were not destined for this path would not.

Once the inner declaration of loyalty is made, the kriyaban feels a certain sense of safety. In fact, Yogananda sometimes directly guaranteed his disciples that he had "taken on their karma" and was responsible for their lives. When Yogananda asked his first disciple, Dr. M. W. Lewis, if he would love him always, Lewis replied in the affirmative. Yogananda then told him, "I take charge of your life."[7] Those I interviewed believe that Yogananda is personally guiding them, and some reported they also receive guidance and inspiration from others in his lineage of gurus.

Besides Guru Yoga, other cornerstones of the Self-Realization path are Laya Yoga and Raja Yoga. SRF participants do not use these terms but refer to their path as Kriya Yoga. The word *kriya* derives from the Sanskrit root *kri,* to do or act. Thus, Kriya Yoga refers to an action performed in order to attain union (yoga) with Brahman (God). Yogananda described Kriya Yoga as "a simple, psycho-physiological method by which human blood is decarbonated and recharged with oxygen."[8] He wrote that this ancient technique was known to Jesus, St. John, St. Paul, Patañjali (purported author of the *Yoga Sutra*), Arjuna (hero of the *Bhavagad-Gita*), and Kabir (a medieval poet and saint). The SRF tradition teaches that the knowledge of the Kriya Yoga techniques was lost, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that it was again brought to

light. Yogananda wrote, "Babaji [Yogananda's guru's guru's guru] rediscovered and clarified the technique after it had been lost in the Dark Ages."[9]

Yogananda always stressed that the techniques of Kriya Yoga are scientific, a theme that we also saw with Vivekananda and will see again with Maharishi. They use the word "scientific" to mean the techniques are based on laws of nature and are thereby reliable. Given a sufficient amount of self-effort, a meditator can repeat the same technique and attain similar results each time. Since it is scientific, the outcome is predictable. Thus Yogananda assured his followers, as Maharishi and Muktananda were also to do, that the goal of enlightenment is assured in "six or twelve or twenty-four or forty-eight years," or, if not in this lifetime, in the next.[10]

A person begins the Kriya Yoga path by signing up for the Lessons, which contain Yogananda's teachings on a wide range of subjects—from how to meditate to how to improve relationships. Lessons arrive every other week and are to be read as often as possible. The student first learns "energization" exercises. Yogananda developed the exercises in 1916, and a year later he taught them to the boys in the school he started in Bihar, India, where he called them "Yogoda techniques." In these exercises the mind directs the body to tense and release particular muscles. The exercises also involve such movements as twisting at the waist, marching in place, and massaging parts of the body. The routine is intended to recharge and invigorate the body through the use of willpower.

The student next learns the "hang-sau" technique. Each of the syllables is repeated silently with the incoming and outgoing breaths. Hang-sau is the same "ham-sa" or "so-ham" technique that is a part of many yoga systems in India. It could be translated as "I am He," meaning "I am no different than God," or the Absolute, or Shiva, or some other conception of the Ultimate.

The third technique is the Aum (Om) technique. This requires a T-shaped wooden support on which the elbows rest. The small fingers are placed at the corner of the eyes, the rest of the fingers on the forehead, and the thumbs block the ears. One listens to the sound of "Om" in this position. This technique is also widely practiced by yoga practitioners outside of SRF.

After one year of receiving the Lessons, the student seeks initiation into Kriya Yoga by a minister of SRF. The technique taught during initiation is said to circulate energy, or *prana,* through the subtle channels of the *ida* and *pingala* that are believed to wrap around the central subtle channel that corresponds to the spine, the sushumna. There are four different stages of this part of Kriya Yoga. Yogananda describes the first technique of the four in his autobiography:

> The *Kriya Yogi* mentally directs his life energy to revolve, upward and downward, around the six spinal centers (medullary, cervical, dorsal, lumbar, sacral, and coccygeal plexuses), which correspond to the twelve astral signs of the zodiac, the symbolic Cosmic man. . . The *Kriya* beginner employs his yogic technique fourteen to twenty-four times, twice daily.[11]

Over time, a person can work up to 108 circulations, which takes about an hour. The kriyaban keeps track by using beads (*mala*) passed along a string with the fingers or by counting the joints of the fingers using the thumb (three joints on four fingers makes twelve). The techniques of circulating the energy are also used in Laya Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, and various Tantric schools.

According to SRF tradition, these techniques, other than the energization exercises, were known in ancient India but were forgotten. In actuality, the techniques have been used continually in many yoga and tantra traditions throughout India. They are, however, taught in slightly varying ways in different traditions, and it may be that there is something unique about the instruction given by Yogananda's lineage. What is undoubtedly unique about the SRF gurus and teachers is that they have made every effort to include householders—people who have worldly responsibilities—rather than just renunciates. The gurus of the SRF lineage wanted to share and disseminate their knowledge with the West, and Yogananda became their eventual emissary. Others, such as Swami Dhirananda and Sri Nerode, were to help him in this venture, but none attained the fame that Yogananda did.

When Yogananda brought the techniques to America, he simplified them for Westerners. The most obvious change is that they are performed in a chair rather than sitting cross-legged on the floor—a kind adjustment for Western bodies, which must have been welcome, particularly in the early twentieth century before the Hatha Yoga craze had spread in the States. Swami Satyeswarananda, a disciple of Satyananda, Yogananda's friend, insists that Kriya Yoga cannot be performed properly without first perfecting a technique called *kechari mudra*, in which the tongue reaches up into the throat and, after practice, into the nasal passages. Omitting this requirement appears to be another kind revision on the part of Yogananda! Other modifications were also made. I spoke with one woman who, after receiving all of the advanced levels of initiation through SRF, decided to see what it would be like to receive Kriya Yoga initiation from someone outside of this movement. The great-great-grandson of one of the gurus of the SRF lineage was traveling in the United States, giving initiations in the very techniques his grandfather had received from Lahiri Mayasay, who is said to have revived

the lost wisdom. The woman was astonished to find out how different they were from what she had learned through SRF. She reported that they were quite a bit more complicated.

The tone of SRF gatherings is decidedly more Christian than in other HIMMs, possibly because the cultural milieu into which Yogananda entered was Christian or because he came to America from Bengal at a time when the Hindu intelligentsia were still deliberately tying to accommodate Christianity into their new formulation of Hinduism. Some of those Yogananda addressed in the 1920s had been exposed to Theosophy, Vedanta, and New Thought, but for the most part they were embedded in Christian heritage. Yogananda took this Christian milieu into consideration when he designed his "services," which were presented in churches where people sat in pews or folding chairs. The service was very similar to a Christian service, complete with hymns, sermon, and prayer. The hymns or chants, as they continue to be performed today, combine Indian structure and instruments with Christian language. Because Yogananda was very devotional in his approach to spirituality, he did not stress the Sanskrit language. Like the bhakti (devotional) poet-saints of medieval India, he felt that it was important for people to understand the language in which they pray. He wrote many poems and songs in English, and always emphasized that his disciples should delve into the feeling of devotion when they sing. The songs composed by Paramahansa Yogananda and used in contemporary SRF services consist of two or three lines sung over and over, such as "In the temple of silence, in the temple of peace, I will meet Thee, I will touch Thee, I will love Thee, and coax Thee to my altar of peace." Less often, traditional Hindu chants such as "Hare Krishna, Hare Rama" are also sung.

Yogananda's guru, Sri Yukteswar, knew the Bible well and instructed Yogananda in its symbolic meaning. When Yogananda taught in America, he often related the symbols of the Bible to yogic precepts. These references must have been comforting to those of an earlier generation who were raised with the language of the Bible. Ironically, many of the kriyabans I interviewed from a later generation had rejected Christianity, and therefore the biblical references present a stumbling block that they have overcome.

In prayers, God is addressed in many forms, both male and female. In fact, Yogananda had a special affinity for God as the Divine Mother. Yogananda had been attracted in his youth to the Hindu goddess Kali, so it is natural that he would continue this worship of the divine in feminine form as an adult.[12] Yogananda's mother died when he was only eleven, and in his autobiography he presents his father a stern disciplinarian. These circumstances and family

dynamic may be related to his attraction to the feminine form of God. Writing of Yogananda's pull to worship Kali, his brother explained, "We [Hindus] feel a special closeness to the mother, for she is quick to forgive, and loves us unconditionally."[13] Some of Yogananda's prayers begin by addressing "Heavenly Father" and "Cosmic Mother." Kriyabans also understand God to exist in the form of the guru; in fact, many of the kriyabans I interviewed said that they prayed to Yogananda.

The desire for prosperity and health is a key component of the American ethos, and these desires received special emphasis in the New Thought movement and its affiliations. Yogananda developed ties with the New Thought movement after coming to America, which seems appropriate since their philosophies were very similar. New Thought leaders and Yogananda taught the importance of thought power in creating desired results. In his book *Scientific Healing Affirmations,* Yogananda offers affirmations and directions on how to use thought for one's own and others' benefit. The American devotee would likely feel comfortable with the practice of directing thought power because it stresses self-sufficiency. Yogananda emphasized that it is the self who is doing the healing and not God, although the power to heal oneself or another is a gift from God. He wrote, "Realize that you yourself, as his beloved child, are employing His gifts of will, emotion, and reason to solve all difficult problems of life."[14]

Yogananda spoke of the power of concentrated thought for not only attaining one's own wholesome desires but also for getting rid of what is undesirable, such as a troubled state of mind. But the focus of the mind, he pointed out, should always be on the positive "lest one's faith be dampened." While Yogananda emphasized people's ability to change their world through thought, he also warned against becoming fixated on attaining a particular desire. He posited a balance between putting forth self-effort and yielding to one's destiny. Yogananda's emphasis on healing and positive thinking was indeed well received at this juncture of American history when New Thought was so popular.

Lineage

Entering the chapel at the SRF retreat site in Encinitas, California, felt vaguely like entering the Episcopal Church of my upbringing. People bowed their heads with folded hands before sitting down in a long pew. Flower arrangements and long-stemmed candles adorned the front of the chapel. The obvious difference between the two worship sites was the altar, which

was covered with a white cloth just as in my Episcopal Church, but the SRF altar displayed a row of pictures. From left to right, the display began with a picture of Lahiri (family name) Mahasay ("great soul"), followed by Mahavatar ("great incarnation of God") Babaji ("respected father"); in the middle were Jesus and the Hindu god Krishna; on the right were Yogananda ("bliss of union") and Sri Yukteswar ("union with God"). A very large version of Yogananda's picture was also displayed on a stand with a spray of white gladiolas in front of it. Besides Krishna and Jesus (the two *avatars,* or incarnations, that Yogananda sought to unite under one universal religion), the other pictures represent the guru lineage, or parampara. If we use the analogy of a parampara being a family's genealogical chart, Yogananda's father was Sri (pronounced shree) Yukteswar, his grandfather Lahiri Mahasay, and his great-grandfather Babaji.

Most gurus have a parampara, although there are exceptions because some gurus are believed to be either avatars or to have been "born realized." When an American surrenders to a Hindu guru, she or he also reveres the parampara of the guru. Stories about the guru's lineage are told in *satsangs* (spiritual gatherings) and in the literature of the HIMM. A disciple often feels a particular affinity with one of the "grandfathers," but primary allegiance goes to the direct guru of the disciple. What is unique about Self-Realization Fellowship is that the *parampara* stops with Yogananda—before he died, he stated that he was the last in the line of SRF gurus. He asserted that after his death, his teachings would serve as the guru and would inspire disciples to follow the path he had laid out. Although unusual, the idea has a precedent in Indian religion. The Sikh religion claims ten gurus in their parampara. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), declared that a scripture containing the gurus' teachings, the *Guru Granth Sahib,* would become the guru after he died.

SRF's president, Sri Daya Mata, an American woman formerly known as Faye Wright, is highly revered by participants in SRF and is believed to be "self-realized." In a public address, Sri Mrinalini, vice-president of SRF, quoted Yogananda as saying, "There will always be at the head of this organization men and women of realization. They are already known to God and the Gurus. They shall serve as my spiritual successor and representative in all spiritual and organizational matters."[15] Yogananda's alleged assertion raises an interesting question. What is the difference between a "spiritual successor" "of realization" who guides disciples "in all spiritual and organizational matter" and a guru successor? In other words, how is Sri Daya Mata *not* a guru? According to one SRF participant, the difference is that Sri Daya Mata can

answer people's questions and offer spiritual direction, but she cannot take away disciples' karma. "Only the guru can do that," the woman insisted. She was referring to the belief, common among followers of HIMMs, that when a person surrenders to a guru, not only does the guru protect the disciple but he or she also may take away repercussions of past bad actions. When a guru becomes sick or suffers some misfortune, disciples often say that the calamity occurred because the guru is "working off the karma" of the disciples. The idea is similar to the belief of many Christians that Jesus takes away their sins through the suffering he endured during his life, especially by his death on the cross.

Regardless of Yogananda's declaration that he was the last in the parampara, several of his former American disciples, such as Roy Eugene Davis and Norman Paulson, have a following and act in the capacity of gurus. A very popular American guru is Kriyananda, who founded Ananda Sangha (Fellowship of Bliss), a network of spiritual communities and churches. Ananda Sangha has seven residential communities and over one hundred groups that hold regular satsangs (gatherings of spiritual seekers). A third generation that traces its lineage to Yogananda is also emerging. The Reverend Ellen Grace O'Brian, a disciple of Roy Eugene Davis, established the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment in San Jose, California. Giving her ministry a particularly American twist, O'Brian ties her Kriya Yoga teachings to the New Thought movement. She does not present herself as a guru requiring a special allegiance, but as a spiritual teacher. The difference between a guru and a spiritual teacher is that a guru enters into personal relationships with disciples in which sole allegiance and surrender is expected; a spiritual teacher focuses more on the teachings than on this type of personal relationship. There is often more freedom for self-expression in a group led by a spiritual teacher than one led by a guru. However, the words "guru" and "teacher" do not always signify these differences. As we will see, Maharishi of Transcendental Meditation and Gurumayi of Siddha Yoga (at least, in later years of her leadership) referred to themselves as teachers and yet acted more like gurus by requiring strict adherence to their own guidance and teachings.

The manner in which Yogananda's teachings have spread through these various gurus is similar to the way yogic teachings have traditionally expanded in India, which might better be conceived as a "network" than as a "lineage." In the eighth century Adi (the first) Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) established ten orders of monks called *dashanami sampradaya,* or "tradition of ten names." These ten sects were organized under four *mathas,* or monasteries. The traditional way of becoming a monk or "taking *sannyasa*"—which

literally means "to throw down completely" implying renunciation of one's worldly life—is to receive initiation under the auspices of one of these ten orders. After receiving initiation, a monk uses the name of the order, such as *saraswati* or *giri,* along with the new name given him by his guru. Thus, when Sri Yukteswar initiated Mukunda (Yogananda's birth name) at the age of twenty-two into sannyasa in 1915, he gave him the name Yogananda. (Mukunda had actually chosen the name for himself because he felt it would continually inspire him to practice yoga.) After *diksha,* or initiation, Mukunda became known as Swami Yogananda Giri.[16] Swami (or svami) indicates the person's new role as a teacher and spiritual guide; the next name, in this case Yogananda ("bliss of yoga"), inspires the initiate to attain the attribute of the name; the third designation, in this case, giri, or "mountain," gives the person status as belonging to the Shankaracharya dashanami sampradaya. Traditionally, these orders are for male Brahmins, but exceptions are often made as they were for Yogananda's parampara, none of whom were of the Brahmin caste.

Once a person becomes a sannyasi, he is free to teach and initiate others. In this way, the teachings spread. Lahiri Mahasaya, for example, Yogananda's "grandfather," had fourteen main disciples, nine of whom continued a lineage. Just as Hindus have many deities but offer special allegiance toward their *ishta-devata,* or chosen deity, so they may have many gurus, yet venerate only one as their chosen guru. Yogananda had several gurus but considered his chosen guru to be Sri Yukteswar. He also had many disciples, and some of them attracted followers and began their own lines of descent. None of this is unusual. What *is* unusual is that Yogananda seems to have tried to limit this type of proliferation, almost as if he wanted to establish one "holy and apostolic" church as Christians had done. Certainly, monks and nuns would play a part in this church, yet they were not to teach in their own right. Instead, they were to be representatives for the organization of Self-Realization Fellowship.

Yogananda's parampara begins with Babaji. An artist's rendition of Babaji appears in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and he is pictured as a well-built young man with light skin and long, black hair, sitting in a full yogic posture. Babaji is perceived as a mysterious figure who lives in the Himalayas. Some say Babaji is hundreds of years old, others say thousands. Babaji's followers believe that he materializes a body only when necessary to instruct or bestow his grace. People in the SRF tradition refer to Babaji as a *maha-avatar,* or great incarnation of God. A magical quality infuses the lore of SRF, and it begins here with the progenitor of the movement. If a person can live for

several centuries and materialize and dematerialize at will, then anything at all is possible. All of the gurus of the parampara have Godlike qualities, but none as much as Babaji. Lahiri Mahasaya, Babaji's direct disciple, said, "Whenever anyone utters with reverence the name of Babaji, that devotee attracts an instant spiritual blessing."[17]

According to SRF tradition, the spiritual knowledge of Kriya Yoga that had been taught in ancient India was all but lost until Babaji revealed it to the second in the lineage, Lahiri Mahasaya. He had been a clerk for the military of the ruling British government since 1851 when he was unexpectedly transferred to a remote region for a brief period, and it was here that he met Babaji. Wandering in the mountains one day, he heard his name being called. When he followed the sound to its source, he saw the tall and radiant Babaji. He did not recognize him at first, but after Babaji touched his head, he suddenly awoke as if from sleep and realized that the cave in which he was standing was the place he had spent his last life as a sannyasi (monk) with this very same Babaji who stood before him. After initiating Lahiri Mahasaya into Kriya Yoga, Babaji instructed him to teach others. That Lahiri Mahasaya was a family man who worked in the world is stressed by SRF proponents, the significance being that he was an ordinary person who was able to carry out his worldly duties while still attaining God-realization. In this way, the eternal and mystical, symbolized by Babaji, and the modern and practical, symbolized by Lahiri Mahasaya, are brought together.

Lahiri Mahasaya was opposed to organizations and preferred to teach in a secret and unobtrusive manner. Even so, hundreds of men and women from all walks of life came to him for initiation. Eventually, he gave permission to establish the Arya Mission Institution in Calcutta to propagate his work. Lahiri Mahasaya also distributed thousands of small *Bhavagad-Gitas*, which contained only key passages. As he gave talks, some disciples would write them down, and eventually they produced books. He often gathered together his devotees for discussions on the Gita, which came to be known as Gita Sabha (assemblies). When Lahiri Mahasaya died in 1895 he left a legacy of books, the Arya Mission Institution, and many disciples.

One of these disciples was Mukunda's (Yogananda's) father, who actually became Mukunda's first teacher of preliminary techniques of Kriya Yoga. Another was Swami Kebalananda, whom Mukunda's father hired to be his son's Sanskrit tutor. However, Kebalananda taught him much more than Sanskrit. Mukunda never had much interest in academic subjects anyway, so, after receiving initiation into many of the practices of Kriya Yoga, he began to spend many hours—sometimes staying up all night with his

friend, Satyananda—practicing meditative techniques. The third disciple of Lahiri Mahasaya to instruct Mukunda was his chosen guru, Sri Yukteswar (1855–1935). Sri Yukteswar provides an interesting link to the East-West dialogue and religious synthesis between Hinduism and Christianity. Priyanath, as he was known as a child, grew up in Serampore (or Sri-rampur, "city of the Hindu deity Ram") in Bengal. It was here that a group of Christian missionaries became interested in the study of ancient Hindu culture. Some of them believed that if they could recapture the Sanskritic past of the Vedic civilization (ca. 1500–500 BCE), which they saw as more rational than contemporary Hinduism, it would open doors to Christian conversion. Young Bengali men then took up this interest in their Aryan roots and began to look at their own religion in a new way. This eventually resulted in Neo-Hinduism.

Serampore's environment of Western intellectualism and Christianity influenced Priyanath (Sri Yukteswar). He attended Serampore Christian Missionary College where he became interested in the stories of Jesus's life and the symbolical meaning of the book of Revelation. He began to make connections between the inner, mystical meanings found in the Bible and those expressed in the Yoga tradition. He later attended Calcutta Medical College but eventually left student life altogether. The pat answers he received from his professors to complicated questions did not satisfy his inquisitive nature. He later married and worked as an accountant for a period. His wife died after a few years, and then his only daughter died as well. He later expressed that it was his destiny to become a sannyasi. He began to pursue the study of homeopathic and naturopathic remedies, as well as music and theater, and also took up various sports such as horseback riding and hunting. While hobnobbing in the homes of wealthy families in Serampore, he heard of Lahiri Mahasaya and felt an insatiable urge to meet him. Sri Yukteswar searched out Mahasaya's address in Benares, went there, and received initiation. From that time on, he became immersed in *sadhana* (spiritual practices). Like his guru, Sri Yukteswar took a special interest in the *Bhavagad-Gita* and started a scriptural discussion group, eventually writing a commentary on the text.

It is a bit surprising that Yogananda chose Sri Yukeswar as his guru. Sri Yukteswar's personality was in many ways the opposite of Yogananda's. He was serious, intellectual, and a strict disciplinarian. While Yogananda was at times uncompromising with his disciples, he also had a spontaneous side to his nature. He was certainly not as interested in intellectual pursuits as was Yukteswar, and we know that Yogananda made it through school by the skin of his teeth. Yukteswar shunned supernatural stories of yogis perform-

ing miracles, while Yogananda's autobiography is filled with miraculous tales of yogis wrestling tigers and Christian saints living without food. Satyananda's biography of Sri Yukteswar states, "He [Yukteswar] believed that most of those supernatural stories were nonsense . . . [and] that the extreme emotionalism of devotees spreading ridiculous stories about them brought their gurus down to a lower level instead of glorifying them." While Yukteswar admitted that yogic miracles did occur, he strongly discouraged giving full attention to them. In order to disprove a rumor about a yogi who was said to levitate, he hid under the yogi's bed during his meditation, and when the promised miracle did not occur, he called his bluff.[18] Sri Yukteswar did, however, have an affinity for astrology, viewing it as a rational science. His views on astrology, along with his reflections on correspondences between the Bible and Hindu philosophy, were published as *The Holy Science* in 1894.

The years that Yogananda spent with Sri Yukteswar before he left for the United States were sometimes difficult. Yukteswar was so exacting and disagreeable that some disciples left him. But Yogananda resolved to stay and receive direction from his guru, sometimes becoming despondent in the process. He once wrote a grievance-filled letter to his guru and at a later time spoke to him in person about what he perceived to be offensive behavior.[19]

Yogananda was later to show some of these same unfortunate qualities as some early disciples report that he had a quick temper. But he also demonstrated a light side. As his friend and disciple Satyananda put it, "That there was too much a feeling of authority at times, or that sometimes slightly unpleasant situations would come about—this cannot be denied. Even when, by mistake, some undesirable behavior would present itself, there was a sweetness and tenderness in his character; this admission was made even by critics who did not like him."[20] Biographies of Yogananda contain many examples of his sense of play. For example, at the school for boys in India that Yogananda and several of his friends founded, he and his fellow teachers would often engage in spiritual discussion during the evenings. Yogananda made a rule that they should not talk for too long, but he was apt to be the first to break the order. After talking, they would sit in meditation. If someone fell asleep during that time, Yogananda might awaken him with teasing that would extend into a time of hilarious fun. One such night, Yogananda decided that they shouldn't be the only ones having so much fun and promptly went from room to room, waking up all the students. His childlike exuberance is also apparent in the many letters he wrote to his American friends and devotees. Writing to his early disciple, Dr. Lewis, he added the postscript,

> P.S. Important. Why don't you both [you and your wife] come in a day. Please do come the day before Christmas and stay overnight in Waldorf. . . .Please do come. Please come I mean seriously. . . You will surely enjoy. We will get you Hindu food from Hindu restaurant and also good American food here. Do come. Do come. Do come.[21]

That is an invitation that would be hard to pass up. Displaying his strict side, on the other hand, he often pushed his friends and disciples to spend many hours in meditation and worship, just as he himself did. Daya Mata, current president of SRF, related a story about how she and some of the other nuns liked to have a bit of fun after their evening meditation by popping popcorn and informally chatting with each other. Yogananda, hearing their laughter one evening, scolded her for wasting time that could be spent in contacting God.[22]

Yogananda and the Miraculous

I had already begun the practice of TM by the time I read *Autobiography of a Yogi.* I knew from experience that it was possible to touch a silent and still place within myself, and I had learned to call that experience "transcending thought." But I did not know anything about Indian saints or gurus. This I learned from *Autobiography of a Yogi.* A copy was being passed among those of us who meditated at the small college I attended in Florida. When it reached me, I began reading on Saturday and finished the almost six hundred pages by Sunday. Stories of yogis levitating and living off of nothing but air for hundreds of years; guru/saviors who appeared on the street and knew everything about their long-awaited disciples; people who had died appearing in "astral" form to talk of life forms on other planets—how different from the mundane world in which I had been raised!

In her book *Eastern Seeds, Western Soil,* the author and activist Polly Trout outlined possible responses for those grappling with this book: accept the miracles as literally true; accept that Yogananda believed they were true even if they were not; understand that Yogananda meant the stories to be taken metaphorically; or assert that "Yogananda just plain lied."[23] One might also take a phenomenological approach and, "bracketing the truth question" as is often advised in classes on world religions, simply observe how the book has had an effect on its readers from 1946 to the present. Another option is to look at the book as a key to unlocking the mystery of Yogananda himself.

Combining accounts of his own life with those offered by his best friend's and his brother's biographies gives us some idea of who Yogananda was.

Yogananda was born in 1893 in Gorukhpur, Uttar Pradesh, about one hundred miles north of Varanasi (Benares). His birth name was Mukunda, an epithet for Krishna that means "the one who liberates." Stories related about Mukunda's birth and childhood are reminiscent of those told about others, East and West, who are considered saviors. His parents' guru, Lahiri Mahasaya, foretold his birth, saying that the new baby would one day follow the Kriya Yoga path. Later, after Mukunda was born, his mother took him back to the guru for his blessing, and Lahiri Mahasaya said, "Little mother, thy son will be a yogi. As a spiritual engine, he will carry many souls to God's kingdom."[24]

His brother reported that the ways of Mukunda (whom he called Mejda) were different from others: "From infancy, Mejda was attracted to quiet and solitary places. . . Whenever he had an opportunity, he sat in a secluded spot and, with half-closed eyes, assumed the yogic posture of meditation." The story continues that Mukunda delighted in attending the temple on Sundays and holy days. One Sunday, the family was not able to attend because a religious festival was being held in their home. Suddenly, someone realized that Mukunda was missing. Much to the parents' relief, they found him in the temple as dawn was approaching, sitting with his eyes closed, oblivious to the world around him.[25]

Mukunda displayed tremendous drive, in his brother's words, "to leave no stone unturned" when it came to metaphysical knowledge. Mukunda first learned the meditation techniques of the Radhaswami (Radhasoami) movement, which originated from the Sikh tradition in the late nineteenth century. Their meditation focuses on listening for the inner sound of "aum" and attempting to see an inner divine light. These techniques play a part in many yogic traditions, including the Kriya tradition that Mukunda next learned from his own father in 1906 when he was thirteen. The following two years he studied Kriya meditation under the guidance of Swami Kebalananda, who taught him how to circulate energy through the chakras.

As a teenager Mukunda made a brief foray into Tantra and began meditating in cremation grounds in order to understand the transitory nature of life. One day he brought home a human skull and several bones to help him in this contemplation. Another time he brought back to his room a matted-haired ascetic, perhaps one of Mukunda's temporary gurus.[26] Once Mukunda and his friends captured some lizards to use in a Tantric ritual Mukunda had learned that was supposed to help develop supernatural powers. The

experiment was abandoned, however, when feelings of ahimsa (nonviolence) caused the boys to release the lizards.[27]

As a youth, Mukunda learned how to hypnotize others and was also able to induce spirit-possession. He often used his brother to accomplish his experiments with fortune-telling, calling a spirit to enter his brother, who would then answer Mukunda's questions about what another person was thinking or about future events or how to heal a person. At times, the experiment backfired when the spirit refused to leave. Mukunda apparently took pride in his occult talents and, when asked to prove himself, used his younger brother in an unpleasant way. To demonstrate his hypnotism abilities for officials at a nearby school, Mukunda asked his brother to eat dirt, telling him it was sweet and delectable. "I began to devour the clod with the greatest pleasure and said, 'It is delicious!'" his brother reported. Then Mukunda told him it was dirty and distasteful and his brother immediately vomited everything he had just eaten.[28]

It is important to examine this teenage period of Mukunda's life to understand how prevalent Tantric and occult practices were—and continue to be—in India. We have examined the Christian missionary and British educational influence on the development of Neo-Hinduism, with its emphasis on Vedanta and a "rational approach" to religion. However, Tantra, fortune-telling, occult arts, and the development of yogic powers were and are also widespread. When gurus come to the United States, they stress the rational and scientific elements of yoga, but it would be unusual for those same gurus not to have had exposure to this other form of Hinduism. Like Yogananda, Maharishi, and particularly Muktananda, who lived in the south of India where arcane practices are more common, most probably learned some of the arts of the occult.

Yogananda's search for knowledge and for yogic powers continued throughout his life. When he returned to India for a short period from 1935 to 1936, he traveled around seeking stories of the miraculous. He also met miracle workers as he traveled through Europe and Egypt. Many of the things he witnessed during these trips are recorded in his autobiography. Satyananda summed up Yogananda's attitude toward the miraculous: "Direct encounters with ascended beings, the radiant and divine appearances of supernatural power-endowed realized beings, the arrival of the spirit of a dead person in the midst of mesmerized people and speaking with that spirit, and ordinary sightings of ghosts and such were things that he believed in, and pursued with concentrated means . . . his belief in these remained firm and unshakable throughout his whole life."[29]

Americans continue to consume *Autobiography of a Yogi.* It is likely that people respond to Yogananda's words in all of the ways that Polly Trout suggested. Wrestling with the idea of miracle as a child, I remember holding onto the belief in Santa Claus several years past the time when my doubts began to arise. There was always the missing milk and cookies that we had set out the night before to contend with. That was a miracle hard to deny because of the physical evidence. *Autobiography of a Yogi* includes a similar type of miracle that seems too objective to be disaffirmed. A postscript to the book reprints part of a letter from the mortuary director of Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. where Yogananda's body was held temporarily: "The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience. . . No physical disintegration was visible in his body even twenty days after death. . . .No odor of decay emanated from his body at any time." Robert Todd Carroll, a former professor of philosophy at Sacramento City College and author of *Becoming a Critical Thinker,* offers his own views about these statements. Not reprinted in the postscript—although available in full in SRF's publication, *Paramahansa Yogananda: In Memoriam*—was the observation that a brown spot appeared on the nose of the dead body after twenty days. Furthermore, Carroll states,

> The state of the yogi's body is not unparalleled, but common. A typical embalmed body will show no notable desiccation for one to five months after burial without the use of refrigeration or creams to mask odors. According to Jesus Preciado, who has been in the mortuary business for thirty years, "in general, the less pronounced the pathology [at the time of death], the less notable are the symptoms of necrosis." Some bodies are well-preserved for years after burial. Some, under extraordinary conditions, are well-preserved for hundreds, even thousands, of years.[30]

Santa Claus died hard for me.

The Organization: SRF

Yogananda established two organizations: one in India in 1917 called Yogoda Satsanga Society, with headquarters currently in Dakshineshwar, near Calcutta, and one in America in 1920, at first called Yogoda Satsanga of America and later named Self-Realization Fellowship Church when it incorporated in 1935. By 1937 one hundred fifty thousand people had been initi-

ated into Yogananda's Kriya Yoga. By the time of Yogananda's death in 1952, one hundred fifty centers for Self-Realization Fellowship had been founded.[31] Even though SRF was one of the earliest HIMMs to arise in the United States, it shows no sign of abating. Today there are close to five hundred centers for Self-Realization Fellowship in fifty-four countries. Over one hundred fifty of these are in the United States. California has a more active membership than any other state, housing the international headquarters for SRF in Los Angeles, as well as another six temples and ashram centers.[32]

I spent several days at one of SRF's better known retreat sites on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean in the town of Encinitas, California. The site was purchased by SRF when Yogananda was alive, and the residents of the small town are accustomed to it after all these years. He spent many years at the home that was built for him at this location, and it was here that he wrote his famous autobiography. Devotees created an exquisite garden, which is renowned throughout California. I enjoyed the lazy afternoons of wandering in the garden with its array of flowers, shrubs, waterfalls, and ponds filled with brightly colored koi. From the garden one can look down at people surfing off of "Swami's Beach." Light refreshments are available across the street from the beach at "Swami's Café." Several people I spoke with in the town's restaurants and shops had visited the retreat center and enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere even though they were not followers of Yogananda. There is no doubt that SRF has left a mark on the ambiance of this small town.

Other properties owned by SRF include two retreat sites in TwentyNine Palms, California, Lake Shrine in the Pacific Palisades, and the Phoenix Temple in Arizona. Its international headquarters, known as the "Mother Center," is located in Los Angeles on Mount Washington. Many of SRF's monks and nuns live there, where publishing and distribution of the Lessons occurs. Relations between SRF and the townspeople are not always as congenial as in Encinitas. SRF confronts the same public relations challenges that other HIMMs face. They want to be good neighbors, but when their activities draw large crowds or change the community's physical ambiance, red flags go up. For several years SRF attempted to move Yogananda's body from a crypt at Forest Lawn in Glendale to Mount Washington. After a four-year effort to build a visitor center, mausoleum, and museum in the face of opposition from Mount Washington residents, SRF withdrew their plans in 2001.

SRF's desire to be the sole propagators of Yogananda's published works has also caused difficulties. They, like other HIMMs, have attempted to trademark common terms and names, such as "Paramahansa Yogananda." SRF spent twelve years in litigation against Swami Kriyananda's organization

Swami's Beach, Encinitas, California. (Photograph by the author)

(Ananda Church of Self-Realization), for using some of the images, sound recordings, and words that SRF claimed were its sole property. SRF also sued because the name Kriyananda had chosen for his organization (which previous to the results of the litigation did not include the word Ananda), was so similar to their own that they felt it would cause confusion. The litigation, which lasted from 1990 until 2002, cost each side millions of dollars with the heavier losses to SRF. This is one of several lawsuits that SRF has been involved in, either as plaintiff or as defendant, since its founding.

Court battles form part of the history of most HIMMs and are the result of their desire to protect their organization, which in turn attempts to protect the guru or guru-parampara as having a unique claim to a set of teachings or an infallible leader. Also at stake are financial assets. Claims of gurus outside a particular HIMM, if not seen as fraudulent, are at least viewed as confus-

ing disciples who are taught to put complete faith in only one guru and that guru's parampara. This presents a problem when direct disciples of a guru claim the right to teach. Perhaps Yogananda thought that giving the entitlement to propagate his teachings to an organization rather than to a person, or several people, would help to maintain his original intent. But organizations are made of people, and therefore the same possibility of changing the original intent exists. In the case of SRF, with Yogananda's purported claim that the organization would always be guided by God-realized people, one might think that disciples would easily assent to the direction of those leaders. This has not always been the case. Disagreements about how the organization should be run and how Yogananda's words should be interpreted have existed throughout SRF's history, occasionally erupting into organizational crises.

The second president of SRF after Yogananda was James J. Lynn (1892–1955), a multimillionaire who devoted his life to Kriya Yoga after discovering that his wealth did not make him happy. He guided the movement into its next phase with grace and acumen. The succeeding president, who presides at the time of this printing, is Daya Mata (mother of compassion), who met Yogananda for the first time in 1931 in Salt Lake City when she was seventeen. Raised as a Mormon, Faye Wright (as she was then known) was instantly taken with Yogananda. She had a chronic blood disorder at the time, which caused her face to be swollen and covered in bandages. Yogananda publicly declared that her condition would clear within seven days, and it did. After attending classes with Yogananda, she left for Mount Washington and became the first nun of the SRF order. In 1955, the SRF Board of Directors elected her to the presidency of the organization.

SRF's division between celibate renunciates and laypeople is much stronger than in other HIMMs in which "householders" take on much of the responsibility of running the organization and of teaching. SRF is hierarchical in its approach with the Board essentially controlling the decision-making process. Former disgruntled members of SRF credit this top-down mentality with creating an unhealthy organization. On the other hand, many feel that the Board guides the organization with acuity and love. Currently high-level decision-making, teaching, and counseling are performed only by monastics. Swami Kriyananda, who broke off from the movement and became a guru in his own right, feels that laypeople are squeezed out of the vision that Yogananda had intended for his disciples. He claims that Yogananda often expressed his vision of establishing communes for families to live together throughout the United States. Yogananda referred to these as "world-brother-

hood colonies." In fact, Yogananda founded the Encinitas retreat site to serve as a model for these colonies. Unhappily, his dream was not realized during his lifetime. Eventually, he turned Encinitas into a monastery for celibates, stating that the colonies would have to wait until later. While Kriyananda has headed several communal establishments, SRF continues to assert that the later time that Yogananda referred to has not yet arrived.

Daya Maya is now growing old; in 1994 she created a mid-level management at the Mother Center in an effort to begin implementing the next generation of leadership. After some investigation, the new Management Committee realized that a labyrinth of difficulties beset the organization. Some people could not even sit in the same room with others because there was so much bad feeling. The committee suggested to Daya Mata that SRF hire outside communication and organizational consultants to offer advice on how to handle the situation. They also suggested that SRF hire counselors and psychologists to deal with the festering psychological problems that some of the monastics seemed to be experiencing. Two new committees, the Monks Spiritual Life Committee and the Nuns Spiritual Life Committee, were formed to execute the suggestions made by the consultants. This was the beginning of a split among the monks and nuns who resided at the Mother Center. Some viewed the promise of change with exhilaration and hope; and some viewed it with fear. The end result was that a large number of monastics left SRF from about 2000 to 2001. Due to the entrenched resistance to change, the communication consultants were let go, the existing committee members replaced by others content with the status quo, and the psychologists relieved of their duties. It may be that so many people needed to talk to the counselors that the leadership became fearful of losing control. They reverted to the old style of dealing with problems, which, as the SRF catchphrase goes, is to "take it to your altar." This approach was deemed by the leadership to be more appropriate for those who have chosen a religious life of monasticism. As one monk from SRF explained,

> Our monastic yoga training gives us the tools to achieve that transcendence and blissful happiness. But those who are unwilling or unable to apply themselves sufficiently to this process of renunciation and self-transformation gradually sour on the life and become negative and unhappy. Then they leave, or they develop psychological problems. In healthy monastic orders, where there is a strong culture of sincere, intelligent adherence to the spirit and practice of monastic rules and vows, such individuals leave

the monastic life because of their own frustrations before they drag down the order as a whole into more serious problems. So, while the period of monastic departures was a difficult one, I believe it was a sign of the health of the organization, not its weakness. In other words, I would be more worried if such persons stayed in the ashram rather than leaving![33]

A former SRF nun feels very differently about this. In her words,

During my last decade with SRF, I had some epiphanies. I saw how important it is to integrate the human and the divine, and not separate the two. Human feelings, needs and expression are all part of our journey; but they often get a bad rap, especially in teachings where "transcendence" is emphasized. What I've seen is that as our spiritual practice becomes deeper, more subtle layers of unresolved or unconscious issues arise—issues we all encounter as humans, even at the highest level of spiritual organizations. In large communities, the leadership rarely has the skill or inclination to support the full dimensions of an individual. Problems of this nature tend to get labeled, go underground, or leak out in harmful behaviors. In my work, the human aspect of life, individually and collectively, comes up more than any other. How people are with one another, especially how the leadership is, creates the particular culture—for better or for worse. Many spiritual groups deeply desire transformation, but unknowingly allow areas of unconscious behaviors to flourish—repression, judgment, rigidity. Anyone stepping outside the "mold" is seen as problematic, and shunned. Sadly, I've witnessed this many times and seen the toll it has taken on a person's faith and well-being. Great skill is needed to create a *conscious* culture that becomes gracefully self-regulating. The most successful, magnetic groups are those that are open to dissent, that create a culture of inclusion, truth-speaking and acceptance and that put a high priority on integration of the full dimension of an individual.[34]

More strongly worded testimonies appear on the SRF Walrus, a website for devotees of Yogananda who are critical of the SRF organization:

Often, longtime SRF members would ask me why I left, and occasionally, if I felt they were asking sincerely, I would tell them my reasons. Their inability to believe my assertions, to trust even the most common-sense explanations, to acknowledge SRF imperfections and wrong behavior; their unshakable, dogmatic belief in SRF's faultlessness, to explain everything

away to karma, training, and their conclusion that it must have been all my fault. . . is really frustrating.[35]

SRF weathered the storm around the change of the millennium and many others. It will be interesting to see if, in the coming years, the ethos of the organization changes with the rising new generation of monks and nuns.

Conclusion

Yogananda arrived in America a generation after Vivekananda and thus met with a more liberal-minded clientele who were also much more savvy about India and yoga. Yogananda's first speech in 1920 was to the Unitarian Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston, an audience undoubtedly more receptive to hearing about a new way of conceiving of God than those who attended the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago twenty-seven years earlier. It was also a time when California, and particularly Los Angeles, was becoming a haven of the avant-garde. Yogananda and his movement brought Hindu ideas and practices one step closer to becoming a natural part of the American landscape.

The dedication of disciples to meditation and to their guru, the guru-parampara, the shift from a one-on-one guru-disciple relationship style to an organizational hierarchy with its ensuing problems, the denial of the whole person due to idealizing the spiritual—these are some of the basic themes and issues that tie HIMMs together. It is ironic that as a Hindu-inspired meditation movement attempts to define its uniqueness by establishing an organization and copyrighting ideas and people's names, it displays similarities to the other Hindu-inspired meditation movements.

The motivation for establishing distinctiveness seems to be altruistic. Most gurus and their organizations have a sincere desire to protect the purity of their teachings because they fear that they may become watered down, or simply unclear, in the hands of others, thereby confusing sincere seekers. Yet this attitude also implies a lack of trust in the *sadhaka* (person pursuing spiritual practices) to find the truth that lies inherently within each person. It also disregards the view that God is ultimately in control, which followers of HIMMs often express. The focus on the perfection of the guru and the guru's organization, and the lack of trust in teachers and institutions outside of these constructs, create a conservatism, which in the end may not serve the movements well. Creating a bifurcation between the God-realized, perfect guru and the disciple whose ego must be subjugated can hamper the dis-

ciples' ability for self-determination and render the organization unwilling to solve or even examine problems. Creativity is sometimes quashed in the disciple and self-confidence weakened. Many, upon leaving the SRF monastic order, complain of having little aptitude to deal with the problems of living in the world. This, however, is not true of those who participate in SRF from a distance. As in other HIMMs, these disciples submit to the guru's teachings but are challenged to integrate those teachings while living in a world of people with other viewpoints. They have the opportunity to learn and grow through making mistakes.

4

Transcendental Meditation

On February 5, 2008, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi passed away at his home and headquarters in Vlodrop, the Netherlands, where he had lived since the late 1980s. He was believed to have been ninety-one years old. In the last years of his life he rarely met with anyone face-to-face, preferring to speak with followers by closed-circuit television. Maharishi's body was shipped to Allahabad, about six hundred kilometers southwest of New Delhi. His relatives and disciples carried his body, propped up in a yogic posture, to a specially erected platform near the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers. Thousands of Maharishi's followers filed past the platform, bowing as the sound of Hindu chanting filled the air and a helicopter showered rose petals from above. He was accorded a full state funeral by the president of India. The army held their rifles in a neutral position for the military salute in honor of Maharishi's lifelong dedication to the creation of world peace. In traditional Hindu style, only men were allowed to attend during the cremation itself. His nephew lit the funeral pyre made of sandalwood logs, and Swami Vasudevananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of the North, presided over the funeral.

Meanwhile, at a TM enclave on Heavenly Mountain, near Boone, North Carolina, devotees watched the funeral pyre via satellite. One told me later, "I would watch and sob my heart out, doze a little, wake up, and start crying all over again."

Thus ended a fifty-year career begun in 1958, when Maharishi inaugurated the Spiritual Regeneration Movement. This was the first of many inaugurations with sonorous epithets during Maharishi's long endeavor to bring peace and prosperity to the world. The tools he used in this venture changed over time, but his basic message remained the same: individuals, pursuing spiritual practices, will change the world. Shortly before his death, he declared that his work was done and nothing could stop the Golden Age from its full efflorescence. Maharishi passed his inexhaustible idealism to his followers who continue the work that he began.

Maharishi is succeeded by a Lebanese doctor of internal medicine and psychiatry, Tony Nader. Besides being a medical doctor, Dr. Nader holds a PhD in Brain and Cognitive Science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The new leader is not called a master or a guru, but "His Excellency Maharaj-adhiraj Raja Ram, First Sovereign Ruler of the Global Country of World Peace." Maharaj means "great king" and adhiraj means "primary king," so his title could be translated "the great and foremost king of the kingdom of Ram." Rama, or Ram, is the heroic king and incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu in the great epic *Ramayana.* Many Hindus believe that Rama Rajyam, or Ram Raj, was an era of Indian history in which morals prevailed. Maharishi and his close followers believe that they are helping to establish a new Ram Raj in which morality will reign as a result of many people practicing Transcendental Meditation.

Dr. Nader was crowned king during a five-day coronation ceremony in October 2000, when he was declared to have reign over this new "Heaven on Earth" that Maharishi had predicted for so many years. Raj Nader wore long golden robes during the ceremony, which took place in the "throne room" of Maharishi's home in the Netherlands. At the end of the ceremony, a royal procession included horse-drawn carriages, bagpipers, an elephant, and an airplane with a banner that read, "Glory to Nader Rama, Ruler of Global Country." Nader Ram was also to have charge over the other rajas, which include the king of Chicago and the king of Atlanta, among others, and forty ministers of the cabinet of the Global Country of World Peace. According to the Global Country's official website, this newly formed government provides "a parental and nourishing role in the family of nations."[1]

Obviously the TM movement has traveled some distance since Maharishi inaugurated the Spiritual Regeneration Movement in 1958. Establishing a world government is just one example of Maharishi's many innovations that attempt to bring ancient Indian knowledge and practice to a modern-day setting. Examination of his various plans to revive ancient medicine, architecture, government, and meditative techniques reveals a central theme: the integration of worldly and spiritual realms. He refers to this complex of projects as a revival of "Vedic science." However, it may be more appropriate to use the term "Tantric religion" in describing the TM enterprise. The renowned expert of Tantra, Andre Padoux, defined this Hindu religious expression as "an attempt to place *kama,* desire, in every sense of the word, in the service of liberation. . . This use of kama and of all aspects of this world to gain both worldly and supernatural enjoyments (*bhuktis*) and powers (siddhis), and to obtain liberation in this life (*jivanmukti*), implies a particular

attitude on the part of the Tantric adept toward the cosmos, whereby he feels integrated within an all-embracing system of micro-macrocosmic correlations."[2] This definition could be aptly applied to Maharishi's movement. He emphasized both material prosperity and spiritual enlightenment, and was always hopeful that his scientist followers would find a "unified field theory" that brought together the material and the transcendent realms. Furthermore, Maharishi placed an enormous emphasis on the cultivation of mystical powers (siddhis) from the mid-1970s until his death. His choice of Dr. Nader as king of the "Global Country" also points to Tantra. Nader had created a theory of "micro-macrocosmic correlations" that delighted Maharishi. The search for correspondences exists in the Vedic tradition as well. The *Upanishads* (called the "end of the Vedas," or Vedanta) are full of correspondences between different levels of existence, many of them fantastical to modern sensibilities. The movement's later accretion of *yajñas* (fire ceremonies) also draws from the Vedic era. However, the mantras they use place it more firmly in the Tantric tradition than the Vedic.

The TM movement has gone through many changes since Maharishi first offered to Westerners a simple meditation technique, which they could practice twice a day. By the time of Maharishi's death the TM movement owned a vast amount of real estate, managed businesses that sell everything from holistic cosmetics to *ayurvedic* medicine, established schools from elementary through the university level, ran ayurvedic clinics, and had laid the foundation for a world government. The expansion continues as the movement recently bought and renovated a six-story building for their Global Financial Capital on Broad Street in New York City, just blocks away from the New York Stock Exchange and situated in the some of the most expensive real estate in the United States.

The Holy Tradition

Followers of Maharishi and the TM movement greet each other by saying "Jai Guru Dev" with their hands folded in front of their chest in prayer position. The words could be translated as "Hail to the Guru, who is God." Guru Dev was Maharishi's guru, and wherever Maharishi appeared, there would always be a picture of his guru nearby. I remember seeing pictures of this balding, heavily bearded man in orange robes when I was eighteen and first learned TM. He appeared to me more as an emblem for mystical knowledge than as a real human being. I knew nothing about India or Hinduism at the time. I had not even heard of karma, a word that today is as much a part of

American lingo as it is of Indian. I remember hearing that Guru Dev had lived in the Himalayas and that he was so peaceful that even the wild animals that surrounded him were tamed. He seemed to be timeless and beyond the mundane concerns of daily life. Guru Dev's aura of mystery carried over to Maharishi. Even though Maharishi did not call himself a guru, he told us he was passing on what he had learned from Guru Dev, and that seemed to make him a guru, too. He was old and wise and spoke softly. Hippies were attracted to him like bees to honey. Like them, Maharishi always carried a flower.

I was in awe of Maharishi, and I was not alone. Even as late as May 2002, the savvy Larry King showed surprising deference to Maharishi. "Tonight, exclusive!" King announced to his audience with a beaming smile. "He was the Beatles' spiritual guru and he turned the world on to Transcendental Meditation. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi gives his first TV interview in twenty-five years!" Throughout the show, pictures of the Beatles danced across the screen, creating a sense of nostalgia for the sixties. In February 2008, in newspapers around the world, the byline was "The guru of the Beatles dies." Maharishi had made a brief splash in the public eye, only to be forgotten by all but his devotees until his image with the Beatles was dug up after his death. In the popular imagination Maharishi had become an emblem, not of mystical knowledge but of the sixties and the Beatles craze.

Mahesh Prasad Varma (Maharishi's birth name) was born near the central Indian town of Jabalpur into a scribe caste family. He studied physics at Allahabad University, but it is unknown whether he received a degree. After his studies he became a disciple of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, whom he called Guru Dev; Mahesh served as his secretary. Guru Dev was what one might call a reluctant guru. He spent most of his life living as a hermit. For twenty years, people tried to persuade him to become the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math (also called Jyoshimath), one of four monasteries established in the eighth century by Shankara. Swami Brahmananda gave in to the pressure in 1941, but disappeared when the arrangements for his installation were underway. He was discovered in Varanasi (Benares) three weeks later and when asked again for his cooperation, he remained silent. This was taken as a "yes" by his supplicants, and Swami Brahmananda was, finally, installed as Shankaracharya.

The worship ceremony that TM instructors perform before initiation honors the Shankaracharya tradition, which they call the "Holy Tradition." This tradition, in turn, associates itself with the orthodox Vedic tradition. It is a conservative institution that adheres to many of the rules first established

for the monasteries in the eighth century. Guru Dev represented the tradition well, for he did not allow anyone who was not of the Brahmin varna, the caste of priesthood, to teach. Since Mahesh was born into a scribe caste (*kayastha*), he was not allowed to join the order of monks. Thus, when Guru Dev died in Calcutta in 1953, Mahesh would not have been considered a candidate to replace him.

Mahesh left Jyotir Math after his guru died and spent time in northwest India near Uttarkashi. In 1954 he traveled to the south of India, and it was here that he began to teach, against the proscription of the Shankaracharya tradition. In 1958 he established the Spiritual Regeneration Movement, an organization formed to bring meditation to the world. He stated publicly many times that it was established under the direct inspiration of Guru Dev. As he wrote in the introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, "It was the concern of Guru Deva, His Divinity Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, to enlighten all men everywhere that resulted in the foundation of the world-wide Spiritual Regeneration Movement in 1958, five years after his departure from us."[3]

By connecting his own teaching to that of Guru Dev, he was essentially connecting it to the Shankaracharya tradition and thus the Vedic tradition. Yet in doing so, he was also breaking with that very tradition. If Mahesh were truly following the Shankarcharya tradition, he would not have taught at all. And if he were to teach, he would have taught only males who were *adhikarin*, or fit for instruction by practicing morality and discipline. Adi Shankara, the Advaita Vedanta philosopher who established the Shankarcharya tradition in the eighth century, outlined four prerequisites to practicing spiritual disciplines: the ability to discriminate between the transient and eternal; the absence of desire; the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith; and an intense desire for liberation (*mumukshutva*). Besides being male and accomplished in these disciplines, Mahesh's initiates would need to be aspiring toward the life of a renunciate because the Shankarcharya tradition had been established by a renunciate monk for other renunciate monks. Any spiritual practices done within the order of monks are meant for liberation from transmigration and worldliness (samsara), and not for improving their worldly lives.

By all appearances, Mahesh, who was now calling himself Maharishi (great sage) Mahesh (great lord) Yogi (one who practices yoga), was establishing a new set of rules while associating himself with the very conservative "Holy Tradition." Ironically, because the Hindu understanding of the guru allows room for independence and innovation, this disregard of tradition

makes him a "traditional" guru. Gurus, while often tied to a tradition, are also considered to be God-realized and, as such, independent of social institutions. As the Hinduism scholar Kathleen Erndl has pointed out, "Charismatic religious leadership is that which stems from a direct relationship with the divine outside of institutional mainstream transmission of religious authority." Furthermore, "while [gurus] are absolutely central (not marginal) to Hindu religious life, their authority *as gurus* is essentially dependent on their personal charisma. In order to be considered gurus, they must have disciples who recognize them as being divine or having extraordinary access to the divine. Without that, it does not matter how high they have risen in a spiritual or monastic institution, they will not be considered gurus. Hindu gurus are a non-institutional institution."[4] This definition applies to Maharishi precisely; he was a charismatic non-institutional institution.

Since he associated himself with the Holy Tradition of Shankaracharya, Maharishi never taught without honoring the tradition through a worship ceremony. When he began to multiply himself by training teachers, he instructed them in how to connect themselves and their initiates to the tradition by offering this same worship, thus establishing the Holy Tradition ceremony in the West. By the 1970s thousands of TM teachers in America and Europe honored the Holy Tradition in a very unorthodox way. Not only were these teachers not Brahmins, they were not part of the varna/caste system at all. There were women as well as men, and their only qualification for becoming meditation teachers was that they had the time and money to spend three to six months in a "TM Teacher Training Course." Were they adhikarin, or spiritually prepared? Had they overcome desire, attained calmness and a spirit of renunciation? Many had been using psychedelic drugs just a year earlier. But their lack of training and discipline was made up for by their mumukshutva, their desire for liberation. In my own teacher-training course, someone asked Maharishi why so many of us had been foolish enough to take drugs. He responded, "Only he who runs risks falling."

Maharishi broke with tradition in other ways as well. His was not a path for renunciates. After coming to America in 1959, he often stated that by simply adding twenty minutes of meditation to one's daily routine, appreciation of worldly life would be enhanced. In this way, Maharishi seems to represent the Tantric tradition as much as the Vedic. The Tantric tradition, which was strong in India during the Middle Ages, reacted against renunciation and Brahmin elitism. It welcomed both women and lower castes. Its practitioners strove for both liberation (*mukti*) and worldly enjoyment (bhukti). The desirability of combining mukti and bhukti was precisely Maharishi's message to

the world. As he said to his Indian audience before embarking on his Western tour, his goal was to provide "a golden link to connect and harmonize materialism and spirituality."[5]

Maharishi once related a story in order to give credence to his double allegiance to the Shankaracharya tradition and to teaching meditation to the masses: He had been summoned to Guru Dev's deathbed where his guru told him, "Many people are dejected. There is a lack of energy in their minds. Their minds are not strong enough. What I have taught you also contains the knowledge of the technique for the householder [person who lives in the world], which has been misinterpreted and forgotten during the centuries."[6]

However, it seems unlikely that Guru Dev would have supported a mass movement to teach meditation to anyone who could pay, regardless of other qualifications. Guru Dev's refusal to ever accept donations, his lifestyle of extreme renunciation, and his hesitancy to become involved in the affairs of householders make it improbable that he would support a movement such as the one Maharishi created. Hindu tradition, though, accepts that a special relationship exists between guru and disciple that cannot be judged by those on the outside. It is impossible to say what transpired between Guru Dev and Maharishi. Yet, whether Guru Dev changed his attitude on his deathbed or whether he did not, it is plain that Maharishi viewed his mission as making meditation available to everyone, regardless of caste, gender, ethnicity, age, or previous preparation.

Guru Dev's successor, Swarupanand Saraswati, has taken strong issue with Maharishi's innovations and interpretations. He has argued that Maharishi should not have taught since he was not of the Brahmin caste, and he claimed that Guru Dev also would not approve of his teaching. In a 1992 interview with former TM practitioner Robert Kropinski, Swarupanand asserted, "In reality, preaching, initiating, guiding people engaged in spiritual pursuits, is the duty of those who are born in a Brahmin family. If he is a follower of Sanatan Dharma [eternal religion], he should not do what he is doing. This is against the orders of his Guru."[7] The Shankaracharya also condemned the TM technique itself, claiming it allowed the mind to wander. He opposed the idea that simply by providing the mind and body with a little peace, sins can be destroyed. In Swarupanand's own words,

> Anyone who comes to him [Maharishi], whether he is a meat-eater, or an alcoholic, he is initiated into dhyan [meditation]. . . Without accomplishing the kind of ability needed for meditation, if one meditates, it can be fatal. This is true, however, making the people who are physically very

> tired sit peacefully and make them do some yoga posture like shavaasan, etc. can provide temporary peace. But, such a process is not at all helpful in destroying our sins. This [TM] is a worldly Yoga. For people who are distressed by worldly objects, or by worldly problems, they can temporarily forget the world. However, even this much is not achieved if they sit without control over their minds.[8]

The Shankaracharya that Guru Dev purportedly named as his successor, Shantinand (d. 1997), was supportive of Maharishi, often appearing with him in public. He was later removed from office by the other Shankaracharyas due to "incompetence." Perhaps it was, in part, this very support for Maharishi that made the Shankaracharyas view him as incompetent. Regardless of the lack of support from the current Shankaracharyas, Maharishi honors their tradition every time TM is taught through the initiation ceremony.

Initiation into TM

TM is a simple form of meditation based on repeating a mantra silently. Maharishi taught that the meditator should be gentle and should not concentrate, which he said would cause strain and interrupt the natural process of transcending thought. The meditator should first become aware that thoughts come and go naturally in the mind. The mantra is then repeated in the same way that other thoughts are—with gentle effortlessness. When the meditator realizes that he or she has drifted away from thinking the mantra, one simply begins to think it again. The process of drifting away from the mantra to other thoughts and then coming back to it is considered part of meditation. The mind, according to Maharishi, finds delight in the "finer levels of the relative" as it relaxes with the process. There is some effort (but very little) involved in "picking up" the mantra. Maharishi called it "half-effort." This easy process is what the current Shankaracharya objects to because he believes it encourages the mind to wander.

Dr. Herbert Benson, one of the first people to conduct research on the benefits of TM (along with Dr. Keith Wallace), called this easy approach the "relaxation response." However, the TM movement ostracized Benson for using that term. Once a TM movement hero, Benson had gone astray by declaring that the "specially chosen mantra" given in TM initiation was not necessary. Any simple sound—for example "one"—could serve the same purpose. He also did not think the ceremony of worship (*puja*) that preceded initiation was necessary to derive benefit from meditation. Maharishi, on the

other hand, taught that both the mantra and the puja were essential. Without them, a person could not truly meditate. With them, however, we have a religion and not a "scientific technique."

When I first learned to meditate, I didn't care whether the process was religious. After being told in an introductory lecture that TM was a scientific process that would make me feel better, I went along with it because I desperately wanted to feel better. After the second introductory lecture, I was asked to bring a flower and a clean white handkerchief on the day of initiation. When I entered the room where instruction was to occur, gifts in hand, I was greeted by a strong waft of incense. I saw an altar, draped in white, adorned with flowers and a picture of Guru Dev. I listened, standing next to my instructor, as he performed a ceremony, singing in Sanskrit, waving incense, and offering the flower and cloth I had brought, along with other items, to the picture of Guru Dev. At the end of the ceremony, I was asked to kneel in front of the altar. None of this seemed scientific, but it didn't matter. The experience I had during my first meditation is what mattered. For the first time in my life, my mind settled down and my thoughts even stopped completely for a short period as I experienced an internal silence that was new to me. My thoughts and actions were undergirded by a sense of calm. Colors seemed brighter; life seemed easier—even enjoyable. I felt as though my life had taken a sharp turnabout, and I was happy with the new direction.

Two years later, while attending the TM Teacher Training Course in Vittel, France, the instructors taught that the motions—waving the lights, offering the flower—were ways of experiencing transcendence while in activity. It seemed to work. I always felt deep silence and peace while performing this puja ceremony. I dutifully told people in introductory lectures that TM was indeed scientific, not religious. I didn't feel as though I was lying because it just seemed to me a matter of semantics. Since every time I performed the ceremony, I felt peaceful, it was like I was performing a "repeatable experiment."

At the introductory lecture I attended before learning TM, the teacher told us that the mantra we were going to be given was specially chosen for us based on the private interview that occurred before instruction. However, during the TM teacher training the instructors revealed that the "specially chosen" mantra was selected simply by the age of the initiate. When I became a TM teacher, I also told new students that they were receiving a specially chosen mantra. Looking back at that time, I wonder why it didn't bother me more that I was lying. Perhaps I suppressed a feeling of guilt. I did think that the good that would come from teaching people to meditate infinitely outweighed the consequences of telling a little white lie.

The mantras used in TM come from the Tantric tradition. The two major streams through which spiritual knowledge is passed in the Hindu tradition are Vedic and Tantric. Both are based on very specific specialized rituals, and each has its own corpus of texts and mantras. The ninth-century reformer Adi Shankara attempted to bring the different sects of Hinduism together by establishing the Smarta tradition. This tradition, which is followed by the Shankaracharyas and their students today, worships five principle deities: Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganapati, and Devi along with a sixth, an impersonal God existing without form (*nirguna*). Scriptural authority for the idea of an impersonal God comes from the *Upanishads*, and authority for worshipping the five deities comes from the *Puranas.*

What is called Vedic in the Smarta tradition, and in much of Hinduism, is essentially Tantric in its range of deities and liturgical forms.[9] But because some Tantric traditions contain elements that transgress conventional morality, and because Tantric schools reject any connection with the Vedas, it was eschewed by the elite Hindu intelligentsia who reformulated Hinduism following colonialism. For this reason, a teacher in India who wants to be assured respectability must show how the dissemination of a new teaching or new scripture is connected to the Vedic tradition. This is precisely what Maharishi did by connecting Transcendental Meditation to the Shankaracharya tradition, which in turn connects itself to the Vedic tradition.

According to Alexis Sanderson, a Tantric traditions expert, the formal difference between Tantric and Vedic religious practice is found only in the mantras used: "This became the chief formal criterion: in Vedic worship the actions that compose the liturgy were empowered by the recitation of Vedic mantras drawn from the *Rig Veda* and *Yajurveda* rather than by that of the heterodox mantras of the Tantras."[9] When a tradition claims to be in the Vedic tradition but uses Tantric mantras, it reveals the influence of Tantra on that tradition. The bija ("seed") mantras used in TM are traditionally associated with particular deities and are used as a form of worship. The gods of Tantra are not Indra (the chief deity of the *Rig Veda*) or other deities in the Vedas, but are the very gods associated with the mantras given in TM initiation. For example, the mantra "klim" is associated with the goddess Kalika, a "yogini" who received special emphasis in the Kaula Tantric text called the *Kaula-jnana-nirnaya*.

While Guru Dev, and the Shankaracharyas in general, associate themselves with the orthodox Smarta and Vedic traditions, it is possible that they were and are practicing Tantra covertly. The Hinduism scholar Douglas Brooks, in his research in South India, discovered that many of the very orthodox

Smarta Brahmins were practicing Tantra.[10] Yet because of its unacceptability, it is often practiced in secret. Its popularity stems from its purported ability to grant practitioners occult powers. A disgruntled former devotee of Maharishi, Earl Kaplan (a multimillionaire who donated a great deal of money to the TM movement), asserts that Maharishi was one of those who practiced Tantra in secret. After breaking with the movement, Kaplan traveled to India, seeking to understand the source of Maharishi's power. He spoke to many people, including Shankaracharya Swarupanand, Guru Dev's nephew, and two swamis. Each of these individuals reported independently that Maharishi had taken a gold and jeweled *Shri Yantra* (Tantric mystical diagram) that Guru Dev had created, and then traveled around India until he found a Tantric specialist to instruct him in its use. If this is true, it would support the idea that Guru Dev himself was a Tantric practitioner. It should be noted that Maharishi traveled to the south of India where Smarta Brahmins were practicing Tantra. According to Kaplan, it is Maharishi's use of the Shri Yantra that gave him the power to evoke mystical experiences in initiates.

That initiates of TM often have powerful mystical experiences is undeniable. When I taught TM, I found that people always experienced an altered, peaceful state of consciousness upon their first meditation following the initiation ceremony. A few reported profoundly mystical experiences. In an extensive study of sixty-seven TM meditators conducted in Germany, many practitioners reported they had pleasant experiences, which led them to sign up for further courses that were purported to deepen the experience. Even though the study concluded that over time, people developed social and personal problems related to the practice of TM, the initial experience was positive and often contained mystical elements. One wrote that he experienced "colors, suspension, a blue lake, feelings of happiness, after that an explosion, shock, water, movement of sperm, standing in front of a golden statue, a great eye, a long canal, saw Indian gods, light, stars, cattle, unidentifiable beasts, tigers, lions, tubes unrolling, toward the end only negative and frightening forms, a mixture of wolf and bear."[11] One cannot help but wonder if experiences like this would have been elicited from repeating the word "one" in a laboratory setting. The description, with its many visions, is reminiscent of experiences that are reported to occur after kundalini awakening. People who practice TM sometimes experience movements, twitches, or shaking, which are also associated with kundalini awakening.

Besides the use of Tantric mantras, the puja ceremony, which Maharishi viewed as indispensable to teaching TM, may also play a role in creating mystical and kundalini experiences. Maharishi asserted that the ceremony—the

movements, the Sanskrit song, and the memory of great teachers that the song evoked—bring about profound changes in one's awareness, allowing the teacher to give the mantra to the initiate while in a state of "cosmic consciousness." It may also be that the initiate, participating in the ceremony by bringing offerings of fruit, flowers, and a white cloth and kneeling before the altar, has literally joined the lineage of the "Holy Tradition" at some level in a manner similar to the way initiates join the *kaula* or *kula* (clan; family) of the Tantric tradition. When a person joins a kula tradition (known as *shakta* traditions after the eleventh century) through initiation, he or she becomes a conduit for *dravyam,* a subtle force that is said to flow through a kula.[12] Dravyam is, literally, sexual fluid in left-handed Tantra. As Tantra enters the wider Hindu sphere through the worship of deities, particularly the male Shiva and female Shakti, a more diffuse "family" forms. The initiate into TM is brought into that same wider Hindu sphere through the worship of Guru Dev of the Shankaracharya tradition, who represents, according to the song that is chanted during initiation, "the glory of" Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. The initiator makes offerings to Guru Dev, sometimes literally, and other times symbolically through song, of a seat, an ablution, a cloth, sandal paste, rice, a flower, incense, light, water, fruit, a betel leaf, and a coconut. Maharishi taught that this ceremony, along with proper instruction in using the mantra, was the key to the initiate experiencing the transcendent during the first meditation.

The Shri Yantra mystical diagram of interconnected triangles representing the communion of male and female principles (Shiva and Shakti) that Maharishi allegedly stole is used in the worship of *Tripura Sundari*, one of a group of ten goddesses known as *mahavidyas.* Meditation on the Shri Yantra, also known as the *Shri Chakra*, combines the use of mantra and mental focus on the diagram.[13] Tripuri Sundari is sometimes represented as Shodashi, represented as a sixteen-year-old girl in sexual union with Shiva. An aspect of "left-handed tantra," involves sexual engagement of a siddha, a male Tantric practitioner, with a female partner for the purpose of gaining occult powers. David Gordon White, a scholar of Tantra, writes,

> [T]he ritual support of this meditation [on *Sri Yantra*, and particularly on the center of the diagram called the *kamakala*] is a maiden's naked body. Of course, in high Hindu Tantra, the flesh-and-blood maiden substrate is done away with, with the abstract schematic visualization sufficing for the refined practitioner. Yet she remains present, just beneath the surface of geometric and semantic abstraction, as such was effected in these later cosmeticized traditions.[14]

White states that a number of Shrividya commentators, "led by the venerable seventeenth-century master Bhaskararaya, insisted on the literal use of this meditation support."[15]

Whether Maharishi engaged in sexual Tantra would be impossible to say. That he did engage in sexual activity, although a declared celibate, has been reported from several sources. Earl Kaplan wrote, "I have spoken with old time skin boys (Maharishi's personal attendants) and old course participants who were involved with Maharishi sexually (verified by the old skin boys.)[so called because they carried the deer skin on which Maharishi sat]"[16] Another source spoke of being part of a private chat group in 2006 with former secretaries and skin boys from the sixties and seventies. He doubted the veracity of the allegations against Maharishi until talking to a good friend: "This time, it didn't involve names from the distant past, reported by one of the many disillusioned personal assistants to MMY [Maharishi]. This time it was someone I am personally acquainted with, a woman who still retains stature within the TMO [TM Organization]. She has absolutely nothing to gain by reporting an incident where MMY exposed himself and asked to be 'attended to' and everything to lose. This woman has been wrestling with conflicting feeling about this incident for years."[17] Dr. Connie Zweig, a Jungian therapist and former TM practitioner wrote, "A friend of mine was so distressed by these reports of hypocrisy [regarding sexual transgressions] that he traveled on his own to meet women who were allegedly involved. He returned to tell me that he was convinced that Maharishi had sexual liaisons with several followers and extracted vows of secrecy from them."[18] Linda Pearce claimed that Maharishi engaged in sexual intercourse with her repeatedly in India in 1969. She was sixteen and a virgin at the time it began, and he was sixty-eight. She stayed with the movement for many years and became a TM teacher because she was convinced that meditation could help people. Later in life she began to experience psychological problems. Her husband spoke to Maharishi about it: "When I confronted the Maharishi about sleeping with my wife he just laughed. She was having terrible psychological problems because of it but he said that I should take her to the psychiatrist. He never denied it."[19]

Allegations of sexual impropriety is a common theme in the phenomenon of Hindu gurus in the United States. Yogananda was also formally accused of impropriety by Swami Dhirananda in 1935 and Sri Nerode in 1940; these two men worked originally with Yogananda to spread Kriya Yoga. They were suing to gain their share of the partnership, but both spoke of the alleged impropriety because it was part of the reason they wanted to sever ties with Yogananda. Muktananda was also accused of sexual misconduct. If the

various allegations are true, whether male gurus engage in sex in order to increase their power through secret Tantric practices, or whether they are simply succumbing to the natural desires of a man cannot be determined. However, safeguards against abuse are slow in coming, as they were in the Roman Catholic Church, due to the exalted spiritual status of the potential perpetrators.

The 1970s: An Era of Change

The early 1970s was a time of great expansion for TM when nearly one million people began the practice. Maharishi himself appeared on the *Merv Griffin Show* in 1975, sparking great interest in meditation. TM teachers later referred to 1975 as the "Merv Wave." In that year, 292,517 people were initiated into the technique of Transcendental Meditation.[20] Close on the heels of involvement with Maharishi by the Beatles, Mia Farrow, Jane Fonda, and Joe Namath, a host of other celebrities began TM, including Mary Tyler Moore, Clint Eastwood, and the magician Doug Henning. In the decades following, other stars began TM, including actresses Laura Dern and Heather Graham, Nobel Prize–winning physicist Brian Josephson, New Age guru Deepak Chopra, and film director David Lynch. Even several senators and congressmen joined the TM bandwagon. The Students International Meditation Society had chapters on campuses throughout the United States by the early seventies. Maharishi's books could be found in every library and bookstore from New York to California to Florida. One interviewee said he learned about TM by reading a book by Maharishi he had picked up in a 7/11 convenience store in Nebraska. TM had infiltrated the heartland.

Maharishi stressed the benefits of TM, not only for the individual meditator but also for society as a whole. Idealistic TM teachers began to enthusiastically spread the social gospel of meditation, explaining to their audiences that only when individuals attained peace would the nations of the world come together to create a lasting condition of world peace. If only 1 percent of the world's population practiced TM, conflict would be replaced by harmony at every level of society.

A shift in terminology from religious to secular and scientific occurred in the 1970s. Maharishi established a course called The Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI), which was a requisite for becoming a teacher of TM. The purpose of the course, taught by Maharishi and distributed to TM Centers in the form of thirty-three videos, was to provide a theoretical underpinning to the experience of transcendence said to occur during meditation. According

to the movement's website, SCI is "a systematic investigation into the unified structure of Natural Law at the basis of creation, as brought to light by the unified field theories of modern quantum physics. SCI includes the study of universal principles common to all disciplines—how each discipline emerges and diversifies from its basis in this unified field, and how this unified field is identified with the consciousness of the student."[21] In 1971 TM held the first SCI symposium at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. It featured, among other speakers, philosopher, architect, and inventor Buckminster Fuller. An SCI symposium in 1972 highlighted renowned communication theorist Marshall McLuhan.

In 1971 Maharishi International University (MIU) was established in Santa Barbara, California. Then in 1973 TM purchased the abandoned Parsons College in the small town of Fairfield, Iowa, where MIU relocated and where it continues to function today under the name Maharishi University of Management (MUM). It offers thirteen undergraduate, nine Master's, and three PhD degree programs. The majors range from the traditional math, literature, and business to the anomalous "Maharishi Vedic Science." Maharishi School, also in Fairfield, began in 1974 as an elementary school, and in 1981 the Upper School was added. Today the junior and senior high schools are together accredited as a college preparatory school, and a large percentage of its graduates are accepted at four-year colleges and universities.

The boom of the early seventies ended by 1976, and enrollment in the basic Transcendental Mediation course drastically declined. More gurus were coming to the States at this time, so there was more competition. Enrollment may also have fallen off because the people who were inclined to meditate had already begun the practice. While Maharishi had always maintained that meditating twice a day was sufficient for a person to attain enlightenment and that peace and well-being were available to any region where 1 percent of the population meditated, in 1976 the focus of the movement shifted. Maharishi's organization began to teach a new technique called the TM-Siddhi technique (spelled "Sidhi" by the TM movement) and advertised that it would accelerate the attainment of enlightenment. The new formula for bringing peace to an area changed from that 1 percent of a population practicing TM to the square root of 1 percent of the population practicing the TM-Sidhi program together daily. The TM organization commissioned studies to show the correlation. A TM website states, "Time-series analysis showed that during three experimental periods, in Iowa, Holland, and Washington DC, when the number of experts in the TM and TM-Sidhi programs

The Dome where practitioners of the TM-Sidhi program gather daily. Fairfield, Iowa. (Photo courtesy of Tom Boettcher)

approached or surpassed 7000 (approximately the square root of 1 percent of the world's population), there were significant global reductions in international conflicts as measured by content analysis of major newspapers.[22]

The TM-Sidhi technique is based on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* (ca. 100 BCE–500 CE), a foundational text of "yoga," one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. "Sutra" refers to a short, pithy statement that often requires commentary to make it intelligible. Maharishi taught that supernatural abilities can be developed by practicing *samyama,* or constraint. In classical Raja Yoga ("kingly yoga") based on the *Yoga Sutra,* the process of samyama combines three parts: *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. Dharana could be translated as concentration or single-mindedness. It involves holding the mind's attention on some object, like a mantra or a candle flame. Dhyana is attained when the mind flows consistently toward the object without interruption. Finally, samadhi, or complete union, is achieved. This union may be with the object of focus or with the transcendent absolute. In either case, one's ego, or source of limitation, is dissolved. The *Yoga Sutra* acknowledges that through samyana, a yogi can attain certain siddhis, or powers. However, the text also warns that the pursuit of siddhis may distract the yogi from the true goal of yoga, which is liberation from the vicissitudes of *prakriti*, or primal nature.

Meditating in the Dome. The floor of the Dome is cushioned with mattresses in order to facilitate a "soft landing." (Photo courtesy of Eric Faveeuw)

Maharishi taught that dharana consisted of a brief fixation of attention on a verse (sutra) from the *Yoga Sutra*; dhyana of focus on the purpose of the sutra; and samadhi of the experience of the small self being engulfed by the object of focus. "Citizens," that is, TM practitioners who are not also teachers of TM, receive a slightly different version of the technique than "governors," or TM teachers, but the difference is negligible. The technique involves repeating chosen sutras mentally every fifteen seconds. Each sutra is repeated twice. There are eighteen of these sutras, each repeated with a different goal in mind. One such goal is friendliness, attained by repeating the word "friendliness;" another goal is knowledge of the motion of the stars, attained by repeating "polestar;" yet another goal is omniscience, attained by repeating "distinction between intellect and transcendence." Levitation, or flying, comes after the eighteenth sutra, and is said to be attained by repeating, "relationship of body and akasha (ether)—lightness of cotton fiber." The "flying sutra" is done for five to thirty minutes, depending on a person's available time. When this is completed, the meditator is instructed to lie down

and rest for ten to thirty minutes and then read from an English translation of the Rig ("Rik" with TM spelling) Veda for ten minutes.

Many report that practicing the TM-Sidhi program brings greater inner peace and joy than practicing just TM. I have not spoken with anyone, nor have I heard of anyone, who has developed omniscience or supernormal strength or the ability to walk through walls using these sutras. No one has demonstrated levitating or flying, but only "hopping"—that is, coming off the floor and moving forward in space a short distance from a seated cross-legged position without using the hands or arm muscles to push. More emphasis is given to the flying sutra than to any of the other sutras. Pictures of people taken while off the floor were used in advertisements for the TM-Sidhi program. Why Maharishi decided to place so much emphasis on yogic flying is open to speculation, but it is possibly connected to an undeclared focus on Tantra. According to the Tantra expert David Gordon White, the goal of Tantric practice of the "left-hand" type is the development of occult powers known as siddhis, and most particularly the siddhi of flying.[23] For many TM practitioners this new development was viewed as another step in Maharishi's unfolding plan to enlighten the world. Others, however, saw the *sidhi* program, as well as the many other "advanced techniques" offered around this time, as a ploy to increase income after TM's popularity had begun to wane. Charlie Lutz, the former president of Maharishi's early Spiritual Regeneration Movement, thought that the motivation for the TM-Sidhi program was financial.[24]

In 1976 Maharishi conducted a one-year course for some of his TM teachers in Seelisberg, Switzerland. The participants in this course were given several new techniques to try out, almost as if the course were a lab experiment. While the course was going on, Maharishi invited Muktananda, the guru of Siddha Yoga, to visit. Maharishi and Muktananda were possibly the two most popular "global gurus" at that time. Each claimed to be bringing about a revolution in world consciousness, but otherwise the two teachers seemed to have little in common. Each had his own style of teaching and his own theory of the best way to attain enlightenment. Maharishi stressed "techniques" and scientific verification of those techniques. Muktananda stressed devotion to the guru (i.e., to Muktananda) and spontaneous meditation that occurred in his presence, claiming that Western science granted only superficial knowledge compared to the knowledge attained through yoga. Maharishi spoke softly, walked slowly, and giggled. Muktananda told jokes, walked like a triathlon athlete, and guffawed. Maharishi dressed in white robes and carried a flower. Muktananda wore sunglasses and an orange ski cap. Both

were believed to have attained the highest level of spiritual development by their followers.

As the two met in front of their disciples, Maharishi introduced Muktananda with a few brief comments and then Muktananda spoke while Maharishi sat quietly to the side. Muktananda and his followers then chanted the *Guru Gita,* a text that praises the guru, while Maharishi and his followers listened. Then, very abruptly, Muktananda got up from where he was sitting, went over to Maharishi, sat down next to him and gave him a big bear hug. This was not out of character for Muktananda, who was known to grab people's noses or stick his finger in a person's ear, all with the purpose of enlivening spiritual energy, but this gesture was apparently quite shocking for followers of Maharishi, who always kept their distance from their master. The two gurus then whispered words to each other and left the stage together. Maharishi's followers sat quietly, as was their custom, while Muktananda's disciples scrambled to follow them, some of them climbing over chairs, in order to get close enough to Muktananda to experience his shakti-filled aura.

While Maharishi always claimed that his teachings are based on "Vedic science" and scriptures, Muktananda unabashedly touted his foundation in Tantra, and particularly the form of Tantra known as Kashmir Shaivism, a philosophical system that proffers that everything in the universe is a form of conscious energy called *chiti*. Muktananda called himself a siddha (i.e., a person who has attained siddhis, supernatural powers, or a "perfected being"). He often told stories about the living siddhas he had known in India and the siddhas he had visited in the astral realm of *siddha-loka* (the world of the siddhas).

The meeting between Muktananda and Maharishi took place in 1976, the same year that Maharishi introduced the TM-Sidhi program. This may be only coincidental. On the other hand, there may have been more to the meeting between the two gurus than what their followers saw. Indeed the entire quality of the practices that Maharishi's followers performed in groups changed drastically that year. They became exactly like the quality of the group practices of followers of Muktananda. I experienced Muktananda's group "Intensives," in which *shaktipat*, the awakening of kundalini, took place, and I also witnessed friends performing the TM-Sidhi program. Before 1976, TM practitioners were very reserved in their practice and behavioral style. In imitation of their guru, TM teachers often spoke quietly and walked slowly. In the sixties, some of them even grew beards and wore white robes. When the dress code was instigated in the 1970s, the men cut their hair, shaved their beards, and donned cream-colored suits. Women often wore saris when tak-

ing courses, and dresses or long skirts when they were teaching. After 1976 when the TM-Sidhi program began, they kept the suits and the skirts, but the quiet, orderly group practice broke out in pure pandemonium.

The experiences and behavior that followers of the two gurus share could be attributed to kundalini awakening. The inner experience of kundalini awakening is usually blissful and often accompanied by inner visions and sounds. The outer manifestations include movements such as twitching, shaking, and hopping, as well as sounds such as roaring like a lion, tweeting like a bird, laughing, crying, and screaming. All of these are considered manifestations of kundalini shakti, who is spoken of in Tantric scriptures as a goddess. She is said to dwell within the subtle body of human beings in the area that corresponds to the base of the spine until "awakened" by spiritual practices or by contact with a guru. Muktananda was known as a "shaktipat guru," that is, one who awakens the kundalini shakti in his disciples. The knowledge of how to give shaktipat is passed from guru to guru, but it is a secret well kept from the general public. Traditionally, it is given to a disciple after years of continuous instruction in yoga and meditation, but Muktananda gave it en masse to anyone who wanted it. Maharishi never said he was giving shaktipat to his disciples—in fact, he forbade his disciples from using the word kundalini—but after his meeting with Muktananda, the manifestation of kundalini shakti was evident. It is possible that these manifestations occurred from thinking the words "friendliness" and "light as fiber cotton," but there is no evidence from the yoga literature of India that samyama causes people to scream or shake. This results rather from the awakening of kundalini. While Maharishi couched everything he taught in either "scientific" or "Vedic" terminology, even a brief perusal of the *Yoga Sutra* reveals that it has nothing to do with either science or Vedic knowledge. It appears that Maharishi used a text from the yoga tradition in a completely original way in an effort to make his students fly: the primary goal of the Tantric siddha tradition.

Maharishi directed initiates of the flying technique to read the Ninth Mandala of the *Rig Veda* after they completed their flying program each day. This *mandala* (chapter) discusses the creation of *Soma*, a magical chemical that induces a blissful experience. The *Rig Veda* describes the process of making soma by grinding a plant or by feeding the plant to a cow and then drinking its milk or urine. Maharishi told a group of "governors" that the purpose of reading this chapter was to feed the Soma they had created in their guts to the Vedic gods—particularly Indra. In return for this "food," the gods would grant the boons of happiness, prosperity, and supernatural powers. While the *Rig* and *Sama Vedas* do talk about the bliss that occurs from drinking Soma

(perhaps a drug made from mushrooms), it does not talk about the gods feeding on it in the stomachs of people who practice meditation. The Vedic gods were believed to feed on oblations made to a fire (*yajña*) in exchange for boons. The exchange of fluid for boons, although not part of Vedic religion, is characteristic of Tantric religion.[25]

In 1986, a disgruntled former meditator sued the TM movement for psychological damage. In a videotape played in the Kropinski trial,[26] Maharishi is recorded as saying, "Who deserves to drink Soma? The Gods drink Soma. . . .That is the chemical which works on the most refined level of our structure." Later in the video he says, "But the experiments in this field are very, very interesting for us to go more and more and maybe we here have started that the reality of Soma is described in the Ninth Verse of *Rig Veda*—Ninth Chapter."[27] Creating Soma for gods appears to be one more experiment in Maharishi's lab of consciousness.

Scientific Research

TM's success in the seventies was due in part to Maharishi's emphasis on scientific verification of its benefits. Wallace and Benson's first study on Transcendental Meditation, "A Wakeful Hypometabolic Physiologic State," was published in the *American Journal of Physiology* in 1971, and one year later Wallace became the founding president of Maharishi International University. In 1972 the two scientists again joined forces to write "The Physiology of Meditation," which was published by *Scientific American*. In these and in subsequent studies, they documented electrophysiological and biochemical changes that they posited accompany a fourth state of consciousness called "transcendental consciousness." Benson eventually left the TM movement to continue research on his newly nomenclatured "relaxation response." Wallace continued to conduct studies under the auspices of the TM movement and began making some bold claims. For example, in a study presented at the 26th International Congress of Physiological Sciences in New Delhi, India, in 1974, Wallace asserted that TM could actually reverse the aging process. Using the measurements of blood pressure, near-point vision, and auditory discrimination, Wallace claimed that long-term meditators who had been practicing TM for more than five years were physiologically twelve years younger than their chronological age. This study was not published in a scientific peer-reviewed journal, however, but by MIU Press (later MUM Press), as were almost all of the thousands of studies done on the effects of TM.

Wallace was joined by Dr. John Hagelin, a physicist who had taught at Stanford University before joining the faculty of MUM, and others in continued research on the benefits of TM. When the flying technique emerged, TM movement scientists extended their research to include the "brain coherence" that occurs during yogic flying. They also researched the "Maharishi Effect," which posits that if the square root of 1 percent of a population were to perform the flying program together as a group, the coherence created would have a positive effect on the surrounding environment, reducing crime rates, and the like. These studies have come under attack from scientists outside of the TM movement.

One criticism is that the researcher's belief in TM creates an expectancy that can influence the outcome of the study. Another criticism is that subjects in the study chose to begin TM and this pre-selection can have an effect on the outcome. There is the possibility that meditators have positive results because they expect positive results, regardless of the technique used. The psychologist and founder of the Stress Research Institute, Jonathan C. Smith, demonstrated the correlation of pre-selection with positive results. Using equivalent expectancy controls, Smith showed that a person's predisposition toward anxiety is not reduced by the practice of TM per se, but is reduced by sitting with closed eyes in conjunction with an expectation of relief.[28] The fact that TM studies often do not contain a control group constitutes a third criticism.

Several former professors of MIU/MUM have testified against the research practices conducted at the university. Anthony DeNaro, former professor of economics and business law and director of grants administration at MIU, signed an affidavit in 1986 as part of the Robert Kropinski case, in which a former MUM student sued the movement for psychological damages incurred while at MUM. In the affidavit, DeNaro alleged "a very serious and deliberate pattern of fraud, designed . . . to misrepresent the TM movement as a science (not as a cult), and fraudulently claim and obtain tax exempt status with the IRS." He also stated, "A simple review of internal correspondence reflects the inconsistency between the outward, sanitized, 'safe' public image they try to present, and the frequently dangerous reality of TM-Sidhi techniques."[29] Dr. Dennis Roark, former MIU Dean of Faculty and chair of the department of physics (1975–80), was witness to routine suppression of negative data collected in movement research studies. In a letter written in 1987 Roark stated, "It is my certain belief that the many scientific claims both to factual evidences of unique, beneficial effects of T.M. and physics are not only without any reasonable basis, but are in fact in many ways fraudulent."

As an example, he had questioned Dr. Michael Dillbeck, a faculty member at MIU involved in a study on the increased brain wave coherence purported to occur in people practicing the flying technique. Roark knew that it was impossible to make EEG measurements while the subject was moving. Dillbeck confirmed that, indeed, it was and is impossible. Roark questioned other investigators regarding the alleged reduction in crime if enough people practice TM or the TM-Sidhi program. The investigators confirmed that they had suppressed negative evidence and that only data that supported favorable conclusions were used.[30]

Maharishi and the TM movement have also made bold claims about the beneficial effects of a variety of trademarked techniques and therapies. These include "Jyotish Gems" and astrological consultations based on Vedic astrology, "Maharishi Vedic Vibration Technology" (a form of faith healing), the performance of "yagyas" (yajña-Vedic fire ceremony) for specific worldly benefits, Vedic architectural designs (*sthapatya*) for homes and offices, and ayurvedic healing clinics. All of these methods and systems together are referred to as "Vedic science."

Maharishi's leitmotif throughout all of this experimentation was a concern for bringing together the ultimate values of the material and the spiritual realms. Some of the movement's scientists, such as Dr. Hagelin, have developed a unified field theory based on discoveries in quantum mechanics. His Supersymmetric Flipped SU(5) theory was once a contender for a grand unified field theory. Hagelin continues to assert that he has discovered a "unified field theory" that connects consciousness and quantum mechanics, which he says has a practical application with the practice of TM and the TM-Sidhi techniques. According to Hagelin, human beings can control gravity and matter since they arise out of a field of consciousness to which we have direct access through TM. The Maharishi Effect finds support, according to Hagelin, with Einstein's "spooky action at a distance," wherein a wave function collapses all over the universe when it is observed and, in the process of observation, becomes a particle the size of the detector and can be located in space and time. This has been used by "quantum mystics" to assert that the mind "creates reality." A more recent contender for the wave-particle duality theory is "decoherence," which makes the subjective observer irrelevant to the process of "wave collapse." For example, gamma rays going through the air will scatter (decohere) air molecules, and the scattering is like making a measurement.[31] In any case, Dr. Hagelin's credentials make him a popular spokesperson for TM and the TM-Sidhi techniques, and Maharishi made use of that reputation. John Hagelin is currently president of the

United States Peace Government and Prime Minister of Science and Technology of the Global Country of World Peace. He ran for president of the United States three times under the Natural Law Party in 1992, 1996, and 2000. Since Maharishi's death, Hagelin has overseen many of the practical matters associated with the TM movement.

Whenever movement scientists claimed correlations between different fields or between macro- and microlevels of phenomena, Maharishi was delighted. Thus, when Dr. Tony Nader wrote his *Human Physiology: Expression of Veda and the Vedic Literature,* which claimed correlations between the human body, the "forty aspects of Vedic literature," and the planets of the solar system and other celestial bodies, Maharishi was pleased enough to declare that Dr. Nader was worth his weight in gold—literally. Telecast on satellite to followers of TM, Maharishi held an elaborate ceremony in his throne room in the Netherlands in which Dr. Nader sat on a scale surrounded by floral arrangements and baskets of fruit while two men slowly piled bricks of gold on the other side of the scale. Dr. Nader's paperback book is available for $450.

Conclusion

Fairfield, Iowa, is the home of Maharishi University of Management (MUM), and Heavenly Mountain, in North Carolina, was the home of Mother Divine, the "nuns" of the TM movement, and the Thousand-Headed Purusha, the "monks." In both locations, I met and interviewed wonderful people and visited the beautiful homes that had been built using the guidelines for Vedic Sthapatya architecture. I met business managers, teachers, artists, and doctors, all of whom seemed to have genuinely benefited from their involvement with the TM movement.

On the other hand, studies have shown that long-term involvement with TM may be psychologically and/or socially damaging, particularly for those who attend long retreat-type courses. TM and its movement appear to help and gratify some people while leaving others not only dissatisfied, but possibly socially or psychologically weakened. Leon S. Otis, for example, published an article in *Psychology Today*, (April 1974) that summarized a study on meditation done by the Stanford Research Institute. The article briefly mentioned that TM may be harmful for "some people." Following its publication the author received communication from former meditators complaining about the adverse effects of TM. This prompted him to pursue survey research on TM that pointed to a statistically significant increase in

psychological problems (anxiety, confusion, depression, withdrawal, etc.) in slightly less than half of the 1,900 subjects. These negative qualities appeared to increase over time. The survey also showed that people who stopped meditating had fewer negative consequences from the practice than those who continued.[32] The TM organization, like all of the HIMMs discussed in this book, sidesteps the issue of potential problems that the techniques or the organization may elicit. Certainly TM has benefited many people, but idealism about TM's benefits prevents leaders in the movement from taking the same precautions against possible injury or abuse that other organizations take.

The case of a murder that took place on the MUM campus in 2003 provides an example of the potentially damaging results of the belief in the perfectibility of humans. Shuvender Sem, a student with severe psychosis, stabbed another student, Levi Butler, with a knife that had been stolen from the kitchen of the dean of men while the dean, who was supposed to be keeping an eye on him, was meditating. Five hours earlier Sem had stabbed a fellow student with a pen, puncturing him several times. After the first incident, students, faculty, and campus security were not alerted about the student, nor was the incident reported to the police. MUM administrators, likely in an attempt to avert negative publicity, decided to handle the case internally. They believed that Sem's problem was that he was not meditating properly. Their evaluation and lack of proper cautionary actions cost the life of Levi Butler. On July 20, 2004, the district judge of Jefferson County, Iowa, declared that Sem, who was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, was incompetent to stand his murder trial and ordered that he be placed in a mental health treatment program.

The naïveté evident in trusting adults with young children without other adult observers, which has proven to be disastrous in religious groups such as the Hare Krishna organization and the Roman Catholic Church, has shown its face with the TM movement as well. Firsthand accounts of sexual and physical abuse can be found on websites critical of the TM movement. The philosophy that Maharishi taught, which included the assumption that meditators would continually grow in psychological and physical health, has led some to avoid psychological counseling, even when it was sorely needed. The belief in the perfection of the guru and the growing perfection of those who practice TM led to a somewhat unsophisticated and trusting culture that avoided addressing issues of safety. A similar uncritical attitude led to trusting that scientific data would not be manipulated in the hands of scientists who were also TM practitioners.

Extremely hierarchical decision-making that often accompanies the guru-disciple relationship can create an unhealthy organizational climate. Maharishi was openly critical of democracy in his later years and tried to create his own governmental system based on the authoritarian model of kingship. The isolation and protection of a guru—or a king—from normal checks and balances sets up a society rife with problems unless that guru or king truly *is* perfect, which is what followers of HIMMs want to believe is possible.

My own experience with TM was positive, but I was involved in what some TM teachers now call the "good old days," before several levels of secrecy and hierarchy had developed. Even some of those interviewees who were very sure of their relationship with Maharishi had doubts about his behavior and found it necessary to maintain psychological distance from the TM organization in order to sustain their positive image of it. Some disciples believe that to look at the flaws of the organization or of Maharishi would be detrimental to their growth on the spiritual path. Indeed, the philosophy of the perfection of the guru was such a part of my own thinking that it took several years of examining facts for me to develop a healthy, critical attitude toward Maharishi. At the same time, I am grateful to Maharishi for bringing the gift of meditation to America.

5

Siddha Yoga

"Be with Baba!" the large bold headlines of a newspaper-style encyclical read. Below the caption, a large picture of a bearded man with sunglasses and an orange ski cap smiled at me. I read every article, most of them testimonies about the power of shaktipat. Apparently, "Baba" (an endearing term that people used for Muktananda that means "Father") could, by simply touching people, catapult them into another realm of consciousness. One person wrote that he could literally see through other people—their veins and arteries and internal organs were all visible. Someone else was reportedly able to see through a wall, others had inner visions. Most experienced "bliss," a term used often by followers of HIMMs that refers to the most profound happiness and peace imaginable. Whatever shaktipat was, it piqued my interest, and it wasn't long before I was headed for South Fallsburg, a small town in upstate New York, home of the main ashram for Siddha Yoga in the United States, to see Muktananda in person and experience shaktipat myself.

When I entered the hall where Muktananda was leading an "Intensive," a weekend event in which he gave shaktipat, I immediately felt a strong energy difficult to describe, although I later learned to call it shakti. People were singing a slow dirgelike mantra, *om namah shivaya,* "I bow to Shiva." We all sat close together on the floor facing Muktananda, who sat in the front. He gave talks about kundalini and the guru-disciple relationship, while an elegant young woman translated. I remember she was dressed in a turquoise form-fitting silk suit with a long skirt. She was beautiful with large, dark eyes and shining, black hair. However, it wasn't her outward appearance that struck me as much as her inner poise. I was mesmerized by her gracefulness. This was Malti Shetty, whom Muktananda later named as one of his successors.

The talks were interspersed with periods of chanting and hour-long meditations. One of the chants was called the *Kundalini Stavah,* (*Hymn to Kundalini*), which was sung to invoke the goddess Kundalini, the powerful goddess worshipped by Shakta Tantrics. This hymn praises her with many epithets,

including "the illuminator of the Kali aspect of Shakti," and "the pure goddess who both procures everything for her devotees and burns those who become adverse to her." She is conceived as a serpent lying coiled three times in the subtle body in the area that corresponds to the base of the spine. When "awakened" she is believed to travel up the sushumna, a column in the subtle body that corresponds to the spine, until she reaches the sahasrara, or thousand-petaled lotus, where she joins in union with her consort, Shiva. I knew nothing of this imagery at the time since I did not have the translation of the hymn. I was just struggling along, trying to follow the Sanskrit words.

By the time I left that Intensive, I felt like a different person than the one who had arrived at the ashram just three days earlier. I returned home to my normal duties as a mother and housewife, but all the activities I performed seemed infused with a sense of holiness. I felt as though cooking dinner was an act of worship, and when I bathed my two young daughters, it was as if God was giving God a bath. My experience was not uncommon. Muktananda affected thousands of people in a similar way. Lives were very literally transformed overnight. Muktananda was known as a *sadguru,* which means a "true guru." He did not teach a technique but gave those who came to him a direct experience of a profound state of awareness. Because his power to effect transformation was undeniable, it was hard for those of us who later learned of physical and sexual abuses he allegedly perpetrated to accept what was and go on with our lives. Although the evidence seems overwhelming that he did, in fact, abuse people, many still refuse to acknowledge it. Others examine the evidence and accept it as the mysterious work of a sadguru, which lies beyond the comprehension of normal human understanding. Still others feel that gurus and gurus' institutions should be given the same critical scrutiny afforded other leaders and institutions, which is that abusive behavior should be investigated through the legal channels of the state.

The history of Siddha Yoga in America can be divided into four phases. The first phase occurred from the time of Muktananda's first visit to the United States in 1970 until his death in 1981. The second phase took place during the reign of Muktananda's two successors: Nityananda (not to be confused with Muktananda's predecessor, who was also named Nityananda) and Gurumayi Chidvilasananda. This phase lasted from 1981 until Nityananda's ousting in 1985. The third phase encompassed a period of expansion as Gurumayi, now a solo guru, continually gathered more disciples until 1994, when an incriminating article, which highlighted allegations of financial, physical, and sexual abuse by individuals within Siddha Yoga's organization, was published in the *New Yorker* magazine. The fourth stage marks Siddha Yoga's gradual decline

in popularity, which began in 1994 and intensified after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The resulting downturn in the overall economy reduced income to SYDA (Siddha Yoga Dham Associates). In addition, the availability of negative information on the Internet and Gurumayi's almost total lack of contact with her disciples since 2004 also had an effect on the organization. Shortly after the turn of the new millennium, the South Fallsburg ashram, for so many years the mecca for Siddha Yoga practitioners, was closed to visitors. It is still open to "long-term retreat personnel"—essentially those needed to conduct the business of maintaining SYDA. There are 125 centers worldwide (reduced from the former 550), 42 of which are in the United States. Informal "meditation and chanting groups" that meet in people's homes offer another venue for followers of Siddha Yoga. But the numbers who attend the remaining centers and other groups are greatly reduced from what they once was at the time of Siddha Yoga's height of popularity in the eighties and early nineties.

Phase I: Muktananda and the Shaktipat Craze

Muktananda embarked on his first world tour in 1970 when he was sixty-two years old, traveling to Italy, France, Switzerland, England, the United States, Australia, and Singapore. He made a second world tour from 1974 to 1976 and a final tour from 1978 to 1981. Like Maharishi, whose inspiration to teach throughout the world came from his guru, so Muktananda indicated that his inspiration to leave India was due to a command he received from his guru.

The Siddha Yoga movement considers its lineage to begin with Nityananda (d. 1961) and to continue with Muktananda (1908–82), and to end—at least for now—with the current guru, Gurumayi (b. 1954). Muktananda asserted that Nityananda, on his deathbed, transferred the power of the lineage to him when he stuck his hand into his mouth. Nityananda was known for behaving in unconventional ways: he threw stones at his devotees, and sometimes ate cow dung, so sticking his hand in Muktananda's mouth to convey grace would not be unusual. Bizarre behavior is commonplace among siddhas, people who have accomplished the goal of attaining unity awareness. In an interview in 1980, Muktananda is quoted as saying, "a Guru has a bundle that has been passed through the lineage, and usually when he is about to leave his body, he gives it to his disciple." The interviewer then asked Muktananda whether a guru gives his final gift to only one or to several people. Muktananda replied, "He gives perfection to many, but he gives the final bundle to only one."[1] (Muktananda contradicted this statement shortly after this by

naming two successors) As is usually the case when gurus die, several new lineages began, each claiming Nityananda as their source. The trustees of Nityananda's Samadhi Shrine in India do not consider Muktananda to be his successor, although they have printed a book listing Muktananda as one of three "chief disciples."[2]

Little is known about the background of Nityananda, referred to among Siddha Yoga devotees as Bade Baba ("Big Father"). He lived as a child in South India but later took up residence in Ganeshpuri, Maharashtra, a small village not far from Mumbai. Anecdotes circulate about his life, but it is difficult to separate historical fact from hagiography. He is considered by his disciples to have come into this world as a self-realized being rather than having attained realization through spiritual practices under the tutelage of a guru. According to Muktananda, Nityananda submitted himself as a youth to an accomplished Brahmin yogi named Ishwara Iyer merely to fulfill a spiritual law, and not because he needed instruction.[3] There is also evidence that Nityananda spent time in his early life in the ashram of a Tantric guru, Swami Shivananda.[4] A picture of Nityananda circulates among Siddha Yoga devotees in which Nityananda, looking to be about twenty years old, is seated on the lap of his Tantric guru.

Muktananda worshipped Nityananda as a manifestation of God. This kind of Guru Yoga became a major focus for Siddha Yoga devotees during Muktananda's lifetime. The relationship in Guru Yoga is between guru and *disciple* or *devotee,* not between guru and *student*, as it would later become during a significant shift in Gurumayi's leadership when she specifically directed her followers to use the term "student." Gurumayi appears to have made this change in terminology so that her followers would take more responsibility for directing their own lives. She also seemed to be trying to take attention away from outer displays of devotion to her. The "path" became increasingly one of study and self-reflection under her leadership rather than the Guru Yoga that was practiced in Muktananda's time. Muktananda often reiterated that the higher one considers the guru to be, the higher one's own state of consciousness would become. Therefore, the guru is considered the highest God in the path of Siddha Yoga. The philosophy remains a part of Siddha Yoga today, even if it is less emphasized.

Muktananda said of his own guru, "There was no duality or nonduality, grasping or renunciation, no personal or social distinctions, no feeling of religion or no religion. He was always in the intoxicated state beyond thought."[5] Muktananda identified with his guru's state by meditating on his own body, touching different parts of it while repeating to himself that

it was Nityananda's arms, legs, and the like that he was touching. Later he would advise his own disciples to meditate on his own form in a similar way. *Gurubhava,* or feeling of identity with the guru, is believed to lead to union with Shiva. If the guru is identified with Shiva, and the devotee identifies with the guru, then the devotee too feels one with Shiva, the supreme Lord of Tantra. Muktananda described his final visionary realization in his autobiography as seeing his guru in the midst of spreading blue rays of light. When he looked again, Nityananda had changed into Lord Shiva, who stood in front of him holding a trident, which is part of Shiva's iconography. When he looked yet again, he saw his own form within this field of blue light. Then he saw Nityananda again and then again Shiva. Suddenly the blue light contracted into a tiny "blue pearl," which merged into his sahasrara, a field of energy just above the head. Then something else happened to which the reader is not privy. Muktananda wrote, "Here I have not revealed a supreme secret because Gurudev [Nityananda] does not command me to do so, God does not wish it, and the Siddhas do not instruct me to write it."[6]

Muktananda considered Shiva's masculine energy to be no different from Shiva's feminine energy, called shakti. As we have seen, shakti is sometimes referred to as kundalini, Shiva's creative energy. Kundalini-shakti is greatly revered in the path of Siddha Yoga. It is she who is believed to be "awakened" through the process of shaktipat, or the descent of grace bestowed upon an initiate. According to Siddha Yoga philosophy, shaktipat is the beginning of a path of spontaneous yoga that culminates in enlightenment. Muktananda often assured his followers that they would travel along the same path that he had followed after he received shaktipat from Nityananda. He also told them that he would guide their process toward enlightenment, just as Nityananda had guided his. This guidance was understood to occur on an inner subtle level, and may or may not be also accompanied by outer guidance. Once a guru bestows shaktipat, guru and disciple are believed to be forever connected.

During Muktananda's time as guru, the Siddha Yoga path consisted, more than anything else, of complete surrender and devotion to him. Just as he had attained his goal through meditating on, serving, and obeying Nityananda, so Muktananda's disciples would attain the same goal through unquestioning surrender. For many this did not require effort, for Muktananda's charisma was so strong that people wanted to serve him and after meeting him, often left their former lives to live in an ashram. They worshipped him as God and believed that the Siddha Yoga path would unfold spontaneously if they maintained a strong connection to Muktananda and to his guru, Nityananda.

My own experience is typical of many who were pulled into the energy vortex that existed around Muktananda. Intensives with Baba were aptly named because they were, if nothing else, intense. During meditation Baba walked around the room and first brushed people with a wand of peacock feathers that was heavily perfumed with heena, an Indian scent that I had never encountered before. For years, whenever I smelled this scent, I was taken back to the strong feeling of shakti that was so palpable at Intensives. I remember sitting with my eyes closed, hearing the feathers, "swoosh, swoosh," and smelling the scent of the perfume growing stronger as he approached. After brushing people with the feathers, he would touch them, usually between the eyebrows, but sometimes other places as well—at the base of the spine, for example. As he walked through the dark room, people began to make noises that were reminiscent of animal sounds. Some people laughed; others sobbed uncontrollably. Every now and then, a piercing scream could be heard. People also found their bodies moving in different ways.

All of these sounds and motions are called *kriyas,* which literally means actions. This is the same word that Yogananda's lineage used to describe their yoga. In both cases, the kriya is an action, whether physical—such as sitting in a certain posture—or subtle—such as seeing an inner light.

Kriyas are discussed in Hatha Yoga literature, and performing them is said to help arouse spiritual energy, as they do in the Self-Realization Fellowship path. In the Siddha Yoga path, however, kriyas are not consciously directed but occur spontaneously. I sometimes experienced my tongue curling back and going up into my throat. My hands often took different positions that I later learned were *mudras,* hand positions discussed in classical literature of yoga. My head sometimes turned rapidly from side to side; my eyes also rolled around in a circle, looking up, then to one side, down, and then to the other side. I experienced spontaneous *pranayama,* or breath control exercises. I would breathe rapidly and forcefully and then push all the air out and sit without breathing for some time. While all of these things were going on, I felt an inner peace and silence. Sometimes the kriyas would cease, and I would fall into the deepest stillness I had ever known. Some kriyas occurred every time I meditated and also when I was asleep. I would wake up and find myself performing hand gestures while singing in a language unknown to me, or perhaps it was just gibberish. At these times, I felt as if I were a goddess, and pure energy was flowing through me. Sometimes I would wake up to find myself in a complicated yoga posture that I never could have accomplished in the waking state. Over the years, these kinds of experiences lessened even though I continued to feel peaceful whenever I

meditated. In his autobiography Muktananda describes the different kriyas a person may have:

> Sometimes he will shout, or the different parts of his body will start to move. He may hop like a frog, spin, twist, run in circles, roll on the ground, slap his face, roll his head round and round, adopt different yogic posture and mudras, shake sweat, . . . his tongue may be drawn in or up against the palate. . . He may make different sounds; he may roar like a lion or make other animal noises, or he may loudly chant Om and other mantras.

How Muktananda was able to elicit these kinds of responses in people remains an unanswered question, although philosophical and esoteric explanations were provided for Siddha Yoga devotees. The bookstores of Siddha Yoga sold certain Tantric scriptures that are part of a North India school of Shaivism (devotees of Shiva) called Kashmir Shaivism. Several strains of Shaivism originated in Kashmir (today the province of Jammu and Kashmir). The major schools of Kashmir Shaivism are Krama, Kaula, Spanda, and Pratyabhijña. Many of us, in the earlier days of Siddha Yoga, attempted to read the rather arcane scriptures associated with these different schools and tried to understand them on our own. Occasionally, some of the principles of Kashmir Shaivism were taught by swamis in courses. It was not until a later phase that Paul Muller-Ortega, a well-known expert of Kashmir Shaivism, became a devotee of Gurumayi and taught in-depth courses on some of these scriptures, such as the *Shiva Sutras* and the *Pratyabhijña-hridayam*.

Kashmir Shaivism's idea of "personal monism" forms the philosophical basis of Siddha Yoga. This brand of monism is different from that of Advaita Vedanta, which was expounded by Shankaracharya. The goal of Advaita Vedanta is to pierce the veil of maya, the illusion of the empirical world, in order to realize that everything, including one's own self, consists of one reality: Brahman. Kashmir Shaivism also posits one reality, which it calls Shiva, but that reality is not separate from the world of maya. In other words, Shiva is not understood as transcendent to the world of appearance, but as the world of appearance. Since Shiva becomes the world, animate and inanimate, Shiva exists as every person. The goal of sadhana (spiritual practices) is to realize, "I am Shiva." Shiva is also conceived of as personal, meaning that Shiva has self-awareness. Thus, Shiva is considered both the nondual absolute, similar to Advaita Vedanta, but also a self-conscious person.[7] This self-consciousness is not like a human's, which includes the feeling of separation from others; Kashmir Shaivism posits that nothing exists outside of Shiva.

Therefore, Shiva's self-awareness is all inclusive—everything is unified, and everything is Shiva. And because of this manifestation, the path of understanding lies not in rejecting the world but in recognizing the ultimate value of everything one encounters.

Another essential element of Kashmir Shaivism is the idea that Shiva has five functions. The first three—creation, maintenance, and destruction—are found in many Hindu schools of thought, regardless of the main deity worshipped. According to the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, Shiva is also responsible for two additional functions: concealing and bestowing grace. He conceals the truth from people by giving them "coverings" called *malas*. *Mayiya mala* gives people a sense of separateness or difference; *karma mala* creates a feeling of incompleteness and strain when performing actions; *anava mala* engenders a sense of smallness or imperfection in people. The word "anu," from which anava derives, means "the small." According to the philosophy expounded by the Kashmir Shaivite Abhinavagupta, shaktipat destroys the anava mala. It is only a matter of time for the other two malas to dissolve once the anava mala is destroyed because the anava is considered the "root mala."

This is the philosophical explanation of shaktipat and of sadhana that we received through texts and courses. Shaktipat destroyed the anava mala and sadhana was performed until the mayiya and karma malas also dissolved. My own experience initially corroborated this explanation. I did have an expanded awareness and felt myself to be perfect and complete after receiving shaktipat. I also felt that actions were easy and flowed spontaneously and that there was no sense of differentiation between myself and others; everything was one unified and blissful whole. As these feelings faded over the years, I clung to the idea that if I meditated more, I would again be established in that state. Yet none of us was able to devote hours every day to meditation like Muktananda had done. Even those who became swamis led very active lives, directing courses and retreats.

Left-handed Tantrism, which involves eating meat, drinking wine, and having ritual intercourse, were not part of the teachings of Siddha Yoga. The ashram served a strict vegetarian diet, and the strongest drink one could find was a hot cup of chai in the morning. Muktananda emphasized that sexual activity would diminish the shakti, so many young people who were involved in Siddha Yoga when Baba was alive chose a celibate lifestyle. Some even took vows of sannyasa and lived in the ashram permanently as renunciates. In dorm rooms and other informal spaces, people shared stories of what they were experiencing. It seemed that the practices of meditation and chanting,

particularly chanting the *Guru Gita,* a text that extolled the virtues of the guru-disciple relationship, could cause sexual arousal. The explanation for this was that sexual energy was being transmuted into spiritual energy. That was why celibacy must be maintained. Sexual fluid, if not expended, would flow upward. This, Baba said, was the source of spiritual experience and of the ability to give shaktipat. In describing different types of subtle energy called prana, Muktananda explained how prana flows upward:

> Udana is a great friend of the sadhaka [spiritual practitioner]; through its force, a yogi maintains his celibacy, draws his sexual fluid upward, and becomes an urdhvareta. The sexual fluid mingles with prana and turns into prana, and from its strength, the yogi can acquire complete victory over even a celestial dancer. The source of the power to give shaktipat is this urdhvaretas, the rising of the sexual fluid.[8]

Muktananda discussed his own experience of becoming an *urdhvareta* in his autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*. For a period of time, during his daily meditation practice he saw in front of him a woman dancing; she was naked except for jewelry. It did not matter if his eyes were closed or open; the vision of the woman remained. While watching her, he had a powerful erection. He tried everything he could to get rid of the vision, including reducing his intake of food to practically nothing. One day, while watching her, his penis tore through his loin cloth and inserted itself into his naval where it remained for some time. Seeking an answer as to why this happened, he visited a siddha whom he loved and trusted named Zipruanna. Zipruanna told him that his experience was the blessing, or shaktipat, of a great saint. He said,

> 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. . . .O swami, such a man is called an urdhvareta. 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.[9]

Muktananda publicly stressed the value of celibacy for making progress on the spiritual path, but he almost certainly violated his own rules. Two

women trustees of SYDA who left the ashram due to Muktananda's alleged behavior said that in Ganeshpuri he had kept a mattress under his bed which he pulled out for sex because he didn't want to get his bed dirty.[10] In the last few years of his life, there are reports that his sexual activity escalated. In September 1981, one of Muktananda's swamis, Stan Trout (Abhayananda), wrote an "Open Letter" to Muktananda. In the letter he outlined the "scores of stories" about numerous young women—girls, most of them—whom Muktananda had engaged with sexually. He went on to say that when people spoke about Muktananda's behavior, they were threatened with disfigurement by his henchmen, former NFL running back Joe Don Looney and ex-Marine and Viet Nam vet, Shreepati, formerly David Lynn. Trout stated,

> [Y]ou, Muktananda, sent two men, Shreepati and Joe Don Looney, to Oakland at the time you returned from California to New York, to harass and threaten two young couples there who had recently withdrawn from your service. They were told by your men to stop talking about your escapades with young girls in your bedroom or they would be "taken care of." The couples then went to the District Attorney in Oakland and filed a statement of complaint. They also hired a lawyer who informed you that if you did not cease harassing these people, a suit would be filed.[11]

Many of Muktananda's followers have attested to his temper and predilection for violence. They believed that, like other gurus, he "tested" his disciples to see if their attitudes of surrender were genuine. His anger was viewed as a "play" that did not affect his state of perfection. Besides testing his own disciples, Muktananda also allegedly became violent with local people who lived near his ashram in Ganeshpuri. One former ashram resident, Richard Grimes, reported that he often saw Muktananda beating peasants who stole coconuts from the ashram grounds.[12]

In 1983, after Muktananda died, accusations of physical and sexual abuse were published by William Rodarmor in the *CoEvolution Quarterly*. Other *CoEvolution Quarterly* journalists independently confirmed Rodarmor's quotes and allegations. The SYDA Foundation never sued Rodarmor or the magazine for libel. Rodarmor also discussed financial issues related to the nonprofit SYDA, stating that Muktananda had at least five million unreported dollars in a bank in Switzerland. Lotte Grimes, one of the journalist's informants, saw Malti, the future Gurumayi, "order a list drawn up of everybody in the ashram who had money, to arrange private interviews with Muktananda, by his orders."[13] The SYDA Foundation has always relied on

two major sources of income: fees from courses and Intensives and donations. People with money were given special treatment. The focus on money commenced when Muktananda began his world tours, according to an interviewee who lived in the Ganeshpuri ashram in the 1960s when there were, at the most, six Westerners in residence. She said that in those days Muktananda would cook for his guests and put the food on each person's plate. Muktananda wrote at the time that the ashram should be a place of refuge and that fees should never be charged.[14]

The *CoEvolution Quarterly* article marked the first public crisis of Siddha Yoga. It did not make a huge impact on the movement at the time because many followers either had not read the article or did not believe it to be true. Muktananda's ability to give shaktipat was undeniable. It seemed as if people could not connect the spiritual experiences they had had in Muktananda's presence with these extremely negative allegations. Many struggled, and some continue to struggle, with the idea that a siddha, a "perfect" human being, could perform bad actions. Nevertheless, Muktananda himself had often warned his disciples to test their guru: "[O]ne should be very careful about choosing a guru or guide. A seeker should not have blind faith. . . An incomplete teacher who is pure and ethical and who puts his knowledge into practice is far better than an undisciplined person who poses as a perfect guru."[15]

As I worked through questions about the perfection of the guru myself, I came across an interview with the guru Amrit Desai. Amrit Desai was a popular shaktipat guru like Muktananda. He later decided that the energy of shaktipat was too strong for most people, and so he focused instead on helping others develop a central core of physical and psychological strength and purity through Hatha Yoga; he established the Kripalu Center for Holistic Health, a community for spiritual practices in Lenox, Massachusetts. It was here that he had consensual sex with several of his students, and his name was added to the growing list of "fallen gurus." His disciples literally threw him out of his own ashram. The Kripalu Center in Lenox now functions as a retreat for spiritual practices without the worry of possible abuses that occur when a person is given absolute power.

Andrew Cohen, founder of *What is Enlightenment* magazine, interviewed Amrit Desai. Speaking of his reason for ceasing to give shaktipat, Desai said,

> It often seemed that the experiences didn't enlighten them at all. I mean, a lot had happened, but they were still struggling with the ego more or less in the same way they were before they had undergone these experiences.

> In kundalini yoga, it is said that once the shakti is awakened, purification is going to naturally occur of its own accord. But for most of these people, it didn't seem that the awakening of the prana or the shakti really had had any big purifying effect.

Responding to a question about the perfection of the guru, he said,

> The idea [is] that the guru is very evolved, that he is very highly developed, he is self-realized. [Disciples] project those images on him because they want perfection in the guru, so they can depend on him. So in order to create dependence, they instill something that is not there. You see, I always claimed that I'm not perfect. I'm a disciple first before I'm a guru. This is just the role that I play for the benefit of transmission of the energy. . . .Sometimes gurus delude people by saying, "That's where I am and I'll take you there." That I did not do.[16]

It seems evident from Amrit Desai's admissions that a person does not have to have attained "perfection" or "enlightenment" in order to give shaktipat. Through unknown means, a person can serve as a conduit for the transmission of energy. The manifestation of kriyas and other spiritual experiences cannot be denied by anyone who has witnessed shaktipat being given to a large group or by anyone who has experienced it personally. But the explanation that gurus and other officials of Siddha Yoga offer is not self-evident. I have found no empirical evidence that shaktipat destroys the malas. As we will see in part III, many people have benefited from receiving shaktipat, and from the practices of chanting and meditation and contemplating the teachings they have received from Muktananda, Gurumayi, and swamis of Siddha Yoga. However, a correlation between receiving shaktipat and attaining an enlightened state of being on a permanent basis is tenuous, although many students of Siddha Yoga accept the doctrine on faith. Even if some people have experienced total annihilation of the malas, it would be difficult to document, and thus faith must always be a component of Siddha Yoga.

In fact, some people have reported negative psychological or physical results from receiving shaktipat. Some have even experienced psychotic-like episodes. Others have experienced uncontrollable physical manifestations, such as twitching or speaking suddenly in gibberish, which may occur in public settings. That kundalini awakening can cause negative—even debilitating—reactions has been documented.[17] A psychologist reported the following incident that concerns a young woman who had just come from a

retreat with "a powerful female guru" in upstate New York. She was admitted to a psychiatric hospital after running through a hotel, naked. Upon being stopped, she was unable to respond to questions. The author reported that after entering the hospital,

> [she was] hopping, bounding upright, springing into walls, with an attendant at her side, doing her best to intervene. [She] did not appear to be trying to harm herself, but was seemingly unable to control her own trajectory. . . [Her hands] were at shoulder level, and her fingers were making quick thumb-forefinger and thumb-middle finger connections in rapid succession. Her eyes were rolled back in her head and looking either at the ceiling or the upper bridge of her nose. Her breathing was very fast, and short bursts could be heard emanating from her mouth. This experience went on for twenty to twenty-five minutes.

The author reports that the chief psychiatrist ordered an anti-anxiety agent, but it had no effect on her. Finally, a physical restraint device that immobilized her arms and legs was administered in order to prevent her from injuring herself. Even with the restraining device, "she arched her back, propelled herself onto her feet and in one motion began hopping and bouncing again." This woman had no previous history of mental instability, although she had suffered depression when her father died. She spent five days in the hospital and at the end of the time appeared normal and attributed the behavior, which she did not remember, to shaktipat.[18] The Kundalini Research Association and the Kundalini Research Network, among others institutions, have been established to scientifically investigate kundalini and its relationship to mental health and mental illness.

Phase II: Malti and Subhash Become Gurus

In anticipation of his death, Baba Muktananda needed to name a successor. Years earlier, he had asked two swamis at different times, Swami Prakashananda and Swami Pranavananda, to serve as his successor, but both refused the offer. In 1981 Muktananda turned to his friend and devoted follower, Mr. Sheena Shetty, who had sent two of his children to live in the ashram. Muktananda then chose Shetty's son, Subhash Shetty, a young man of eighteen, to be his successor. At the same time he gave Subhash the name of his own guru, Nityananda, which means "eternal bliss." Many devotees were surprised at this announcement; not only was Subhash young but he also

possessed a rather unassuming and casual manner. Six months later Muktananda named this young man's elder sister, Malti, as his successor as well, giving her the name Chidvilasananda, which means "the bliss of the play of consciousness." (The name was so difficult for Westerners to pronounce that it did not take long for it to change to Gurumayi.) Malti, who had been acting as Muktananda's translator for several years, was Subhash's senior by eight years. People once again were surprised. Not only was she a woman, but she was a beautiful woman. She did not fit the ideal of a wise old master that people associated with guru. Some people left the Siddha Yoga movement because they could not accept these young somewhat Westernized, English-speaking "kids" as their guru. In fact, younger devotees, who had been around Baba for many years, had grown up with Subhash and Malti. Accepting a friend as a guru posed a hurdle for them. There was also confusion about having two gurus. Siddha Yoga, as much of the Indian Hindu tradition, taught that a person should dedicate him or herself to one guru.

As people continued to question how to be devoted to two gurus, Nityananda announced that the issue would sort itself out over time as people chose one or the other of them. In the meantime, the Shettys acted sometimes as a team, offering Intensives and other programs together, and at other times separately. I recall the first Intensive they gave together in Oakland, California, after Muktananda's death. We were all ecstatic to have two gurus, and they, being young and Westernized, seemed more like us than Muktananda had been. The shakti seemed just as strong as always, with people having kriyas and deep meditations. During a chanting session, one woman became so carried away by the energy that she stood up and started twirling like a Whirling Dervish in the Sufi tradition. I thought the hall ushers would take her out and offer her something sweet to eat, which was the custom when people got too carried away. The sweetness was supposed to "cool" the shakti. But nobody stopped her, so she just kept whirling until she passed out. Those were the heady days of Siddha Yoga when two young, cool gurus seemed to be figuring out as they went along how to fit into their new role. There was a sense of freedom in the air, but it would not be long before the freedom turned to chaos.

As people did begin to settle on which guru they wanted, more people chose Gurumayi than Nityananda. When disciples lined up to bow before the guru, Gurumayi's line was much longer than Nityananda's. Perhaps it was because Gurumayi seemed to take her new position more seriously than Nityananda. According to people who knew Malti as a young girl and as a teenager, there was nothing particularly unusual about her. She attended

an ordinary school and underwent the same questioning and confusion as most teenagers. When she was chosen as Muktananda's translator for public talks, however, a grooming process began that continued when she became the guru. Swami Kripananda, a former professor of Spanish, became Malti's English teacher. This elegant and refined lady passed her sensibility on to Malti. Later, after Malti became Muktananda's successor, Swami Kripananda and Swami Durgananda (who reverted back to her previous identity, Sally Kempton, in 2002) continued to work with her and wrote many of her talks. Gurumayi quickly became a warm and engaging speaker.

While Gurumayi was crafting talks, directing ashram business, and generally acting like a guru, Nityananda, like most teenagers, decided that he wanted to have some fun. Devotees' "experience talks," which were supposed to focus on inner spiritual experiences they had during meditation or on an encounter with their guru, turned into reminiscences about cruising with Nityananda and checking out the local discos. Once in an evening program at the ashram in South Fallsburg, New York, Nityananda spoke about how some swamis had accused him of engaging in sexual activity, which he then denied. He said the "panties" they found in his room belonged to Gurumayi, who was washing them and left them there to dry.

The confusion about two gurus came to a head when Nityananda announced his resignation in 1985 stating that Muktananda had told him that he was to serve as guru for only three years, and then Gurumayi was to be the sole guru. All would have been fine if, shortly thereafter, Nityananda had not asserted that he was still a guru after all. In order to clear up the confusion, leaders within the Siddha Yoga organization said that Nityananda had been told to make the first announcement to save face for himself and for Siddha Yoga. In fact, he had forsaken his vows of sannyasa (monkhood) and had been having affairs with several women who lived in the ashram. Violence, unfortunately, was chosen as a way to deal with the problem. As Lis Harris reported in the *New Yorker*, on November 24, 1985, Gurumayi, George Afif, and eleven others entered Nityananda's room. First, Gurumayi struck both Nityananda and Devayani, one of Nityananda's consorts, with a bamboo cane. Then she gave the cane to six women whom Gurumayi accused Nityananda of abusing. (Nityananda said it was consensual sex.) She told them to continue to hit him. The caning lasted for three hours according to Nityananda. According to Gurumayi, she had given him "a few slaps" and the women had also given him "a few slaps." One of the men present punched Nityananda in the face. A swami had to be restrained to keep him from attacking Nityananda.[19]

Nityananda eventually left the Siddha Yoga movement and began to act as a guru in his own right. This was taken as an affront by the original Siddha Yoga community, and people were sent to publicly harass him. Harris reported that a group was sent to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where Nityananda was slated to speak in August 1989. At first the group simply picketed outside the residence hosting the speech, but they later decided to crash through the door. As reported in the *Ann Arbor News*, "four of them then kicked in a door to enter the residence, assaulted the swami and another follower, and threw bottles of skunk scent against the walls." Witnesses said someone kicked Nityananda's driver in the chest and another knocked down a disabled man who was trying to stop them.[20]

During the time period when Nityananda was being harassed, SYDA officials attempted to erase him from all public records of the ashram. They asked all those involved in Siddha Yoga to join in the effort of excising references to Nityananda from books and videos and to remove pictures of him from altars. The SYDA Foundation requested devotees to return all materials with Nityananda's image or words, and after this was accomplished, it was as if there had never been two gurus. Nobody talked about him, and many new people joined the movement without ever knowing that there had once been two gurus.

Phase III: Gurumayi and Siddha Yoga's Expansion

The late 1980s and early '90s might be considered the Golden Era of the Siddha Yoga movement. By 1994 there were ten ashrams for live-in guests and permanent residents and more than five hundred meditation centers throughout the world. Enormous amounts of money poured into the SYDA Foundation. The ashram in South Fallsburg had expanded to three large hotels with five hundred and fifty acres of land. Buses rotated among the hotels to help convey the crowds from dorm rooms to morning chants, to breakfast, to courses, to lunch, and so on. Streams of devotees walked the wooded "silent path" from "Atma Nidhi" where meals were served to the main building called "Muktananda Mandir." People sometimes paused along the path to watch the deer or to offer a flower to the statue of a blue Shiva meditating with a cobra wrapped around his neck. Perhaps another offering would be made farther along the path to Jesus or Mary before crossing a footbridge over a dam that created Lake Nityananda. Next to Muktananda Mandir, a large pavilion called the "Shakti Mandap" held the increasingly large summer audiences during evening programs. With high glass panels

on the sides, the Shakti Mandap offered a view of weeping willows and a stream, providing an idyllic setting for the thousands of people who gathered each evening to chant, meditate, and listen to Gurumayi speak.

The highlight of each day was *darshan*, when people lined up, five abreast, to bow before Gurumayi, who was seated on an elevated platform. Ushers on either side would make sure that nobody lingered too long, for if the line did not keep moving, darshan would have lasted longer than the two to three hours that it did, night after night, during the summer months. Some people would leave, walk along the silent path, eat dinner, and return with plenty of time to still receive her blessing. How Gurumayi could sit cross-legged with a perfectly straight back through the program, which lasted several hours, and then brush people with a wand of peacock feathers for several more hours is a mystery—especially since she was known to have back problems. After darshan ended, Gurumayi would remain in her seat to informally chat and joke with the swamis and remnants of the audience from the evening program.

Summer visitors had full days, every day. Most devotees woke by 4:00 a.m. to meditate and then sing the *Guru Gita* together, a Sanskrit chant that lasted about ninety minutes. After that there was breakfast, then *seva*, which means "service to the guru." For short-term visitors a few hours a day were spent in seva, chopping vegetables, cleaning, or working in the gardens. Others spent the entire summer in service, providing full-time work in return for accommodations. Still others were on staff and stayed year-round to provide ongoing support in publishing, programming, public relations, maintenance, and the like. The crowds, the full schedule of practices and courses, and the seva, taken together, could be both exhausting and exhilarating at the same time. Love for Gurumayi created a strong bond between the devotees who came and went during the summer months.

The Golden Era was also the era of courses. In Muktananda's time, swamis offered occasional courses, but for the most part seva and chanting filled the days. But in Gurumayi's time, the summer schedule was filled with courses taught by both swamis and lay people. There were courses on every imaginable spiritual topic: "Siddhas, Saints, and Sages," "The Practices of Kashmir Shaivism," "The Kundalini Course," "The Fire Course," "The No-Ego Course." This was also a time when people began to focus on Hatha Yoga. Hundreds would gather in the Shakti Mandir, the glass pavilion, to learn yoga in the afternoons. Most of the courses lasted an hour or two a day, but some went from 4:30 a.m. until late at night. A favorite of these longer courses was the "Blue Pearl Course." Gurumayi guaranteed that anyone who took the course would see the "blue pearl," what Muktananda described as

the culmination of his sadhana. The course consisted of sitting in meditation all day and maintaining complete silence. Then there was the "Month-Long Course." This was the most intense, lasting often eighteen hours at a stretch. People had futons in the tent where it was held, and they could rest on these for short periods. Those who signed up for this course had strong mumukshutva, desire for liberation, for it took great fortitude to persevere for an entire month. Sometimes swamis would walk through the tent with sticks, like Zen masters, ready to correct those who were slouching. Later, the ashram offered a shorter version, "The Week-Long Course," which was a bit more manageable.

This was also the era of personalities. Talented speakers were identified through "experience talks." In Muktananda's day, at the end of Intensives, people could stand and describe a particular spiritual experience they had had. It was very spontaneous, and there was no time to prepare. Not so with "experience talks." They were well rehearsed and practiced in front of the more experienced speakers. The talk had to be completely positive in tone. These experience talks were also given in smaller centers in cities throughout the world. If a person showed significant talent, he or she would be invited to serve as an MC for an evening program or an Intensive. People who were very good would become star MCs, and their personal style became known and loved. This was particularly true when the featured MC was a media star. One summer Phylicia Rashad of the *Bill Cosby Show* dazzled Siddha Yoga devotees with her sparkling personality. Famous musicians also offered their talent in evening programs. John Denver gave a concert one summer; movie stars who frequented the ashram included Olivia Hussey, Don Johnson, Marsha Mason, Roberta Flack, Raúl Juliá, Diana Ross, Meg Ryan, Isabella Rossellini, and Melanie Griffith.

There were also yoga stars and academic stars, all of whom were beloved by the devotees who made their yearly trek to ashrams. After fits and starts with several Hatha Yoga teachers, John Friend made his debut at Shree Muktananda Ashram. He already had attained some fame for his friendly manner and quick humor, which accompanied his mastery of Hatha Yoga. With Friend's guidance, interest in Hatha Yoga blossomed. The SYDA Foundation soon built a beautiful Hatha Yoga practice studio. Eventually, John Friend established his own system, Anusara Yoga, which by 2008 was one of the fastest growing styles of yoga in the world with more than twelve hundred trained teachers.

Gurumayi made good use of her "Siddha Yoga scholars." They included John Grimes, an expert on Advaita Vedanta; Douglas Brooks, who had writ-

ten two books on the practice of Tantra in south India; Paul Muller-Ortega, one of the few experts on Kashmir Shaivism in the world; and William Mahoney, who founded the educational branch of Siddha Yoga, the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute. Muktabodha publishes translations and commentaries of Hindu—particularly Tantric—texts, offers scholarships, and oversees a school in India that trains scholars or pundits. Scholars gave talks in programs and taught courses of their choosing. Paul Muller-Ortega taught a course on the *Guru Gita,* the text sung every day by Siddha Yoga devotees, which was videotaped and sent to centers around the world. Gurumayi had the Siddha Yoga scholars sit near her during programs and would often defer to them to answer questions.

But the biggest star of all was Gurumayi. People couldn't get enough of her and vied for a seat close to her in a program or Intensive. Receiving attention from Gurumayi became an obsession for some people. They thought they had a good chance of getting it if they positioned themselves right in the center of the five-abreast line for darshan because Gurumayi would be sure to notice them. But this didn't always work. In fact, it was as if Gurumayi had a special sensor for people who wanted attention, and she would intentionally avoid them.

George Afif, a handsome Lebanese man, was invariably at Gurumayi's side during the Golden Era. He had no particular title, although he did supervise some construction projects. Over time he received a reputation for ruthless authority and as a predator of teenage girls. He pleaded no contest after being charged with statutory rape. When I learned later of his behavior, I looked back at regret at the naïve trust I had in the ashram's integrity. I arrived one summer with a beautiful young seventeen-year-old under by charge. Policy dictated that anyone under seventeen had to have a chaperone. In no time she was made a "darshan girl"—young, beautiful girls who sat next to Gurumayi and handed out gifts at her request or simply helped to keep the line moving. George Afif was in charge of the darshan girls, and so I did not question when I often saw them together. When it was time to leave, a special offer was made to her to stay on as a guest, which means she did not have to pay for room and board. Her room was moved to one that housed all young women. I did not question why the chaperone policy was suddenly abandoned but trusted that she was in good hands, the same way parents trusted their sons with Roman Catholic priests. Now I know that no religious group should have impunity from practical rules that protect children from sexual abuse. Of course, it was her parents' decision to let her stay, and perhaps nothing happened.

The fact that institutional rules to protect young people could so easily be bypassed, however, is troubling.

Service organizations that Muktananda had begun were expanded at this time. One provided milk to malnourished children in the area surrounding his ashram in India and another constructed houses and a high school for the poor. Gurumayi initiated the PRASAD Project in 1992 for the purpose of serving disadvantaged people in India, Mexico, and rural upstate New York. *Prasad* means "blessed gift." Its main services include dental care, cataract eye surgery, and providing milk for children. It has also taken a role alongside other nonprofit organizations in providing relief after disasters. Muktananda inaugurated the Prison Project in 1978. This work continued to expand under Gurumayi. By the early 1990s about fifteen hundred inmates were taking a correspondence course that taught the principles of Siddha Yoga and the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. It continues to be a vibrant program with specially trained teachers leading satsang programs at designated prisons on a regular basis. Currently around six thousand inmates in fifteen hundred prisons in North America, Europe, and Australia are enrolled in the correspondence course.

While the ashram schedule remained the same for several years after Gurumayi became the guru, she gradually initiated changes that affected the practice of Siddha Yoga. Although the Hindu-based practices of chanting Sanskrit texts and performing puja (worship) still occur in Siddha Yoga, Gurumayi and her swamis emphasize discovering inner wisdom through contemplating ordinary daily experiences within the context of scriptural texts and Muktananda's and Gurumayi's books. Technology aids this form of sadhana (spiritual discipline) as monthly themes are posted on the Siddha Yoga website for devotees around the world to contemplate. Gurumayi also established a tradition of giving a talk on New Year's Day, which includes a statement to guide people's contemplation for the coming year. Study groups are often formed at ashrams and local centers to share insights on the monthly or yearly theme. The process of contemplation involves keeping a journal and sharing one's thoughts with other devotees. With this shift in focus, Gurumayi also began to encourage her followers to think of themselves as "students" rather than "disciples" or "devotees."

The guru's words are greatly treasured by students of Siddha Yoga. In fact, the words of other Siddha Yoga teachers or swamis, no matter how inspiring, are never to be read in satsang. Only Muktananda's or Gurumayi's words are believed to "carry the shakti" in the holy setting of satsang. Gurumayi's students believe that the words from New Year's messages and from other talks

are her own, but in reality, a team of writers work together with Gurumayi. One of these, Marta Szabo, has written a blog about her experience as part of this team. Here she describes hearing the New Year's message one year after she had helped to write it:

> And then the talk began. We turned our heads to the small television screen. Gurumayi was sitting in her chair amidst the beautiful backdrop of live trees and plants that the stage team had been working on so hard for weeks. There they were—all the words we had chiseled so carefully and read and re-read for months—rolling out of Gurumayi's mouth, getting their laughs, making their mark. "Believe in Love," she concluded and the hundreds of people present stood on their feet, applauded and cheered, as did hundreds of thousands of people around the world in every time zone who had been watching it all by satellite hook-up.[21]

Szabo's words highlight the tremendous planning and effort that went into creating the perfect "words of the guru" to be delivered in a beautiful environment that would be treasured by "students" of Siddha Yoga throughout the year. The tone had definitely changed from the time of Baba's Intensives when he spoke spontaneously and his disciples stood up in their blue jeans and T-shirts and shared from their hearts. During the Golden Era, talks—whether Gurumayi's or others'—were well-rehearsed and offered in increasingly beautiful and elaborate settings. Men wore suits and ties and women expensive dresses and jewelry. Every effort was made to avoid any appearance of imperfection. In the next era, the formality and dress code eased somewhat.

Phase IV: Decline in Numbers

In 1994 when Gurumayi and her teachings were touching the hearts of so many people, Siddha Yoga received a shock. Lis Harris, a journalist for the *New Yorker* magazine, wrote an exposé that covered sexual, physical, and financial abuses of power from Muktananda's day up to 1994. When Harris began her research on Siddha Yoga, she did not expect to write such an indicting article as her initial experiences with Siddha Yoga were positive. She first became suspicious, however, when she visited the ashram and was not allowed to walk around and talk to people on her own. There was always someone swooping in with a walkie-talkie to escort her. She decided that there was more to the story than the smiling faces she saw around Gurumayi,

and she began a long process of investigation. Later, SYDA officials visited Harris in her office to try to convince her not to publish the article.

When the article was published, SYDA bought up every copy they could find. Center leaders around the world were contacted to warn them that they would need to be prepared for questions. To the barrage of questions that poured into leaders at ashrams and centers, the response was to be another question: Does what you've read make sense in light of your experience? This avoided direct denial, and turned the responsibility for deciding whether the allegations were true back to each individual. Another attempt to avert the blow was not revealed until recently. Marta Szabo describes on her blog attempts to avert the *New Yorker* article through psychically willing it away. Szabo was invited to an emergency meeting of some of Gurumayi's inner circle. She describes the scene:

> "We have to stop this article from coming out," said Katy. "That's why you're here this morning." I sat on the carpeted floor and listened while Katy told us how our small group had been chosen to perform a concentrated daily meditation to halt the publication of the article. We were to meditate every day at a specific time together in Baba's house. "Meditation with intention," this was our new seva, to take precedence over everything else we were doing."
>
> A few days later Amanda came up to me. . . "It's to do with the *New Yorker* article. Another group is being formed and you have been chosen to be part of it.". . . The next day I met Amanda as scheduled, once again in the hidden conference room that was near my room but known only to a few. . . Amanda had a folder in her lap that she handed to me. "Study these," she said. The folder contained three Xeroxed sheets, each depicting a different diagram. I saw lines and circles with arrows pointing in different directions. Amanda explained that I was to memorize the three simple patterns so that I could trace them in my mind, without looking at the sheets. . . .
>
> And so it began. A group of about eight of us met every evening after dinner, when it was dark . . . As we each silently traced the patterns, we were to aim them at a woman called Tina Brown who, we were told, was the editor of the *New Yorker* magazine and at the woman called Lis who was the writer of the article. . . Weeks passed and then once again we were asked to gather in the conference room. The *New Yorker* article had been published, Katy told us. My heart sank. . . [A]s the months progressed, we began hearing stories of devotees in the United States who were leaving Siddha Yoga because of the article.[22]

One group who left Siddha Yoga at this time wrote "An Open Letter about Siddha Yoga" published on the Internet in 1995. The letter, written by people who had been on the staff of Siddha Yoga ashrams for many years, was anonymous "because SYDA, represented by its powerful law firms and supported by the personal fortunes of numerous wealthy devotees, can harass its critics not only with expensive lawsuits, but have in the past violently assaulted their critics." Even though they had known of the abuses that Lis Harris addressed, they had ignored them because they had invested so much of their lives, energy, and money into Siddha Yoga that they were afraid they would be left with nothing without it. The *New Yorker* article helped them to face what they already knew. In the letter they revealed even more information than what had been reported in the article. The letter stated, "[A]s we drew closer to the guru, we discovered that both Muktananda and Gurumayi had private personalities that were in sharp contrast to their public personas. We soon learned that our status as 'disciple,' our being 'close to the Guru,' depended on how well we could learn to keep the secrets we came to know, and how skillful we could be at whitewashing and damage control." Among the incidents detailed in the article were hidden microphones placed throughout the ashram; earphones worn by teachers of courses such as the "No Ego Courses" in order to feed in private information that had been told to Gurumayi and which was then used to publicly humiliate people during the course; the firing of all gay and lesbian Hatha Yoga teachers in 1991; the sudden banishment of people who had worked in the ashram for many years without explanation; the extreme numbers of eating disorders, addictions, and other psychological problems among staff members; therapists who were also devotees reporting information they learned in sessions back to Gurumayi; plastic surgery performed on Gurumayi to improve the appearance of her cheekbones and jaw line; the payment of enormous fines to Sullivan County, New York, to cover environmental damage created by the formation of Lake Nityananda; as well as more on sexual abuse by Muktananda and George Afif.

During this time, contact between Gurumayi and the vast majority of her disciples slowly began to diminish until the present, when there is practically no communication at all. The diminishing contact occurred in stages. The first distancing occurred with continuing changes in the format of Intensives. When Gurumayi succeeded Muktananda, she first adopted a format similar to his, which was to walk around and touch each person during meditation sessions. In the mid- to late-1980s devotees were told that Gurumayi would begin giving shaktipat through her will, since touching was not

necessary. In 1989 the first satellite broadcast Intensive occurred in which people around the world received the Intensive in their local Siddha Yoga centers. Even before this time those who had traveled to an ashram to be with Gurumayi were often not in the same room with her during an Intensive due to the large number of people in attendance. Video cameras carried the Intensive to "overflow rooms" when talks were being given. In the late 1990s, fewer people signed up for these Intensives, so the number given each year was reduced slowly. There is now one Intensive a year, and Gurumayi is not in attendance. She did, however, broadcast a message in 2008 and 2009, which students could listen to from their centers or homes. Gurumayi's swamis assure her followers that she is guiding the ship, but some wonder if she has abandoned them. Others proceed with as much faith in the guru as they have always had.

Conclusion

The evolution of the Siddha Yoga movement over its years of existence in America since 1970 has been variable and sometimes tempestuous. It began with a firm basis in Guru Yoga as devotees sang the praises of Muktananda and identified with his shakti when they meditated. The focus in these early years was on shaktipat and on being close to Muktananda's physical form, as that is where the shakti could be palpably felt. The period of two gurus, from 1981 to 1985, is a distant memory for followers of Siddha Yoga. Many who entered Siddha Yoga after Nityananda was deposed have never heard of him. The history of Siddha Yoga has been carefully reconstructed to appear as though Muktananda chose only one successor before he died. The Golden Era of the late 1980s and early '90s saw many changes as Gurumayi intensified a focus on studying scriptures and incorporating spiritual teachings into everyday life. She also brought attention to preserving the Siddha Yoga heritage for future generations as programs for children, teens, and young adults took precedence over the more internally centered practices of chanting and meditation. During this era so much money flowed into the SYDA Foundation that there was a rush to figure out how to spend it all. Beautiful chandeliers were added to meditation halls; the Nityananda Temple, once a simple statue, became an ornate shrine with an enormous crystal placed behind the statue of Nityananda; the floor of the Shakti Mandap, where thousands gathered in the summer to hear Gurumayi speak, was first covered with a carpet that was replaced a year later with marble. When the marble was discovered to be too cold in the early morning, it was also removed, heaters were

installed beneath the floor, and the marble reapplied. During this period, many dedicated people were trained to bring the Siddha Yoga teachings to their hometowns and cities around the world.

The rumors of abuse that the *CoEvolution Quarterly* exposed were all but forgotten until the *New Yorker* article brought them to light again. Then the Internet became widely used, and experiences and incidents that had been hidden reappeared. Yet, many refused to read of these abuses; others read them and denied that they could have happened. Leaders in the Siddha Yoga organization guided people to remember their own shaktipat experience and contemplate whether that blissful experience could have any correlation to the negative rumors. SYDA, however, did not sue either the *CoEvolution Quarterly* or the *New Yorker* for libel.

Followers of Siddha Yoga took different approaches in negotiating between the strong HIMMs' value of surrendering to a guru and the Western value of critical thinking. Examining negative issues undoubtedly takes one away from a blissful heart-centered state of consciousness that followers of HIMMs cherish. Some are unwilling to examine facts because of this. When interviewing followers of Siddha Yoga, I asked one who was living at the ashram in India at the time the *New Yorker* article came out if devotees there knew about it. She replied that they were told about it, but they were warned not to read it because it would detract from their sadhana (spiritual pursuit). This woman followed the advice because she believed the path she was on would take her to enlightenment, and anything that interfered with that goal was a waste of her time.

The varying attitudes toward Muktananda's behavior can be exemplified in the story that Joan "Radha" Bridges shared with me as she went from accepting to doubting to rejecting her path. It took Bridges twenty-four years to reach the point of rejecting Baba's behavior, and thus rejecting him as a perfected being. She did not, however, deny the idea that a person could be an enlightened master, and accepted the now deceased Meher Baba as the master she had previously sought in Muktananda. Bridges relates that when she was twenty-six, Baba used her sexually. She was married at the time, and Baba instructed her not to tell her husband. He also told her that what was happening was not sex, but Tantra. At the time, she told nobody and began reading books about Tantra, looking for an explanation for why she had been used in this way. She continued to follow the Siddha Yoga path and even served in a leadership role. It was not until twenty-four years later that she realized the extent of the abuse she had endured when her therapist asked her a simple question: Would you allow your teenage daughters to go through

the same thing you went through? With that question, Bridges said she knew that what Muktananda did was wrong to the core. She decided to tell others about it, and sought the support of the SYDA leadership. She sent a donation to SYDA, along with a letter saying that she was going to go public with her experience. She did not receive the support she sought, but neither was she threatened as people who had previously talked about their experiences had been.

Gurumayi has taken a step toward redefining the guru-disciple relationship by directing her students to contemplate ways of applying teachings to their lives and of serving others, rather than always looking only to her for inspiration and guidance. My hope is that someday Gurumayi and other SYDA leaders will have an open discussion about the mistakes and abuses that have occurred in Siddha Yoga's history. This might also include an open discussion about exactly what enables a person to give shaktipat. As Sarah Caldwell, a former fulltime resident of Siddha Yoga ashrams and researcher of Tantric Hinduism, concluded, while Muktananda's engagement with women was Tantric, it was still abusive.[23] If it is brought to light that Muktananda's power came, even in part, from sexual contact with young women, students of Siddha Yoga could decide for themselves whether the experiences they had from shaktipat were worth it.

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III

In Their Own Words

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6

The Guru-Disciple Relationship

The guru-disciple relationship is a defining characteristic of HIMMs. Followers of HIMMs consider the guru to be an enlightened human being or even a manifestation of God. Some of those who practice TM do not enter into a guru-disciple relationship with Maharishi, but many do. With SRF and Siddha Yoga, the guru-disciple relationship is foundational. When I asked meditators about their first encounter with their guru, the responses revealed that it was a life-changing event and often took them by surprise. Bryan's response was typical:

> I was at Encinitas, California, on a silent retreat. They have a very nice dining room there with a large picture of Master [Yogananda] on one wall. I was just sitting there, enjoying the peace of the place. All of a sudden instead of it being a picture, it was as though he was really there. I thought, "Oh my God, he's really here." He came through that strong. And I had a feeling like I didn't have to worry about anything. I'm part of his family. It was so strong! I wanted to cry. I felt so accepted and loved. I felt held in that presence. I've come to learn since then that that's a real spiritual experience. It's the most powerful thing that's ever happened to me.

As I listened to people speak of their guru with devotion and reverence—many with tears in their eyes—I realized that the guru was experienced similarly by HIMM disciples, regardless of who the guru was. I wondered whether the source of this love came from within or from something the guru had conveyed to the person, and whether there was also an unspoken creed about the nature of the guru that they had learned, perhaps even subconsciously. I was also curious about how similar the traditional Hindu view of the guru was to that of Americans involved with HIMMs.

Gurus, as spiritual authorities who are often considered divine or semi-divine, are a Hindu phenomenon, yet the concept of a spiritual master has antecedents in the Judeo-Christian worldview as well. For example, the Jew-

ish Hasidic *tzaddick* is often believed to have supernatural powers and is accorded absolute authority over his disciples' lives. Jesus is considered both God and human by many, although most Christians believe this combination to be unique to Jesus. The idea of a god-man was also found in the Greco-Roman world. From the sixth century BCE to the time of Christ, wandering philosophers, poets, prophets, and fortune-tellers were often considered divine and were known as "sons of man" and sometimes "sons of God." Kings of many cultures have been considered divine.

In HIMMs the guru is understood as a person who has reached the pinnacle of spiritual development. This engenders a hierarchical relationship between guru and disciple, with the guru having full authority. It also places the guru outside of conventional norms. This hierarchical relationship is not a permanent reality though. Since disciples believe their spiritual journey will culminate in the same pinnacle of development as the guru's, the hierarchical aspect of the relationship is provisional. At the deepest level, the guru and disciple are considered equal and united.[1]

The Guru in Hinduism

As commonly understood, the guru is considered qualitatively different from other people. This view is explained by contrasting the *laukika* and the *alaukika.* While an ordinary, worldly person (laukika) perceives difference and separation, the guru, as an enlightened, "unworldly" person (alaukika) perceives unity. The guru has extraordinary access to divine power that the ordinary person lacks. Disciples gather around a guru, creating a community, which is "the dynamic, sacred center of Hinduism."[2] These communities are considered extended families called *kulas* and can be distinguished from each other along sectarian formulations according to the deities and philosophies they follow.

The term "guru" has been used in various ways throughout Indian history. The word originally meant "heavy" and sometimes carried the connotation of "extraordinarily powerful." It was probably used in this sense in the Rig Veda (ca. 1200 BCE) when it modified the word "mantra," meaning the mantra was "weighty" in its influence. Although guru does not become associated with "teacher" until the Chandogya Upanishad (ca. 900–600 BCE), the concept of the teacher, or acharya, as a man of good behavior who establishes rules and institutions was present as early as the Atharva Veda (1200–900 BCE).[3] One of the earliest uses of the term as "a very important spiritual teacher" occurs in the Mundaka Upanishad around the fourth century BCE. The word may

be used today to refer to anyone in a position of authority, including one's mother, father, elder brother, or teacher. It can also refer to a ritual expert. Many Hindu families have a guru who assists them, not only in matters of worship and ritual but also in worldly concerns such as marital difficulties.

The Atharva Veda (11, 5) praised the *brahmacharin.* This is a teacher who seeks to realize Brahman, or who is viewed as an incarnation of Brahman.[4] Thus, as early as the time of the Atharva Veda, the idea of the union of a person with God, the Absolute, or Brahman, was present, although not associated with the word "guru." Later Shankaracharya defined a guru as one who has realized his or her oneness with the supreme consciousness, whose mind is established in the highest reality, and who has a pure and tranquil mind. Adi Shankaracharya established four monasteries in India, and the head of each is called a shankaracharya. William Cenkner noted in his study of the shankaracharya tradition that the guru is accorded the role of the supreme God, and that the guru and scripture work together to enlighten students.[5] A contemporary shankaracarya told Cenkner, "A great preceptor knows the Upanishads, is free from ignorance, stands in the enjoyment of the Self and is able to impart a path to others."[6]

Obviously, the word has a rich and multifaceted Hindu heritage. Only some of the ways the word has been used in the Hindu tradition are applicable to HIMMs. The understanding that places the guru in the highest light, as not only being an important teacher but also as having attained union with Brahman, is most similar to the understanding found in HIMMs.

The Guru in HIMMs

HIMMs might be viewed as "families" centered on a guru and that guru's teachings in a manner similar to traditional Hindu kulas. When a person enters into a relationship with a guru, that person also joins a family of fellow devotees. In India the guru serves as a personal guide for disciples. With thorough knowledge of the capacities of each disciple, the guru may teach or initiate differently depending on the needs and spiritual readiness of different aspirants. According to Indologist Bettina Baumer,

> The teaching and the method are always adapted to the actual spiritual stage of the disciple which can only be recognized by the true master. There is no place for make-believe and also no place for mass instruction in the spiritual field, for everything depends upon the capacity of the disciple to receive.[7]

In contrast, HIMMs often employ mass instruction. The Hindu model of a group of disciples living in the home or ashram of a guru, receiving personal guidance in their sadhana (spiritual practices), is rare in HIMMs. While individually oriented instruction sometimes exists in an American context, larger-scale groups, such as those highlighted in this book, employ modern technologies as guru and disciples unite through print, CDs, DVDs, satellite, or the Internet. This is the only way that a guru who has disciples in countries around the world can maintain contact with all of them. HIMMs create national and international organizations to facilitate communication between the guru and his or her disciples around the world.

Yet those I interviewed feel that the guru-disciple relationship is extremely personal, even if contact occurs through a book or video. Many believe that their guru knows them intimately. They often feel personally guided through dreams or through reading or hearing the guru's words. Meditators understand the relationship to occur on a different level than ordinary relationships and, therefore, feel that physical contact is unnecessary. None of those I interviewed from SRF had met Yogananda because he died about the time they were born, and yet they all claim to have a close personal relationship with him. Some followers of Maharishi and of Gurumayi also have never met their gurus in person, or may have only seen them from a distance, and yet they too expressed that the relationship is deep and personal.

Most people who become involved with a HIMM have had some previous exposure to the idea of a guru. Some, as products of the 1960s counterculture revolution, balked at the idea of submitting to a guru because they opposed authority figures of all kinds. However, others had positive expectations of the guru-disciple relationship. Perhaps the most widely read book by meditators—no matter the particular HIMM affiliation—is Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Rather than discussing the guru-disciple relationship in a philosophical or abstract way, Yogananda related stories. Although he sometimes downplayed the role of the guru, admonishing his disciples to look to God rather than to him,[8] the tales he tells in this immensely popular autobiography point them in a different direction. The stories imply that the guru-disciple relationship is extremely important and instill in the reader a feeling of awe at the mysterious quality of this relationship. He affirms for his readers that complete surrender to the guru assures a safe journey to self-realization. Furthermore, he presents the guru as a supreme intercessor on behalf of the disciple.

Yogananda indicated that his first meeting with his guru, Sri Yukteswar, was an answer to his own deep desire to know the truth.[9] Yogananda (then

known as Mukunda) was residing at an ashram in Banares when he heard "a divine womanly voice" tell him, "Thy Master cometh today!" Later that day while on an errand with a friend to purchase food for the ashram, he saw a face in the crowd that seemed familiar to him. He continued to walk on, telling himself that it was only his imagination. However, after walking a bit, he found that he could no longer move. He believed that the saint was "magnetically drawing him." He walked over to the man and immediately recognized him as "the one I had seen in a thousand visions." He knew spontaneously that this was not their first meeting, but that they had been together in previous lifetimes. He then followed his guru to a house overlooking the Ganges. There he vowed to love him eternally. As they talked, Sri Yukteswar spoke of occurrences in Yogananda's life, and Yogananda realized that his guru knew everything about him. He also knew the future, predicting that Yogananda would return to his family in thirty days. Yogananda insisted, against his guru's wishes, that he would never return. His guru responded by telling him that "there must be complete surrender by obedience to my strict training." Still Yogananda refused to return to his home and instead returned to the ashram. The situation there turned increasingly negative, however, and he finally returned to his family just as his guru had predicted. By the next time he met his guru, he had learned his lesson and vowed to obey his every command. Because of this, Sri Yukteswar told him that he would assume responsibility for Yogananda's life.[10] Sri Yukteswar then told Yogananda that he must earn a university degree. This must have been difficult for Yogananda to accept since he was never interested in book learning, but this time he obeyed without question.

The story contains many lessons about the guru-disciple relationship. For example, the meeting of one's guru does not occur by chance; it is mysterious and is based on previous lifetime experiences. The guru knows the disciple better than the disciple knows himself. If a disciple disobeys the guru's command, serious consequences will ensue. If, on the other hand, a disciple surrenders to the guru, the guru will take ultimate responsibility for the disciple's life.

Swami Satyananda, Yogananda's friend from boyhood, offers a different account of Yogananda's first encounter with his guru. In his biography *Yogananda Satsanga,* Satyananda relates that when Yogananda left home in 1909 to live in an ashram, his parents became upset. His uncle suggested that they write to Sri Yukteswar, whom they considered a rational man, to convince Mukunda (Yogananda) to return home to continue his studies. So they wrote a letter to both Yukteswar and to Mukunda arranging a meet-

ing. According to Satyananda, the two met on a street and Yukteswar asked Mukunda, "Are you the nephew of Sarada Babu?" Mukunda felt this man's eyes penetrate his soul, and he knew that he would be his guru.[11] Satyananda relates the feeling of love and surrender that Yogananda felt immediately upon meeting his guru, yet the magical elements found in Yogananda's account are missing. Nowhere does Yogananda mention that he or his guru received a letter. In fact, disclosing information about the letter from Yogananda's family to Sri Yukteswar would help the reader of the autobiography understand how Yukteswar knew some of the details of his new disciple's life, knowledge that Yogananda attributed to clairvoyance.[12]

Certainly the mystical quality of the guru-disciple relationship that Yogananda emphasized is part of its allure for Americans, and reading this book may have encouraged some to expect this same kind of relationship. Yet people's mystical experiences or premonitions before meeting their guru should not be discounted. An interviewee described her experience with Yogananda that was so strong that it dramatically changed the direction of her life:

> I read *Autobiography of a Yogi* when I was only eighteen. I was just out of high school. I was at Chapter Four in the book when I had a superconscious dream. I was led inside the Mother Center [Mount Washington] to a meeting with Yogananda. It is still so vivid in my mind that it could have happened last night. He touched me on the head, and I heard the sound "Om." It frightened me because I didn't know what it was. And then he took the fear away. He gave me the experience of samadhi; I can't even describe it in words. There were a lot of details in the dream that were beautiful and specific. The next summer I went to the Mother Center, and it was exactly as I had seen it in my dream—down to the design of the fabric, everything.

I have heard many incidents like this over the years. Even though the guru is often not physically available to disciples in HIMMs, disciples believe that the guru inspires, guides, and intercedes for them through dreams or other psychic means. Sometimes, as with this woman's experience, guidance is confirmed by some objective circumstance. The gurus of HIMMs also speak of psychic contact with their own gurus. Yogananda wrote about how his guru visited him in his "astral form" after he died. Maharishi said his guru inspired him, five years after he had died, to begin the Spiritual Regeneration Movement. Gurumayi also reported receiving help from her guru, Muktananda,

even though he had left his physical body. As noted earlier, for many years Gurumayi gave a message to her devotees on New Year's Day. One year she told an audience that she had received the theme of the message directly from Muktananda. In the same way, Muktananda reported receiving help from his guru, Nityananda, after his death, saying, "[H]e still meets me and gives me guidance, and he also appears to many of my followers in their meditation."[13] The only way to account for these types of experiences is to view the guru-disciple relationship as existing in states of awareness beyond the physical—even if one assumes this to take place in the imagination of the perceiver.

A Model for Understanding the Guru

We have seen that disciples relate to their gurus on several different levels. They may learn from the guru directly at an ashram or through a video. They may also receive guidance or have darshan (sight) of the guru in dreams or visions. They may have an inner feeling or intuition and attribute it to the guru. They may also experience the transcendent in meditation and call this an experience of the "inner guru." The way meditators speak about the guru is different than the way they speak about other people, and the relationship is unlike other interpersonal relationships. For example, Dick Anthony, a psychologist who has undertaken a number of research projects on the mental health effects of new religious movements, narrated an experience that occurred when he was alone in a cabin in the middle of the woods at a Meher Baba Center. The cabin was one in which Meher Baba (1894–1969) had earlier given personal interviews with disciples. Anthony was not a disciple at that time and described his retreat to these woods as a much needed break while working on his dissertation. He was not expecting what happened. As he described it,

> Some presence came into the cabin, which I somehow knew was Meher Baba. I didn't see anything visually, but there was some striking presence there, which started to talk to me. And, there was a feeling of great attractiveness and peacefulness and a sort of loving quality, and the discussion was somewhat philosophical. It had to do with what it was that I was looking for, how to regain transcendence, and how it related to various social concerns. He was very persuasive and convincing. . . .
>
> But, no matter how persuasive the conversation seemed, it eventually occurred to me that these arguments he was using seemed to contain an implicit assumption, which was that if you accepted them, you would also accept him as a master. . . .

> So I said to him, "Well, this is all very well, but I could never follow an external master." I was just going to terminate the "interview" and walk out at that point, and leave the center. Then he responded to me, "I'm not outside of you; I'm inside of you." When he said that phrase, there was an uprush of consciousness from some very deep level of my being. It seemed much deeper than I had ever felt before, and at that level of consciousness, everything seemed unified. . . The notion of an external master was no longer meaningful; he didn't seem to be separate from myself, so my objections to following him seemed ridiculous. I was swept away into a feeling of love and reverence.[14]

Dick Anthony later wrote a letter to Meher Baba, who confirmed that the "discussion" had taken place. Anthony's experience of receiving guidance in this vision is similar to some of those I interviewed in that it came from a distinct person and gave specific knowledge. However, as the experience progressed, it became another way the guru can be experienced—that is, as the "guru principle." In this type of experience, the guru is "cosmic" rather than individual and is not perceived as separate from one's own self. Thus, three ways of experiencing the guru can be distinguished: (1) physical, (2) psychic or subtle, and (3) cosmic. Anthony bypassed the first and went directly to the other two. These three forms are not always distinct though. A person can experience the cosmic or transcendent form of the guru, as well as receive psychic messages, while in the guru's physical presence. Meditators often relate that when the guru is speaking publicly to a large audience that a particular phrase or idea will suddenly resonate strongly within. They might say, "I felt like the guru was speaking directly to me." Who was it that the person was hearing—the outer guru, a telepathic communication aimed directly to the student, a deep inner wisdom, or all three?

The idea of an inner and an outer guru was first articulated in the *Upanishads* and was further developed in Vedantic philosophy. Of these two forms, the outer guru is a part of the lineage of gurus or parampara; the inner guru, or the *antaryamin*, resides within the heart in the form of an inner guru or guide. Shankaracharya described this inner guru as "the higher transcendent Brahman, who, when conditioned by maya, becomes immanent in the world as the inner ruler."[15] Thus, there are two divisions within the category of the inner guru: the "guide" and the "transcendent Brahman." The guide could also be called the "psychic guru" or the "subtle guru" and lies between the physical outer guru and the cosmic or transcendent inner guru. It can appear to a disciple in dreams, visions, or in the form of intuition.

All three levels of the guru were apparent in interviewees' descriptions of encounters with their gurus. In this conceptual model, the "outer guru" is subject to the laws of physicality, as are all human beings. Thus the outer guru may experience dementia in old age; he can make mistakes or be a terrible singer; she can forget a person's name; he can become angry or frustrated. In contrast, the "inner transcendent guru" is beyond the physical world. The inner guru is not a person but a type of awareness. It is the *purusha* in yoga philosophical terminology. The inner guru infuses the physical guru with an aura that disciples say they can tangibly feel. While it is part of the outer guru, it is also cosmic in nature and united with all things and all people. The "subtle guru" or the "psychic guru" could be understood as partially individual and partially cosmic. It may be difficult to distinguish whether it arises from the guru or from the disciple or from a psychic interaction between the two. This model should not be understood as ontological, but as provisionally arising during an experience. In other words, the experiences described below by interviewees are not necessarily objective, but that does not make them any less real. There are religious, philosophical and even scientific theories that assert that everything arises as an interaction of forces that we have dubbed subjective and objective.

The Hinduism scholar William Mahoney describes the inner guru as the *tattva* at the subtlest level of creation. The tattvas of Indian philosophy are universal principles of creation that manifest as "levels" from subtle to gross. Each level of subtlety is contained within the level of greater subtlety preceding it. According to this schema there would exist not three, but *many* levels of the guru. The subtlest levels could be conceived as the levels closest to God or the transcendent; the grossest levels as closer to the physical world. According to Mahoney, "The guru as gurutattva is equivalent to the universal power of consciousness that is said to give rise to and support to the universe and all things in it."[16] The inner guru may be experienced through the different chakras (spiritual energy centers), the most powerful being the sahasrara (the "thousand-petaled lotus" at the top of the head). The inner guru can also be experienced in the form of subtle inner sounds called *nadas*, or without any form at all as "the infinite spaciousness of the expansive heart."[17]

The theories of Carl Jung can also inform the concept of "levels" of the guru. The "collective unconscious," according to Jung, contains all of the psychic phenomena of humankind in the form of different archetypes, which are experienced by people in dreams or symbols. Jung posited the "Godman" as one such archetype. He did not claim ontological status for the archetypal Godman, but focused instead on the effects of the archetype on the psyche.

The Godman serves as a symbol for wholeness and is equivalent to the inner guru in the terminology we are using here. The inner guru lies dormant until it is aroused by an external form (the outer guru). The experience of the guru is furthermore socially constructed so that a disciple projects all that she knows about what a guru should be onto her experiences of the guru. Followers of HIMMs might draw on the various stories of gurus and guru lineages that have been told and retold in India and throughout the world as they construct their ideal form.

The disciples' experiences cannot be totally explained by archetypes and pre-existing ideas, however, because this would mean that the relationship is not a relationship at all but something that only exists within the disciple. Yet the goal of the guru-disciple relationship is to transcend difference, making the "relationship" provisional. The experience that Dick Anthony related, when he heard Meher Baba say, "I'm not outside of you; I'm inside of you," precipitated the sudden experiencing of a state of unity consciousness. There was no "other" with whom one could have a relationship.

Experiencing the Physical Guru

Many meditators undoubtedly feel a sense of awe when in the physical presence of their guru. In describing this sensation, they may speak of the guru's eyes that seem to reflect infinity or of the guru's movements that seem to embody stillness. This palpable sense, which they believe reflects the guru's state of consciousness, could be referred to as charisma. Charisma, in the original Greek, denotes a "gift of divine grace." Disciples speak of feelings of deep stillness, love, joy, lightness, or a physical sense of "electricity" that may arise within them when in the presence of the guru. Disciples recognize the guru's divine grace and so accord authority to him. They may submit to a guru spontaneously, without rationality.

Since Yogananda died in 1952 without leaving a successor, the following descriptions of encounters with him come from some of his direct followers who are alive today. These people are different from the main focus of this study since they are of an earlier generation and met Yogananda at a time when the possibility of receiving direct daily and personal guidance was viable. Brother Anandamoy, an SRF monk who met Yogananda in 1948, said,

> The first time I saw him [Yogananda], he had given a Sunday service. . . And when I stood in front of him, he didn't say a word. I didn't say a word. He just took my hand, and the moment he touched me, I was drunk. I was com-

pletely drunk! That was the real stuff. That was the wine of a mystic. You know, I thought I had experienced joy before. Then I knew. He talked about bliss consciousness. And I knew. He gave me just a little more than I could hold. Unbelievable bliss! First time, at a little touch—bliss. And I walked out. I was completely drunk. I couldn't walk straight. Not only that, I was alone, and I couldn't contain it. I laughed out loud. I was completely drunk. And people in the street were utterly disgusted. They shook their heads and went way out of my way. I didn't care. It took me several hours to simmer down.

Anandamoy also spoke of another meeting with Yogananda in which he felt that his guru knew him completely, a common experience among followers of HIMMs:

I had an interview with him and he asked me questions about my studies and about my life, and that sort of thing. And I saw by the way he phrased the questions, I knew he didn't need any information. He knew me better than I did. That is a remarkable experience, I can tell you! If somebody knows you completely—no ordinary human being can do that. If somebody knows everything about you, all your mistakes you have made and everything. But there was more. There was understanding. No judgment. There was understanding. And unconditional love.[18]

Sri Mrinalini, current vice president of SRF and editor in chief of SRF publications, met Yogananda for the first time when she was in junior high school. She was reluctant to meet him because of her strong Christian beliefs. She relented, though, when her mother told her she could take her Bible with her. Sri Mrinalini believes that the guru-disciple relationship began from the first time she met Yogananda:

I think that the transformation of feeling the love from Master and the special relationship with Master, I think that took place that instant that I walked into the temple the first time. I certainly could not have explained it that way at the time, but from that moment, there was a connection. There was just the feeling, when Guruji spoke to you, when he talked with me that first time. There was no question in my mind, though I still did not know fully who he was, or what he was, or why he was, and what was my relationship with him, because I hadn't read anything about Indian philosophy. But there was no question in my mind that there was something of him going inside of me. I knew that he knew everything that I was thinking.[19]

Kristin's experience with Maharishi was similar to those expressed by Yogananda's disciples. She felt immediately upon her first physical encounter with Maharishi that she would be his disciple. In describing this meeting, she said,

> When Maharishi came to the course, it was the first time I'd seen him in person. The only thing I could think when I saw him was that I knew exactly what Peter and James and John felt like when Jesus walked by them and said, "Come, follow me." There was a presence and a silence that was so loud, and I just felt that this was my path, and I knew without a doubt that I should follow him.

Vincent's experience of accepting Gurumayi occurred after a number of years of resistance to the idea of a guru. He was an ex-priest who battled with the idea of submission to authority and "blind obedience." He described his experience of beginning a guru-disciple relationship in this way:

> A therapist friend of mine was telling me I really should go to New York and meet Swami Muktananda, and I thought, "I don't need a guru. I just got rid of a bishop. Why do I need a guru?" I was actually turned off by the whole idea of having a guru. But for some reason in 1985, I was drawn to go to Houston, Texas, of all places, where Gurumayi was visiting. I wanted to see Gurumayi, so I walked into the hall where she was and sat down. I looked at Gurumayi and immediately when I looked at her, I felt this wave of energy come rolling across the room, and I literally felt my heart leap. All of a sudden I started sobbing, and I thought, "What am I crying about?" I was in this room of two hundred or so strangers, and I felt very uncomfortable. So I looked down, took a deep breath, looked up, and it happened again. So I did the same thing another time. I stopped myself. I looked up again and started crying again. It was at that moment that I really took Gurumayi to be my guru. I had no doubt in my heart.

Some interviewees felt that the physical guru manifested the state of transcendence as they moved or talked. Mark spoke of his experience:

> What has had an impact on me more than anything else was being with Maharishi. Being in his physical presence was to see and know that manifestation of pure intelligence. It was seeing pure intelligence in every

breath, every whisper, every motion, every smile, and every sparkle in his eye. It was the pure expression of the absolute, of being. That, more than anything, has impacted my experience and my continued meditation.

Followers of Muktananda and Gurumayi spoke of the experiences they had when the gurus touched people during Intensives.

A real turning point for me was in 1985. I went to the ashram for a week. It was just the most incredible week of my life. The high point was an Intensive on the weekend. Gurumayi gave the touch, which I had not experienced before. I will never forget it. I knew she was coming close to me. All of a sudden something inside me said, "Are you ready for this?" And I had no time to answer. She had perfume in her feathers [a wand of peacock feathers], and to this day I can smell this perfume. She put the feathers on my head first, and then she put her hand on top of the feathers, and then it was as if a dark velvet cone surrounded me and I sat there completely serene and still. There were no thoughts; there was nothing. I was just being held in that black velvet.

Many who followed the path of Siddha Yoga spoke of the power they felt emanating from the guru during darshan when they bowed before the guru. Having Gurumayi's darshan (time to "see" and be with the guru) was not a blissful experience for everyone though. Carmen asserted, "I hated going up in the darshan line to meet Gurumayi because it was a crucible for every yucky feeling I'd ever had, every childhood feeling of wanting attention and 'Please love me,' and 'You don't love me.'" Carmen's experience is not uncommon. Many people feel a childlike sense of dependence arising when in the presence of Gurumayi.

Some felt the need to be in the guru's physical presence during their early days of being a disciple, but later found that the need dissolved. Others are satisfied with one meeting. Darren, for example, had been practicing TM for twenty-seven years. He saw Maharishi once when he gave a lecture at Maharishi University of Management (at that time called Maharishi International University) in 1980. He said, "When I walked out of that building, I thought, 'I never have to see him again.' I was completely fulfilled." Still others have no need to be in the guru's physical presence at all because they have experienced the subtle and transcendent levels of relationship, and that is sufficient.

Experiencing the Subtle Guru

The disciples of Yogananda I interviewed had never experienced the guru's physical presence, but this did not in any way diminish their certainty about their relationship with him. They all reported that they felt a very close and personal connection with Yogananda. Many felt that this relationship was based on past life experiences and so becoming a disciple was inevitable; it was not something they chose. They did not experience a need to proselytize because "Master will draw a person to him if the relationship is ordained." Yogananda himself spoke of how he had visions of his future disciples in America before he ever went there.[20] He also spoke of relying on divine guidance as he accepted disciples. He told one who was anxious to meet him, "I agreed to see you only because Divine Mother told me to. I want you to know that. It isn't because you've come from so far. Two weeks ago a lady flew here all the way from Sweden after reading my book, but I wouldn't see her. I do only what God tells me to do."

People are often drawn to follow a guru after feeling "pulled" by a picture of the guru or by a book or a video in which they "feel the vibrations" of the guru's energy. One woman described the effect that viewing a video of Gurumayi had on her:

> I went to this Siddha Yoga program at the Civic Center. I had no expectations. I knew nothing about it. I was a total blank slate. Never in a million years would I have gone for a guru. In fact, the word guru had very negative connotations for me. I used to be a psychotherapist in the Bay area of California. There were so many groupies who would put people up on a pedestal, and so I detested gurus. So I went to this program, and I sat there and listened to these talks, and yeah, yeah, yeah, but then they showed this video of Gurumayi. And I was just mesmerized. Then we meditated, and it was like I was being cradled inside a black velvet sky with stars. Then it felt like two hands went inside my chest and ripped my ribs apart. Ohhh, it hurt! I started to sob. There was no content, no reason for crying at all. When meditation ended I was still sobbing, but I was filled with peace. It was just an incredible peace, and I was absolutely sure that no matter what happened to me in my life, I would be fine. In this peace there was a quiet, sweet, total acceptance of everything.[21]

Even the Internet serves as a vehicle for drawing a person into relationship. A devotee of Gurumayi stated that she had heard about all the scan-

dals of Siddha Yoga, but in spite of that, she became a disciple because, in her words, "I can't deny my Internet experience." Upon seeing Gurumayi's picture on the Siddha Yoga organization's website, she felt the power of her presence so strongly that she sought out a local group of practicing devotees. Whether establishing a relationship with the guru through reading a book, seeing a picture, viewing a video, or surfing the Internet, disciples report the experience of suddenly being gripped by a palpable force that elicits a strong emotional response. They attribute the source of this experience to the guru.

The sense of being personally guided by the guru, as well as receiving physical healing from him, was strong among followers of Yogananda. Roxanne spoke of Yogananda as "a loving helper." She feels his presence and sometimes has dreams about him. When she went to her first "convocation" (a yearly gathering of SRF students), she saw Yogananda in her "spiritual eye" (*ajña chakra*) every time she sat to meditate. She also related stories about people being healed, prefacing the anecdotes with, "This is how we see our connection with our guru." Walter spoke of how he was aware of "the hand of the guru" in many events that have occurred in his life. Randy said, "I feel like Yogananda is guiding my life. I feel his protection, too. I feel my children and wife are being protected and guided as well." He also spoke of a time when he was meditating and felt the presence of Babaji, the first guru in Yogananda's lineage. He felt a state of blissful ecstasy, which he was certain came from Babaji. Blake spoke of having many dreams of the gurus in Yogananda's lineage. "But more than dreams," he said, "they are reality. Where do reality and dreams divide? It's a grey line."

Sometimes followers of Yogananda received guidance concerning practical matters. Bryan had been a smoker and was, as he put it, "*really* addicted." He thought that some day he would make the effort to quit. One day he received a picture of Yogananda in the mail. When he opened it, he felt a wave of energy pour over him. He never had another cigarette after that, even though he had no intention of quitting at that time.

Followers of Gurumayi also spoke about receiving inner guidance from her or from others in her guru lineage. Several disciples spoke of writing to Gurumayi about a concern. Before receiving an answer on the physical realm, they would have a dream that provided the answer. Charles said,

> Once I called the ashram because I was having a rough time with self-acceptance. A swami was supposed to call me back the next day. That night I had a dream. I witnessed my life like it was a movie. Everything was equal and nothing was particularly important. I could see as I watched my life

why I was the way I was. There was no blame. It could have been anybody's life. The next day I felt totally fine.

Disciples of Maharishi spoke about guidance in a different way. Rather than guidance coming from Maharishi personally, they viewed it as coming from a cosmic intelligence. Mark described it in this way:

I don't attribute guidance to Maharishi. It comes from nature or divine intelligence, not him in particular. Through meditation I tap into the organizing intelligence of nature. Maharishi's whole thing is people getting knowledge and techniques so they're self-sufficient and not dependent on him. Maybe people close to him have a different experience. Who knows what happens between them? I'm not in that situation.

Aaron, also a disciple of Maharishi, spoke of "nature" supporting him in what seemed to be miraculous ways. He believes that one becomes more in tune with cosmic intelligence as that person continues to practice meditation. Aaron described his experience of having his desires fulfilled:

There are these coincidences—serendipity. I'll think of someone, and ten minutes later I see them. Or I'll have a desire for a chair or dresser, and I'm driving along and I'll see a second-hand dresser on the sidewalk—just what I wanted. There's also intuition, knowing things in advance. The phone rings and I know who it is. That is happening more and more. In fact, it's like a test of consciousness to see how easy it is. This guy came here [to Maharishi University of Management] from Nepal, and he had nothing. So we made it a game. We'd think about what he needed and then go find it. Maharishi says it's an indication of higher consciousness when it's easier to fulfill your desires. It's like something beside myself is organizing my life. Even though I set goals and plans, sometimes I get things when I need them without trying.

The subtle level of the guru-disciple relationship also takes the form of visions. Grace described an experience she had of Muktananda's guru, Nityananda, whom she calls here Bade Baba:

I had this experience during the Guru Gita chant. There was a painting on the wall of a lotus, and Bade Baba was sitting in the middle of it. So that's what was in my awareness when I was chanting the Guru Gita. I felt this

picture in my heart. Then I felt the petals of the lotus start vibrating and the letters of the chant come up out of the petals, and I had the sense also that the people around me were the petals. Then at some point I was the one sitting in the middle of the lotus instead of Bade Baba. That vision has stayed with me for a long time.

Experiencing the Transcendent Guru

Yogananda often said that his purpose was not to gather disciples to himself as a person but to point people in the direction of God. Maharishi emphasized the technique of meditation as a way of attaining higher states of consciousness so that one could know the truth from within. Muktananda and Gurumayi spoke of the "guru principle" as the spiritual force that lies within. All of them, in other words, pointed to a level of relationship in which a disciple "knows" the guru because he or she has realized the guru's state of consciousness. When Yogananda spoke of God, he was speaking of the cosmic intelligence present everywhere in creation, which can be experienced within oneself: "[God] can be known by using the technique of meditation. Then He shall throb as wisdom in your mind, and as joy in your heart."[22] Maharishi spoke of Being as "uniformly present": "It has been seen that the Being is the essential constituent of creation and that It is present in every stratum of creation. . . It is the omnipresent God for those who know and understand It, feel It, and live It in their lives."[23] Muktananda talked about the guru principle as being "the essence of Guruhood": "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."[24] Gurumayi emphasized the source of the mind as "the light of consciousness": "On this path, the mind learns to keep its energies centered so it can perceive its own source, which is the light of Consciousness, *chitprakasha.*"[25] For these gurus, the mind, the Self, the guru, and God are aspects of one reality. Likewise, those I interviewed sometimes spoke of the guru, not as a person, but as a unified, transcendent reality.

This transcendent reality may be experienced in meditation or through the practice of bowing before the guru. The purpose of the practice of bowing is to break down the sense of separation between oneself and the guru. Disciples in the SRF and TM groups typically practice bowing in the simple form of raising the hands to prayer position and bowing the head. In this way they show reverence for both the outer and inner manifestations of God. They may do this in front of a picture of their guru or upon entering a holy

place. In later years, devotees of Maharishi sometimes bowed fully in a kneeling position with the head on the floor. Siddha Yoga devotees bow in both of these ways or may even lie completely flat on the floor with arms stretched forward. The practice of darshan is often a part of programs in Siddha Yoga. In the past, when the guru was physically present, people formed lines, and one by one bowed at the guru's feet. Bowing to a representation of the guru—a picture, an altar, or a chair—is still often practiced. Several disciples spoke of how they experienced the outer and the inner merging through the practice of bowing. A disciple of Gurumayi spoke of her difficulty accepting this practice at first:

> I went to the Chicago ashram, and it appeared very cultish, with all these pictures of gurus and the smell of incense. All that was really foreign to me, but I was there, and I liked the talks. They resonated with my heart. They kept talking about how God is in you, and that was so foreign to me with my Catholic experience. Then they explained darshan and bowing to yourself, and I decided I wasn't going to go for darshan with everyone there. I decided I wouldn't leave the hall until I tried bowing to the presence in me that was great. So after everybody left the hall, I went to the main aisle, and I knelt down, and I put my head to the floor, and I just made it clear in my head that if there was a God in me, I was honoring that. And it was a profound experience. I made that connection.

For the most part, the longer a person practices meditation, the less urgency they feel about being in the physical presence of the Guru. Mark, a medical doctor, has four children. Because of his responsibilities he had not been able to see Maharishi, who was alive at the time of the interview, for many years. He said it didn't matter to him, though, because, "The body is not what Maharishi is. He is that absolute expression of consciousness."

Faith and Doubt

Even with the sacred and profound experiences that meditators report, the guru-disciple relationship also exists on a more mundane level. The guru may make mistakes and act unreasonably or even immorally. In addition, the organization the guru has founded will, like all organizations, have flaws. The teachings from gurus and Hindu scriptures point to the guru as the pinnacle of love and perfection. They contain both subtle and overt warnings not to question the guru's judgment and authority. The *Guru Gita,* for example, is

Chanting the *Guru Gita.* (Photograph by the author)

chanted daily in the ashrams of Siddha Yoga. Its message is clear: questioning or criticizing the guru is a grave error. Verse 104 states: "One who speaks to the Guru in rude or insulting terms or who wins arguments with him is born as a demon in a jungle or in a waterless region."[26]

Interviewees differed in their opinions about what submission to a guru entails. Randy stated with conviction, "When the guru says to do something, disciples should follow the instructions lamb-like. If the guru says it, it's right. Only he who knows can tell us the way. Even if I don't understand why, I do it." Yet many disciples have left HIMMs because they cannot abide by this very attitude. Those who do not leave may also at times question the actions and words of their guru. They have various ways of reconciling the teachings they receive from HIMMs regarding submission with the American ethos that values independent thinking. One who was influenced by the work of the philosopher and meditation teacher Ken Wilber pointed out that perfection occurs through different "lines of development."[27] Among these are creativity, intelligence, morality, and spirituality. According to Wilber, even

though a guru may have achieved oneness with God or Being, it does not mean that the guru cannot become angry or make a mistake or even act in an unethical way.

Adherents of Abrahamic religions and of Hinduism perceive spiritual perfection differently. According to nonmystical Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thought, perfection lies with God alone. When a person aspires to spiritual perfection, which can never be absolutely attained, she does so by trying to live a moral life. In Hindu thought, however, morality is typically not associated with perfection, and in fact even gods and goddesses behave in immoral ways. The goal in the Hindu yoga tradition is to attain a state of awareness in which *purusha* and *prakriti* (spirit and matter) are seen as separate. Different philosophical systems in Hinduism may describe the goal of spiritual pursuit in different ways, but it is usually associated with a state of internal awareness, not with how one behaves in worldly matters. By ethical or social standards, a holy person may indeed appear immoral or foolish. Muktananda's autobiography *Play of Consciousness* abounds with stories of holy persons—including his own guru, Nityananda—who do not fit Western conceptions of perfection. For example, Muktananda describes a saint named Hari Giri Baba who wandered around wearing four coats and talking to himself. He would pick up stones from the river and comment on how much they were worth, "Yes . . . very good, you are worth two hundred thousand." Outwardly, he appeared a fool, but Muktananda said of him, "This saint was all-knowing."[28] Clearly, ordinary standards cannot be used when judging another's state of consciousness. What standards can be used then? According to the majority of interviewees, their own inner experience of the guru in the physical, subtle, or transcendent form took precedence over outer evidence or logical reasoning. That inner experience led them to establish a guru-disciple relationship that could not be broken by temporary doubts.

All of the HIMMs mentioned have well-developed organizations. When people have doubts, it usually concerns a policy or action of the organization rather than the guru. Devotees are sometimes confused about how the guru and the guru's organization intersect. They are unsure about how much direction comes from the guru, to whom many feel they should submit without question, and how much comes from other devotees in the organization. Yogananda established the Self-Realization Fellowship as the organization that would carry on his work. For participants in SRF, to question the organization is, in a manner of speaking, to question the guru. As in all HIMMs, several leading disciples of Yogananda have set up their own ashrams and organizations and have their own followings, but members of

SRF see them as renegades and prefer to keep their focus on SRF, which they view as Yogananda's true organization. While devotees of Yogananda in these spin-off organizations often criticize SRF, followers of Yogananda who are members of SRF are very positive about the organization and its leaders. One devotee, although favorable about the organization, felt that people went too far in their adulation of the movement. He said,

> In twenty-two years, I've seen nothing but integrity. I know other movements have had some problems with different scandals. To my knowledge, nothing like that has ever happened in SRF. It has human struggles because it's made of people, but there have been no major scandals. SRF is run quite beautifully with care and attention. Every person is treated as a child of God. I appreciate the organization tremendously. At first I was more identified with it than I needed to be. I needed it to anchor me. Now I don't feel obsessed with it like I see others being. They make an idol of it, and they idealize people in the monastic order. They're projecting their own divine qualities onto others. I don't idolize the monks or nuns or Yogananda. But it's how we're trained—to give our power away, to see others as better than us. We project. But the guru says, 'I'm just someone who's accomplished this. I'm not better than you.'

When I asked this person if he ever had doubts, he replied:

> Yeah, I have times of doubt. Sometimes I think maybe there's a better teacher. Maybe I wouldn't have to work so hard on another path. But then I always realize it's my own problem. I'm totally convinced there's no other guru or path for me. But I'm not worried about seeing other saints. When a true master comes near your home, it's a good idea to visit him or her. My wife's guru is Amacchi. Her picture is around our house. I've seen her every year for fifteen years. I love her. Some people in our group don't agree that it's okay to see other masters. I'm not so rigid. On the other hand, I'm not indiscriminately going all over the place.

An area that has created concern for some followers of TM is the fee charged for learning the technique, which has increased exponentially over the years. In the early 1970s, working adults paid $75 and students $35; today the fee is $2,000, which was reduced from $2,500 shortly after Maharishi died. It is hard for people who have been practicing TM for a long time to understand, as one put it, "why Maharishi has out-priced himself." In fact,

the high costs have caused some TM teachers to teach outside the auspices of the organization and charge what they see as a more reasonable fee. But this did not seem right to Diane who said, "As a teacher, I have always taught TM the way Maharishi wanted it taught. He wants it to be taught through the organization. Those teachers who teach on their own, it's not right. If you have a master-disciple relationship, you don't go against the master." Others expressed doubt. One woman spoke of having to step back from the TM movement on and off:

> I think of Maharishi as my guru. I've been part and apart from the organization over the years. There are times when I didn't like the way things were being done. I wondered if Maharishi knew what people were doing. I'm in that phase now. I don't feel apart from the movement, but don't feel I'm part of it either. Maharishi has accomplished all these things through the organization. There are hundreds and thousands of organization people. I don't even know the names of them all. Maharishi is the inspiration behind it. When there was a[n ayurvedic] clinic here, he called and talked about every detail for hours. It's almost like he micro-manages. But sometimes I can't comprehend some of the decisions that are made. I don't really relate to Maharishi as the administrator. I relate to him more as a source of knowledge. None of the knowledge I've ever gotten from him has proved to be false. But the administration at times is beyond my comprehension. I don't know if it's him or other administrators or karma. There's stuff in the *Puranas* about what the master will do to enlighten people, and some of it can be really incomprehensible.

Several of the TM interviewees were confused by Maharishi's elaborate ceremony in which he crowned Tony Nader, the medical doctor from Lebanon, as "king of the universe" in February 1998. As noted earlier, he was "awarded his weight in gold for his historic discovery under Maharishi's guidance on the Constitution of the Universe—the Veda and the Vedic Literature—at the basis of the human physiology."[29] Some were embarrassed and didn't want their family members to know about it. One person said, "For one day, I thought maybe Maharishi was just a senile old man. But the next day, I was over it." I asked TM followers specifically about this incident. One replied,

> Tony Nader? I haven't followed it closely. But it seems goofy to me. The TM movement gets kind of grandiose. I'm for world peace, don't get me wrong,

but they have these world governments. They think big and cosmic. I guess it's an Indian mind-set. But it did strike me as goofy. You know, Tony Nader is king of the world—no, of the universe! Goofy is my honest reaction.

Another reply placed the incident in a larger context, perhaps in order to account for the cognitive dissonance it brought up. The respondent dealt with her own doubts by referring to a Hindu scripture in which the story is told of a person placing faith in the wrong person:

King? God knows what he's doing. It's really a source of embarrassment. But I do think that all these people who think they know what Maharishi is talking about are absolutely clueless. This is my belief: that he is a perfect master. This isn't about the earth in the year 2003. It's about a reality that is much, much, much bigger than that. I have to trust. I use the *Ramayana* as an example. If you're wrong and devoted to the wrong person like Ravana's brother was, what harm have you done by trusting and accepting and surrendering to someone who, when you look and look and look and then ask what has he done—I mean, you look at him like a Westerner and ask what has this man accomplished—the answer is the man has done nothing but service his entire existence. I can't say what harm he's done. I have to trust someone. Am I going to trust Bush? The world is meaningless. There's nothing there to put your trust in, to put your energy in, to put your money in. Every time I feel screwed by the TM movement, I think, where else am I going to put my money? I'm a semi-good Catholic. Do you think I'm going to give my money to the Catholic Church after the way it's screwed things up?

Another meditator expressed concern over TM's scientific research:

I'm ambivalent about the TM organization. On the one hand, I think it's wonderful that they're trying to verify what meditation is and to deliver it on a mass scale. They have a world program, and they want world peace, and they push for world peace and push for people to meditate. I'm all for that. But they're a corporation and a business, and that kind of turns me off. On the other hand, if you want to live in this world, you have to take the economic and business realm into consideration if you're going to spread things or have something established or lasting here in this world. My partner is a scientist and she showed me how some of the research is flawed. They were making claims that were false, and that kind of bothers

me. They were making claims they couldn't really back, and it just looked unethical. There's too much pushing an agenda and not enough looking at the scientific model, if that's what you're choosing to work with.

Followers of Muktananda have had plenty to question over the years. The sexual scandal surrounding one of the named successors to Muktananda discussed earlier was the source of great confusion for many in the Siddha Yoga movement. More recently, the letter posted by Joan "Radha" Bridges on the Internet about her "tantric" experience with Muktananda has cast doubt for some about Muktananda's claim to be an enlightened Siddha. Those who have read the letter but remain with the movement usually do so because they feel that the phenomenon is beyond normal understanding. One person said, "You just have to dig deeper to know the truth. You have to read these texts on Kashmir Shaivism. I just don't think we can understand it on a normal level." Another person told me that if she ever heard a first-person account of sexual misconduct by Muktananda, she would leave the Siddha Yoga movement immediately. After reading Joan Bridges's letter, she went into her meditation room and prayed about it. She left the room with the feeling that it was alright, even though she did not understand it with her mind. Yet others have been outraged by the Siddha Yoga scandals as can be seen on the websites established by former disgruntled devotees.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the disciple, the guru-disciple relationship is deep, personal, and emotional. It also manifests on different levels at the same time. Jung's theory of the Godman (although it could also be Godwoman) provides a compelling argument for why the relationship is so powerful. The universal archetype helps to explain why the master-disciple relationship is common to human experience and why people are often willing to give power and authority to others readily. In addition, the guru's charisma clearly has an effect on disciples that is partly responsible for the strength of the relationship. In other words, it is not solely internal to the disciple. I have heard and read of many examples of the guru or events confirming the inner experience of the disciple, and I have also experienced it firsthand.

After receiving shakitpat from Muktananda in 1981, I had no contact with him or anyone else involved in Siddha Yoga until after his death. I was keeping a journal during this period. One night I experienced the spiritual energy (shakti) very strongly as I was preparing to go to bed. I was suddenly in its

grip, so to speak. I felt wave after wave of blissful energy that began in my feet and "rolled" to the top of my head. Then I suddenly found myself sitting on the floor of a bare room. It felt like the space of a dream, but I was awake and very aware. As I sat there, Nityananda, Muktananda's guru, entered the room and when he looked at me, I felt as though a beam of energy went from his eyes into mine. Nityananda sat down in front of me, and then Muktananda came in the room and sat next to him. After a short period, Maharishi came and, standing by the door of the room, told me—not through speaking, but through "thinking" to me—that Muktananda was "now eternal." I didn't know what that meant, but wrote down the whole experience in my journal with the date. I learned a month later that Muktananda had died that night. I read in the *Siddha Path* (a magazine published by the SYDA Foundation) accounts of others from different places around the world who had had experiences very similar to mine. I do not think, although I do not know, that Muktananda or Maharishi knew that they were conveying a message to me. Nonetheless, a message reached me from the "subtle guru," and it was verified through outer sources. The message came to me in a symbolic way, and I did not understand it until I learned of Muktananda's death. Nevertheless, I do not think it came entirely from my own psyche because the experience caught me by surprise while I was in the middle of a very mundane activity. It was also extremely powerful and even though it occurred in a space that was not real—if by reality, one means the physical world—it was certainly "real" in some other sense.

It is possible to offer a reductionistic analysis of these devotees' experiences . A person may, of course, feel a special energy around the guru because he expects to feel it. Or a person may describe an experience in such a way as to fit the interpretive framework that she has learned. Yet, while spiritual experiences include psychological and sociological elements, to analyze them using the terminology of these disciplines takes only a portion of the total phenomenon into consideration.

Using the linguistic categories of "inner guru" and "outer guru," or "physical guru," "subtle guru," and "cosmic guru," may shape a person's experience if he is familiar with them. But language and experience are interrelated in the human drama of life. In one of the experiences cited, Sri Mrinalini described her uncertainty about exactly what she experienced when she met Yogananda. Looking back on that day, she stated, "I think that [relationship with Yogananda] took place that instant that I walked into the temple the first time. I certainly could not have explained it that way at the time." Because she did not have a conceptual category for a guru-disciple relation-

ship, she "could not have explained it that way." It was only after she had learned the lingo that she could relate her experience to the concept of guru-disciple relationship. On the other hand, *something* touched her and changed her life at that moment. Did she create that something by her subconscious expectation? Did Yogananda's charismatic energy permeate the room so that she felt it when she walked in the door? Did she subconsciously remember her relationship with Yogananda from a previous existence? None of these questions can be answered with any certainty. The only thing that *can* be said is that she had a powerful experience that involved a relationship between two people. As she put it, "There was no question in my mind that there was something of him going inside of me."

It would be difficult for a person not experiencing these types of things to imagine how anyone could possibly remain committed to a guru or to an organization that engaged in questionable behavior, or that simply required so much of one's time, energy, or money. The only way to understand this is to realize that a deep relationship, based more on emotional and transcendent realities than on logical and material realities, has tremendous power. Furthermore, many people feel a need to commit their lives to something they perceive to be large—even cosmic—because it creates a meaningful center from which they can engage in the multiple activities and relationships of life. As the informant who questioned Maharishi's crowning a king said, "I have to trust someone." Followers of HIMMs make the decision of whom to trust based on personal inner experiences that are related to a particular outer figure. Whether it is trusting Yogananda because, looking at his picture, one suddenly feels his love and acceptance, or trusting Maharishi because, after years of practicing TM, one realizes that Maharishi is "that absolute expression of consciousness," or trusting Gurumayi because, after being touched by her peacock feathers, one is suddenly surrounded by "a dark velvet cone," the trust is deep and lasting and may supersede all other considerations.

7

Mystical Experiences

Diane first learned Transcendental Meditation during her freshman year of college. She was not expecting the experience she had. In her words,

> I sat down to receive instruction, and then the teacher let me sit to meditate for awhile. I was just in the middle of light. It was very powerful. My physiology was subtler than it had ever been in my life. It was very powerful. There was just lots of light. Unbelievable! I didn't want it to end. The light was radiant, and this was with my eyes closed. It was internal, not external.

Mark's experience upon beginning TM was similar:

> My first experience meditating was profound. It was like finding a method to come home. During the process I was able to transcend completely. Immediately my mind became silent, and I had the experience of pure awareness. There was a softness, a feeling of mother being at home. Then I experienced light. It was an inner light. It was inside, not visual. It was me. I was light inside, and I was aware of that for the first time. It was a very nice experience.

The mystical experience of inner light has been recorded in religious traditions around the world and throughout history. We could call it a perennial experience—one that is not bound by culture or time frame. The way a person describes the experience of inner light *is* bound by culture—in this case, the culture created within the HIMM of the TM movement. When people begin the practice of Transcendental Meditation, they are given some hints of what to expect during introductory lectures. Instructors emphasize the physiological correlate to the meditative experience, which in TM parlance is called "subtle physiology." This is probably why Diane described her experience by saying, "My physiology was subtler than it had ever been in my

life." And Maharishi used to say that TM makes people feel safe, just like a child feels when he knows that "mother is at home." Thus Mark described his first meditation as "a feeling of mother being at home." The fact that Diane and Mark clothed their experiences in familiar language gives credence to "constructivist" or "cultural-linguistic" theories about the source of mystical experiences. These theories argue that mystical experience does not derive from an ontological reality, but occurs as a result of expectations due to the person's cultural and linguistic milieu.

On the other hand, nowhere in introductory lectures do TM instructors mention that the meditator will experience light. Yet both Diane and Mark had very distinct experiences of inner illumination, which seemed to take them by surprise. The fact that they experienced something for which they were unprepared supports another theory regarding the source of mystical experience, commonly called the "perennialist" view. According to this theory, mystical experiences occur at a level beyond language and therefore similarities can be found across cultures. Whether mystical experiences are the result of culture and language or come from a transcendent realm beyond language has been debated vigorously among scholars of mysticism.[1] Diane's and Mark's descriptions offer support for both sides of the debate.

HIMMs' emphasis on inner spiritual attainment makes them strongly mystical in nature. The word "mysticism" derives from the mystery cults of ancient Hellenic culture in which aspirants gained spiritual knowledge through studying with an adept. The knowledge and experiences that transpired between the master and disciple were kept secret from the general public. The wisdom contained in the Hindu scriptural corpus of the *Upanishad*s is likely to have been shared in the same way. According to one etymology, the word "upanishad" means secret doctrine or instruction (*rahasya*), but it can also mean to sit near the spiritual teacher (from verb root *sad*=to sit and *upa*=near).

Cultivation of mystical experiences through specific training might be called "institutional mysticism." Ancient Roman mystery cults, Hindu Tantric cults, Muslim Sufi orders, and Roman Catholic monastic orders, among other religious groups, have cultivated systems of thought and training that are disseminated by a master or precept for the purpose of attaining higher knowledge. Institutional mysticism occurs as well in the training offered through HIMMs. Prospective students enter the contemplative path through initiation that is guided by the guru. Those who follow the path "sit close" to the guru—if not literally, then metaphorically. Varying degrees of

secrecy surround each HIMM. Many of the practices and teachings are for initiates only and are guarded from public knowledge.

The term "mysticism" has also been applied to chance experiences of an extraordinary, supersensory realm of awareness. This could be called "personal mysticism." The mystical experience does not need to be connected to a religious system. It might be viewed simply as tapping into one's full potential as a human being. The psychologist Abraham Maslow popularized this way of thinking about mystical experiences, calling these chance events "peak experiences." Although personal mysticism *may* include the experiences of individuals associated with a religion, it may also be associated with individuals who have no particular religious affiliation.

Scholars have approached the study of mysticism in a number of ways. Philosophers have focused on its ontological aspects, historians on its relation to institutional development, anthropologists on its prevalence in shamanistic religions, psychologists on its qualities, and sociologists on its relationship to behavior. Here, we focus on the qualities of mystical experiences as meditators describe them (personal mysticism), as well as on the philosophical systems or "road maps" proffered by each of the gurus that serve both to engender and to understand the experiences (institutional mysticism), but not of the validity of these experiences. Ninian Smart has suggested that the study of mysticism has a long way to go before it broaches that subject:

> [W]hat is often forgotten is that we have a long and delicate path to pick before we are really in a position to make an evaluation; and that path is phenomenological. It means that we must be able to disentangle varieties of religious experience, have a nose for degrees of interpretation in their descriptions, see what they mean existentially, place them in their living contexts and so on. We are still in a very early stage of scientific and human inquiry along these lines, and that inquiry is ill-served if we speed too hastily into questions of theology and evaluation.[2]

While we will briefly and tentatively speculate on the ontological reality of mystical experiences, our primary emphasis will be on people's own perception of the experience and how it affects their understanding of reality. For example, when we discuss Aaron's experience of floating above the ground and feeling plants and animals reach out to him, our concern will not be about whether an observer would have seen these things occurring, but about the subjective effect the experience had on Aaron.

Unexpected Mystical Experiences

Many interviewees spoke of mystical experiences they had before beginning the practice of meditation. These experiences caused them to search for a way to repeat the experience, and this led them to the path of meditation. In these cases, the experiences occurred without prior knowledge of meditation or mysticism. They did not have the intellectual or contextual foundation to explain the experiences to themselves or to others. Later, when they began to meditate, some recalled these earlier epiphanies and attempted to fit them into their newly found institutionalized mystical system. John, for example, related an experience he had as a teenager that, after he had been inculcated into Maharishi's language system, he called an experience of "unity consciousness." Since he had no intellectual grasp of what was happening at the time, the experience actually engendered fear:

> I had a profound experience when I was sixteen. I woke up at midnight and sat up in bed. I was experiencing infinity, eternity. I felt awe and fear at the same time because I didn't know what it was. It felt great, but it also felt scary. I remember walking around the house. Nobody else was up, so I was just looking around, feeling this eternity.

Barbara experienced a vision when she was a child that helped to heal her from a severe asthma attack. Because of her Roman Catholic upbringing, she placed her experience in the context of her belief in God and God's agents:

> I had asthma when I was growing up. Once I was having severe breathing difficulty, and all of a sudden I spontaneously closed my eyes and put my finger and thumb together. I knew nothing about meditation at this time. I was very young—only about six. When I did this, I suddenly felt like I became very small, but at the same time, very calm and whole. Then a woman appeared and invited me to sit in her hand. I went very deep somewhere, and when I came out, I was over my asthma. "Who was she?" I wondered. She had long, black hair, and she was wearing red. I would love to say it was Gurumayi, but I can't, because I really don't know who she was. She didn't fit with any Catholic images, and that was the only thing I had been exposed to. But I knew she was God's helper because I felt so taken care of.

Bryan also had an experience of receiving help from a spiritual realm during a series of visions he had as a young adult. As he looks back on these experiences today, he wonders why it happened at that particular time and why now, when he practices meditation every day, nothing like this ever occurs. In fact, he expected to have dramatic experiences when he started to meditate. Contrary to his expectation, he has experienced a slow evolution of peace and devotion, but nothing "flashy" like his earlier experiences. He feels, though, that any experiences he has had over the years, whether dramatic or subtle, occur not through his ability to make them happen but, in his words, "by accident." He puts forth tremendous effort to follow the daily disciplines he has learned through Self-Realization Fellowship, yet he does not feel he has gained control over his experiences.

Bryan's dramatic mystical experiences occurred continuously over a period of two to three months. They happened before he started meditating, and he feels they provided the impetus to seek out a career as a psychophysical therapist, as well as a meditation path:

> I was having these experiences at night. Were they real spiritual experiences or hallucinations or what? I was conscious of people on the other side. They were like spiritual helpers and angels. It was very tangible. They communicated with me—not through words, but through shifts in vibration. I would leave my body, and just fly through space, and I would feel different sensations. I have no idea how long these episodes lasted. Sometimes there were powerful archetypal symbols. Where would they come from? The most powerful was the eye of the Horus symbol. There was a Chinese or oriental woman, some sort of guide from a spiritual realm, who painted this Horus eye on my own face. I mean it was just so real! You just couldn't say it was only a dream. I would regain consciousness and not know where I was, and then slowly a sense of familiarity would come back. I had no real context at all to understand these experiences. And then they just stopped. Looking back, I think the purpose of it all was to really get me started on the path of meditation.

When I inquired about how he interprets these experiences today in light of his Self-Realization Fellowship path, he replied,

> Well I had these experiences when I was young, before I ever started meditating. It seemed like the experiences reconnected me with a part of myself

that had been lost. Then later I was meditating, and I wasn't having any experiences—at least not any big experiences. Sometimes I have deep meditations, but it happens by accident; I can't duplicate them. I had to learn when I started meditating that my desire for drama wasn't completely satisfied. I kept asking, "Where's some dramatic stuff? Where's the beef?" I had a desire for the spiritual experiences that we think we're supposed to have as a meditator—instant bliss or whatever. Maybe some people do. I have really had to work my way back. I've had to develop discipline; I've had to develop devotion without desiring that I get anything back. It's hard. In hindsight I know what I've gotten back; it just hasn't been what I thought it would be. Meditation has made me a much calmer person. It's helped to be in the present moment. And this is a lot. It's just not what I expected.

Mystical experiences in some interviewees were triggered by intense emotional pain. Very suddenly they experienced a shift from struggling with difficult, painful emotions to a sense of deep peace. Barbara experienced this while in a therapy session when she felt as if a power entered through her eyes and then left through her breath. Suddenly her whole outlook on life changed. Her outer environment seemed infused with a sense of love and peace. And Vincent related that he began to practice meditation after having an experience of deep peace while in an encounter group:

In this training group, I was talking about my experience of grieving for my buddy. The person leading the training had me lie on the floor and she said, "I want you just not to do anything. Just allow yourself to be." I went into the deepest inner state. Everything just stopped. It was so peaceful. I was totally conscious. I have no idea how long I laid in the middle of that floor, but it was so peaceful, I never wanted that to end. Finally I opened my eyes and looked around, and I really had the sense of being connected with everyone.

Amanda, a psychotherapist, was working with a woman who was extremely hostile toward her. Because she had heard on the radio the story of a young psychotherapist who had been murdered by one of her clients, she was gripped with fear. She explained that she tried everything to work on overcoming her fear. As a last resort, she decided to try listening to a tape someone had given her of Muktananda chanting the mantra *om namah shivaya*. She lay on the floor of her office and listened for an hour before the client was due for an appointment:

> I was feeling very anxious. I wanted to jump out of my skin. I was listening to the tape, and all of a sudden, I said this prayer out loud, and I don't know where it came from. I prayed, "Christ, I don't know about all this guru stuff, but if I ever had a guru, you would be it. And if I ever needed a guru, I need one right now." And when I said that, there was an explosion of energy at the base of my spine. It went BAM! It was like this pulsing energetic heat started at the base of my spine and began to move up my back, and it was sending out shock waves of love. As it was moving up my back, it was as if all feelings in my body other than love were being pushed somewhere off into the void. I felt such a relief. It was something I'd never felt before—this incredible stillness, joy, and a total absence of everything I'd been feeling before. So I turned off the tape, and got up, turned the lights on, and I thought, "Wow, what a great tape," and then my client came.

Amanda later identified that experience as shaktipat, the awakening of kundalini through the guru's grace. The fact that she had never heard of shaktipat or known anything about Muktananda at the time of this experience led her to believe that the experience was authentic and had nothing to do with expectation. In her words, "I didn't know anything except that something very extraordinary had happened to me. This was great because my mind could never say that this occurred because of a suggestion. There was no way my mind could ever deny the experience later because the experience came before the understanding."

All of these experiences have in common the element of surprise. Later they learned terminology that helped them to understand what had occurred, but at the time, they felt like they were treading in unfamiliar territory. Mark, who practices TM, observed that it is impossible to have an expectation of a state of consciousness unless it is something with which the person is already familiar. If one could only experience what one already knew, there would be no possibility of change in consciousness. One could only repeat the familiar. His view contrasts to the argument that all mystical experiences are culturally bound. Mark explained what he understood to be the relationship between experience and knowledge:

> I *have* experienced unity consciousness, but there was no expectation of what this would be like. Before I started meditating, I recall that I was somewhat restless and desperate to know something and desperate to have some kind of experience. But the experience is much more than what I

expected because I was in a state of ignorance before. Each level of transformation brings a new level of knowledge. How can you expect that new experience until you know what it's like?

While all those interviewed had unique experiences to share, common motifs became apparent. These could be broadly categorized as two types: dramatic experiences involving intense emotions and/or physical sensations, and serene experiences involving inner stillness and silence. We call the first type "kundalini experiences" and the second type "serene experiences." These are not necessarily separate and distinct. People often reported having intense emotional and physical experiences while—at the same time—experiencing a deep inner calm. For the purposes of discussion, though, we will consider the kundalini experiences first and then the serene experiences.

Kundalini Experiences

The corpus of scriptures and experiences that center on the idea of kundalini awakening forms a unique genre of mysticism. Of the three HIMMs under consideration, kundalini mysticism is espoused especially by the gurus and teachers of Siddha Yoga. Although Yogananda did not specifically refer to kundalini, the techniques of Kriya Yoga that he taught are believed to awaken a spiritual energy. Maharishi, on the other hand, dissuaded giving attention to this idea, professing that kundalini experiences are simply the manifestation of stress being released from the nervous system. In TM parlance, the word for this is "unstressing." However, followers of Maharishi have reported classical experiences of kundalini awakening, particularly while doing their TM-Sidhi program.

According to Muktananda, the kundalini (also known as shakti) manifests in the form of physical and spiritual movements, visions, and inner sounds called kriyas. Kriyas serve several functions. They purify the gross and subtle bodies so that the energy of higher states of consciousness can be endured. This is the function that Maharishi called "unstressing." Muktananda revered kriyas because they reveal to the disciple kundalini in action. Of the manifestations in the physical body, Muktananda wrote, "These kriyas are not meaningless; they destroy sicknesses and purify the nadis [subtle channels]."[3] Kriyas may occur at a subtle sensory level, causing visions of ethereal realms or of deities, or the perception of subtle smells, tastes, and sounds. Muktananda asserted that it is through these "inner divine experiences" that God can be known. Thus a second function of kriyas is to make God manifest. Muk-

tananda asserted, "Shakti is the face of Shiva. When we look at someone's face we know who he is; and in the same way, when we perceive the Shakti working within, we come to know God."[4]

Yogi Amrit Desai, a popular guru in the United States in the 1980s, also spoke of the inner experiences that are common after kundalini awakening, such as hearing divine harmonies or the sound of various instruments or mantras, seeing lights of various colors, tasting divine flavors, or smelling sweet fragrances. He said that one may also recall past lives or be poetically inspired.[5]

In *Devatma Shakti*, Swami Vishnu Tirtha explained:

> When your mind gets influenced spiritually as if some spirit has taken possession of your body and under that influence different postures of yoga are involuntarily performed without the least pain or fatigue, and you feel increasingly buoyant, and simultaneously strange sorts of breathing exercises start, think that the Divine power of *Kundalini* has come into action.
>
> When no sooner you have sat with eyes closed than in an instant the body begins to show activity of throwing out limbs forcibly, deformed sounds are loudly uttered, your speech begins to utter sounds like those of animals, birds and frogs or of a lion or like those of jackal, dogs, tigers, fear inspiring and not pleasing to hear, understand that the Great Goddess *Kundalini* has come into action.[6]

From the mid-1970s, when Maharishi first introduced the TM-Sidhi program and Muktananda first began to give shaktipat on a massive scale, to the mid-1980s, the types of kriyas mentioned were very common in both the Siddha Yoga and Transcendental Meditation movements. The outer manifestations of kundalini that occurred during TM's group flying session and Siddha Yoga's group Intensives could be bizarre. Joe Latham's description offers a sense of the ecstatic mayhem of group "flying" sessions:

> Try to picture sitting in an assembly hall with a couple of thousand men [men and women practiced in different rooms] all sitting silently going deep into meditation. . . The group power builds over the next half-hour or so. . . At a specific point, everyone starts practicing the flying technique. Immediately people start bouncing in place, then start *bounding* in huge six-foot leaps around the room.
>
> Sitting in the lotus I pound the six-inch foam mattress as a wave of power rushes from the base of my spine, straight up into my head and

> blasts my small ignorant mind to infinity. . . The next thing I know, I'm lying on my side, jerking spasmodically, trying to figure out what happened. Liquid bliss courses from my heart into my left arm because my heart was suspended for some moments during the transcendence. Everyone around me is hopping like crazy and men are starting to make war cries.[7]

Latham goes on to describe how the group energy grew until thousands of men were simultaneously "clapping, laughing, hooting, and screaming victory war cries." Nancy Cooke de Herrera offers her observations of a similar group experience with women at a TM-Sidhi course in Switzerland, 1977:

> My body started to shake uncontrollably; it started in my bottom and worked up to my head in spasms. Next came a real shock of Kundalini, a shaft of heat shot up my spine, it was scary. . . I went up and down, and up and down—not forward or sideways, just up and down. What fun! It was so easy. My legs slipped out of the lotus position; I went up about two feet in the air just touching the pad with the outsides of my baby toes. . . Finally the noise became too much for me. It was like descending into hell. People howled like animals, chattered like monkeys, let out piercing screams, grunted in pain, moaned as in orgasm—it was pandemonium. Finally, we pulled mattresses into the side barroom and made an area for about twelve of us who were more conservative in our "flying." [8]

Although these wild group sessions no longer occur, when I questioned people about their experiences in meditation, many referred to classic kundalini types of experiences like those spoken of by Muktananda, Amrit Desai, and Swami Vishnu Tirtha. Some experienced physical manifestations such as bodily movements, spontaneous breathing exercises, and sensations such as the feeling of something crawling in the scalp or up the spine. Others reported experiencing inner subtle types of kriyas such as hearing sounds, seeing lights, or feeling lightness or bliss. Some observed a connection between kundalini and creativity. Carmen, for example, said, "During meditation all these things would unfold for me. I would understand how to do things. In meditation I created art, but in my mind, not with my hands."

The experience of seeing a snake, most often a cobra, in a dream or during meditation was common. One person said that he suddenly "unfurled" from deep sleep to sit up and hiss. Barbara related a snake experience that occurred while taking a Siddha Yoga Intensive:

Almost minutes into meditation a cobra appeared before me. I was quite frightened. I kept looking at it and breathing. Suddenly, it turned around and entered me and became me. My back started to arch back, and then I came forward, hissing. I tried to stop myself, saying "I'm making this all up," but I couldn't. So I went with it, and eventually it subsided, and then I felt the serpent leave me.

Several people explained that their meditation sessions would often begin with intense kriyas, but then eventually settle down into a peaceful meditation. Grace explained,

Every day I would have incredible physical kriyas. I'd get up at 3:00 in the morning and sit for meditation till 6:00 o'clock. My experience was a combination of contemplation, meditation, and intense physical kriyas. Often times I would have dry heaves, and after a period of that, the shakti would have me go into different mudras [hand gestures] and yoga positions. Then I would talk in a really strange tongue. This talking would happen even outside of meditation. I'd be out jogging, and I would spurt ahead of my husband so he wouldn't hear me. Whatever this strange tongue was, it felt very sacred. I thought that maybe I was a Buddhist monk or a Hindu Brahmin in another life. This went on for years. I still get physical kriyas to this day. I get such pain around the back of my neck and then I have this awful gagging thing, and sometimes I think "Just forget the whole thing." But if I sit through the kriyas, I then get to a really serene state. Once the kriyas stop, then I have this constriction that's very physical in my base chakra. Then there's an energy that shoots up into my head, and if I focus and just keep breathing, then sometimes it stays in my head and becomes very intense up in the sixth and seventh chakras. But sometimes then it goes back down, and I can feel it spreading through my body, and then it'll come back up, and it might come down and up several times. Sometimes then I'll have a retention of breath, and if I have that retention of breath, then I have that experience of peace and an opening up inside my chest.

Rachel experienced the kundalini in the form of a strange "language":

When I chant I get really heated up; the shakti gets so strong. Then these sounds start coming out. Sometimes the shakti talks so fast, but I know it's the shakti coming through me because it feels so positive. If I try to stop it, pressure builds up, and then it comes out.

Carmen spoke of a kundalini experience she had when she attended a program with Gurumayi in Milwaukee in 1992:

> I was sitting there in meditation when all of a sudden there was bolt of lightening and thunder, and my head flipped back. I opened my eyes and looked around; nobody heard it. Then at the base of my spine, in the area of my lower back, there was this trembling and a little electrical twinkly feeling. I'd never felt the kundalini physically before, and I just wanted to stay with that feeling.

Amanda spoke of sensations that she experienced around her neck:

> I feel like there's a ring of shakti points or acupressure points around my neck. I don't know what it is, but maybe there're eight points on it. And I will feel the energy at one of the points and it will start burning really intensely, and then I will feel like I'm going to cough or choke. But if I can just breathe and just let it do what it's going to do, the energy will all of a sudden break through that point and shoot all the way up, like it's going through all the chakras in my head on that one side. And the next time it happens, it will be a different point. It's fascinating. This process has gone on for about ten years.

Kristen described her first meditation:

> I had no expectations about experiences or what meditation would do for me. I was so young, only sixteen. In fact the first experience surprised me because they [TM teachers] said all that stuff about not expecting too much and about it being subtle. But my first meditation was fairly flashy. The experience was that I felt huge. I felt so huge, but my body was both huge and small at the same time. My awareness was so much larger than my body, yet somehow it seemed that my body had expanded to become really large.

Quite a few interviewees felt a "pulsation" or a "vibration" when they meditated. Sometimes this pulsation would make their body move slightly or sway from side to side. As one person put it,

> I feel this pulsation around my heart, but it's not my physical heart. It slowly becomes warmer and then it becomes huge and then it's like my heart is

> out here, and it's energy and bliss and there's no boundary between my skin and that energy. It happens pretty much whenever I sit to meditate.

Another reported,

> The predominant experience I have is the manifestation of pure blissful expansion of awareness. I will be meditating and then I feel like I'm vibrating. Even though I'm physically myself, I'm also outside my body. In the sahasrara [crown chakra], I feel silence vibrating. Then the silence vibrating gives rise to bliss. The vibrating itself is blissful.

The physical and ecstatic nature of kundalini experiences are similar to the shaking, shouting, swooning, and speaking in tongues (glossolalia) that are prevalent in Pentecostal churches as well as among the Shaker sect that arose out of the "Shaking Quakers," a small group of ecstatics on the fringe of Quakerism. These groups, like the HIMMs that focus on kundalini, view the physical manifestations as a sign of the indwelling God. While the manifestations are similar, they of course draw on very different traditions to interpret the phenomenon.

Serene Experiences

Many related another type of mystical experience, which consisted of inner stillness, often called "transcendence," and sometimes accompanied by a feeling of expansive love. The state of pure awareness or transcendental consciousness is a goal for many meditators. When I asked people to describe their experience of transcendental consciousness, they used words like "peacefulness," "inner stillness" or "going deep." Vincent described it thus: "I get very still and sometimes I think I'm asleep, but it feels different from sleep. When I wake up in the morning, it doesn't feel like it does when I come out of meditation. I come out from a deep place."

Brent reported, "I regularly experience how I interpret the word transcendence." By carefully using the phrase "how I interpret," Brent indicated that cognitive training accompanies the experience. He seemed to be aware that he was trying to grasp the experience of going *beyond* the mind *with* his mind. Kristin spoke of trying to understand the terminology of "transcendence" when she first began meditating. Her struggle provides a good illustration of the way experience and intellectual understanding can work

in tandem. In another religious context it is possible that she would have described the same experience in a different way.

> I didn't have a clear intellectual understanding of what was going on, and when they talked about transcending, I wasn't sure I was doing that. But at the same time something very dramatic seemed to be happening pretty much every time I sat to meditate. I would feel either far removed from my body or much larger than my body. Or else I would experience something very deep, very subtle, and very quiet. I was pretty high strung, so for me it was a really big contrast.

Robert Forman defines transcendence as a state of "wakeful though contentless consciousness."[9] Yet from the examples I listened to, it appears that each experience varies and is not always the same "contentless" state that Forman defines as transcendental consciousness. R. L. Franklin's characterization of transcendence more aptly describes interviewees experiences. In addition to being "beyond discursive thought" and bringing one "in touch with an unbounded deeper reality," Franklin states the transcendental state contains a "feeling-tone" that can vary in intensity.[10] Interviewees indicated a feeling-tone when they spoke of "deep joy" or "bliss" accompanying transcendence. And as Franklin suggests, the intensity of feeling varied from one meditation session to another.

Meditators use the term "witnessing" to describe an experience of detachment that occurs when the transcendental state begins to pervade their awareness even while they are engaging in activity. As Barbara described witnessing, "I'm the one watching rather than being actively involved in the drama of things." Aaron explained his experience of witnessing this way:

> There's less contrast now between the times I'm meditating and the times I'm not meditating. It's not just being pulled back from activity, but it's expanded awareness. I'm aware of more than just being in my body. I'm located in my body, but I'm outside the body at the same time. It's like I'm looking through the eyes of the body, but I'm not just the body. I feel like I'm this expanded awareness, and I'm pulled back from being involved in interactions.

Some reported that witnessing became stronger when they felt intense emotions. This may be because there is a greater contrast between the emotions and the silence behind them. Vincent spoke of this experience when he was in mourning after learning of his wife's terminal cancer diagnosis:

I was on a retreat, and I had such a sense of being in the witness state, like I've never had before. I was aware of sensations in my body and could identify them. All of a sudden, my stomach got really tight, my heart beat became really fast, and in that witness state, I thought, "That's interesting. That's fear." I don't usually get afraid, and as soon as I identified it, it went away.

Some meditators also spoke of witnessing while sleeping. One described her experience while attending a six-month-long TM course in Switzerland in 1975 and '76:

There were long periods of witnessing throughout the day and witnessing sleep a lot too. That was the most concrete. You can often wonder when you're having an experience in activity if it's real or if you're just imagining it. In sleep it's hard to imagine something. Witnessing was happening in both deep sleep and dreaming. Most of my life my experience of sleep was you'd lay your head on the pillow and a few seconds later, you'd wake up. But I started to become aware of the passage of time. Sleep wasn't just lost to me, but I was experiencing it all night long. This experience has been continual since then. It makes sleep a lot more enjoyable, because there's a bliss in actually experiencing it rather than having no experience of it.

Mark also spoke of maintaining a witness state during sleep:

Sleep for me is a continuum of consciousness. As the waking state goes away, consciousness maintains itself. There's no longer a gap in consciousness. Instead there's a continuum of awareness. In sleep I experience consciousness as being unchanged, absolute, and then there's the experience of waking in which there's movement and change. Then if you take the change away, you still have the absolute. It's what is always there, even during sleep.

The ability to witness one's own body, thoughts, or activities as if from a distance was consciously developed as part of the human potential movement—particularly Assagioli's techniques for psychosynthesis in which he taught people to repeat silently: "I *have* a body, but I *am not* my body; I am pure awareness." For followers of HIMMs this state is experienced spontaneously through alternating meditation with activity. Most gurus, Maharishi particularly, would not recommend cultivating this awareness through the

use of words. In fact, Maharishi referred to this sort of mental manipulation as "mood making." The result, according to Maharishi, would not be a real witness state of awareness, but something artificial or imagined. Because people from all three HIMMs experienced witnessing, it appears to be a natural outcome of daily meditation practice.

Another common experience meditators expressed was feeling an expansion of love accompanied by a sense of unity with others or with one's surroundings. Carmen related such an experience:

> My daughter came in to the kitchen where I was working. Suddenly for the first time in my life, I felt absolute unconditional love. I don't know what was on my face, but it made her stop in her tracks. I smiled and looked out the window. I felt there was no difference between the trees and me, between anything and me. Like after a rain when everything is fresh and crystal clear—the whole world was like that.

Randy exclaimed, "Sometimes I feel such deep ecstasy, I'm moved to tears. The spiritual life is so real when that happens, so deep, so intense, so wonderful." He described an experience he occasionally has of a compassionate woman looking through his eyes:

> Sometimes when I'm really devotional, and praying deeply—it's hard to explain—it feels like I'm looking out through someone else's eyes, and it's always a female, the same female, and there's always a shawl on her head, and she's feeling extremely devotional. Maybe I'm tapping into a past life, a very devotional life, when I feel this. Sometimes I think I want to feel it again, and I can't. Other times, I try to push it away and not let it come, but it's just there. She's always very devotionally quiet. I can't put words on it.

Aaron described feeling united with nature:

> Just after I started TM, when I was still in high school, I was in a park in the middle of the day, meditating under a tree. I had a very clear experience of transcending where there's no thought. When I came out everything was different. Everything was alive and vibrating and light. Everything was connected. Even the rocks were alive. It was like one connected projection, all glowing and full of light. Everything was pulsating with the same life. When I got up and started walking, it was like dancing. It was so effortless. I felt like I was weightless, and when I looked down, I wasn't touching the

ground. I was an inch or two off the ground. When I walked by plants, they leaned out and touched me, and I realized that everything is looking for love. At that moment I was radiating something that was attracting them. This was the most dramatic experience I ever had, and it made me realize that everything is animated by life. Everything is connected, and I am an integral part of that. Everything has a soul, and we're all connected.

Meditators who have experienced transcendental consciousness, witnessing, and universal love interpret reality and events in a way that coincides with their experiences. Their worldview shifts from looking at events and entities as disconnected to viewing everything as purposefully united. As Aaron states, "everything is connected," and "everything has a soul."

Assessing Progress on the Path

Most followers of HIMMs believe that they are involved in a process of gradual spiritual enlightenment and that as they continue to meditate, they will see signs of progress. They assess their progress by comparing their current state to their previous state or to the model that their gurus have provided for them. Comparing their current to their previous state, many pointed out that over time their daily experience outside of meditation felt more and more like what they used to experience only while meditating. Interestingly, many also felt that their most dramatic experiences occurred during the early years after they first began the practice of meditation. As they continued to practice, they stopped expecting dramatic experiences, but instead began to look forward to the peace and silence that meditation brought into their lives. One person reflected,

When I first started meditating, I was having fairly flashy and dramatic feelings during and after meditation. There was a huge contrast between in and out of meditation, and this has gotten less over the years. More qualities that happen in meditation are now there in activity—not only in my state of consciousness, but also physiologically. My metabolism is more subtle and relaxed and stable. The main thing I notice these days is just more of a witness value, like I'm being pulled back from everything. I'm not so strongly connected. I don't identify with my body, my thoughts, and my circumstances. I realize that's not me; that's not all I am, just my body and thinking. It's like witnessing, but it's not schizophrenia. I'm not attached to little up and downs. I'm much more stable emotionally.

Another assessed his path and realized that he had continuously grown into higher states of awareness:

> For me meditation has been an accumulation of infinity, silence, and expansion, and that continues over time. As my consciousness, which is the Self, becomes aware of itself, it can't remember anything other than that. It can't remember anything other than itself. That experience is becoming stable over time, and so any experiences of the past are always less than what I have right now.

Comparing their own state to that of their guru's, followers of HIMMs look for signs that corroborate their gurus' expectations, and they often interpret their experiences using the language of their gurus. It became evident in interviews that the adherents of each HIMM attempted—with varying degrees of success—to fit their own personal experiences into the road map they had learned. It also became evident that meditators were influenced by the religious tradition they practiced before their involvement with a HIMM. For example, even though Maharishi never discussed Jesus Christ as part of his "road map," several TM interviewees related having visions of Christ. Only a very few had the sense that they were progressing along an orderly path from ignorance to enlightenment in the way they had originally thought they would. They had learned from their guru what to expect, but on reflection, realized that their experience was only sometimes in alignment with this expectation.

Practitioners of SRF are expected to hear the sound of *om,* to see inner lights, and to feel sensations along the spine. They are also expected to feel an increase in love and peace. Because they are taught not to discuss their experiences in meditation, it is more difficult with this group to determine if the expected experiences are occurring. Interviewees usually referred only briefly to their own mystical experiences. However, when they did, they used the language of their guru. For example, one said, "I've been trying to hear om, but I never heard it. On the other hand, I see the light vividly when I go deep in meditation. Sometimes it's little, and sometimes it's large." Another said, "I've had some experiences of the spine. It was actually an amazing experience and it lasted a whole day. Everything just seemed loving. It was precipitated by kriya practice [that focuses on the spine]." Another said, "I get more of a peaceful feeling from meditation. I don't see things. Sometimes I see a yellow haziness, a circle. It might be the spiritual eye. The SRF symbol is a blue light with a yellow ring about it and a star in the middle." Blake reported,

> Things happen that are intangible, and I can't explain them. I'm aware of certain inner sounds, sensations, healings, and inner visualizations. These happen when you're first on the path. It's hard to bring them back, but it can happen with dedication. Now things happen outside of meditation. There's a singular sound, om. It's everywhere; it's a matter of tuning into it. Or there's the spiritual eye, which is in the form of a light. When you're not meditating, just sitting somewhere, it can be pulsating immediately for extended periods of time—for minutes. I haven't even sat down to meditate when this happens. It's just there, and it totally consumes my sight, so I'm not seeing you, but I'm seeing this light. It's like looking at a movie screen, a huge panorama screen, just seeing the spiritual eye for a long time. That's a phenomenon; it's not the ultimate goal, just a nice gift.

In all of these examples, the experiences referred to are straight from Yogananda's specific blueprint. No one from Siddha Yoga or TM referred to hearing the sound *om* or seeing a "spiritual eye." Are people experiencing what they expect to experience based on what they are taught by their HIMM? Or do the meditation techniques provided by each group actually give rise to different types of mystical experiences? Is there an objective experience—say, of light—that the meditator immediately shapes into what she or he expects? Does the experience of a "hazy light" remind a follower of SRF of the organization's symbol, while someone who practices Siddha Yoga is reminded of the "blue pearl"? It was obvious from these interviews that even though followers of all three groups had some similar experiences, they also had experiences that corresponded to the particular HIMM of the meditator.

The epistemology of William James may shed some light on these questions. James distinguished between two types of knowledge: "knowledge-by-acquaintance" and "knowledge about." The first type is immediate and preverbal, as for example, the experience of tasting a pear. The second type is articulate and conceptual, as in the thought "That pear tastes good." These two types of knowing are intertwined and affect each other. However, lacking knowledge-by-acquaintance a person cannot have a complete picture. As the religious studies scholar G. William Barnard put it: "Knowledge-by-acquaintance provides information that knowledge-about simply cannot replicate; tasting an apple is fundamentally different from knowing about apples, even if these two processes are fused during each bite."[11]

Perhaps, to answer my questions above, "knowledge-about," or to put it another way, preconceived notions, affect people's perception to such an

extent that, given the same "objective" material, the experience will be perceived differently. A light appears and a person in the same instant "colors" the light to meet his or her expectation. This view might be called "soft constructivism." It assumes that there is an objective reality, but that reality is perceived differently by different people depending on the person's prior cultural conditioning. "Hard constructivists" would say there is no "objective" light. The entire experience is being created by the imagination of the perceiver. Carried to its extreme, hard constructivists would insist that every person creates his or her own reality. There are no "givens." Soft constructivists would argue that the cultural and the linguistic background gives reality a particular "twist" or "flavor."

Jess Hollenback in his *Mysticism* examines this question by comparing the kundalini experiences of Gopi Krishna, an avowed agnostic, to those of Muktananda, a "theist." In his autobiography, Muktananda describes his experience of chakras as "lotuses"; Gopi Krishna, with his Western scientific education, describes them in his personal accounts as "discs of light." Muktananda discussed deities and letters associated with the chakras; Gopi Krishna saw only whirling light. Not only were their visions of chakras at odds but so also were their attitudes toward those visions. For example, Muktananda interpreted his visions of various heavens and hells as proof that they existed; Gopi Krishna opened up his visionary experiences to scientific investigation.[12] Perhaps the experience of seeing light is likewise interpreted by different meditators according to their "knowledge about" how these lights *should* be seen. Regarding this idea, Steven Katz relates the story of Manet [*sic*, Monet] who painted the Notre Dame cathedral with Gothic archways based on *his* experience of Gothic cathedrals when, in fact, the archways were Romanesque. Katz reminds the reader of Coleridge's statement: "the mind half-sees and half-creates."[13]

Muktananda clearly laid out in his autobiography a road map in which four types of lights of different colors and sizes are associated with different states of consciousness. Everyone who continues to meditate will experience these four lights, according to Muktananda. The final vision of a tiny blue light that is said to correspond to the "supercausal" body is emphasized in the teachings of Siddha Yoga above the other three lights. When I asked Siddha Yoga disciples about experiences in meditation, none of them referred to the red, white, or black lights that are said to correspond to the gross, subtle, and causal bodies as Muktananda experienced them. They spoke only of the blue light, referring either to how they *had* or *had not* seen it. Jennifer, for example, said she had a vision of the blue pearl after she had been meditat-

ing with Siddha Yoga for a short period. She reminisced, "I cried because I knew this was the highest experience. I remember that meditation often—especially when I think I'm not having any experiences." Vincent spoke of experiencing transcendence, but of having never seen the blue pearl, which, according to Muktananda, is associated with that state:

> Sometimes I see lights, but I've never seen the blue pearl. I learned in a Blue Pearl Course that sometimes we experience it in the heart rather than see it. I've experienced it that way. Sometimes my heart explodes. When I was on a retreat in India I was in silence for eleven days. Every other day I had this experience of my heart exploding.

Jennifer was taught that seeing the blue pearl was the highest experience, and so she remembers that meditation when she thinks she is not having any experiences. Even though elsewhere during the interview, Jennifer spoke of her heart expanding in love, she did not associate that with the blue pearl. Vincent, on the other hand, learned while taking a course that the blue pearl could be experienced as the heart, so he feels he has experienced the blue pearl even though he has never seen it. Followers of the Siddha Yoga path seem to rate their experiences in accordance with what they understand to be valuable. Barbara, another follower of Siddha Yoga, questioned the meaning of a vision she had of little blue lights. She seemed to be trying to fit her experience into the rubric of "a spiritual experience" according to what she had been taught, but finally concluded that perhaps it was not that important after all. She related her experience:

> Driving home from Milwaukee, my husband and I were ecstatically chanting, and all of a sudden, I began seeing little pea-sized bubbles of light; they were blue. I thought, "Is this the windows?" So I rolled down the windows, but they were still there. They went away when we finished chanting. Was this the blue pearl? What does that mean in my life? I've been thinking about that every since—about how it translates into my life. It's supposed to be like the awakening of consciousness. It's a sign to us. Maybe the Guru sees blue light all the time. If I don't see it, does that mean I'm not waking up? I really think to see the blue pearl is not important.

The reports from Siddha Yoga practitioners raise questions. Muktananda experienced the expansion of consciousness along with lights; the two seemed to be inseparable. His entire journey took place through the vehi-

cles of these different lights, and he described the experience of liberation as the explosion of the blue pearl after which blue shimmering light permeated everything he saw. If his disciples do not have the same experience, is it because they are so far behind Muktananda in their journey, or is it because their journey is not to be the same as Muktananda's? It is intriguing that no one spoke of experiences of the other colored lights that, according to Muktananda's experience, would indicate a lesser state of spiritual evolution than the highest state that corresponds to the blue light. This is not to say it does not happen, but it did not show up in my interviews nor in the literature of personal experiences reported in the monthly publications of Siddha Yoga.

For TM practitioners who listened to Maharishi's lectures or read his books, there is no doubt about what they should expect on their path. Maharishi clearly outlined for them different stages of consciousness that should occur as their experience of meditation becomes established. As pointed out earlier, one of Maharishi's most profound innovations was his insistence that everything follows from meditation. One does not have to *try* to change anything; one only has to meditate. He advised his followers to meditate in the morning, meditate in the evening, and then watch life spontaneously grow more easeful and joyful. In fact, he even advised people not to think too much, for this would detract from the natural unfolding of consciousness. Just as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep occur naturally, so the experience of higher states of consciousness will naturally unfold.

Maharishi often reiterated his expectation that those who practice Transcendental Meditation on a daily basis should experience what he called the "seven states of consciousness," which later in his career expanded to eight states. Briefly, the first three are waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The fourth state is transcendental consciousness, which is experienced in meditation. It is a thought-free condition of pure awareness, what Robert Forman calls the "pure consciousness event." When a person alternates between meditation and activity for a period of time, he experiences the fifth state, "cosmic consciousness," in which transcendental consciousness is maintained while in the midst of activity. The hallmark of this state is witnessing. The sixth state is "God consciousness" (sometimes referred to as "refined cosmic consciousness"), in which one begins to appreciate "finer levels" of the relative world. A person may see into the "astral" world, have visions of angels or *devas,* or see auras. In the seventh state, "unity consciousness," the individual self unites with its surroundings. In the eighth state, "Brahman consciousness," a person realizes her identity as the creator of all worlds.

I asked followers of TM if they had experienced any or all of these states. None had experienced all of them in the order in which Maharishi had outlined. Many had experiences of unity consciousness, the seventh state, but not of God consciousness, the sixth state. Aaron was unique in being able to pinpoint his own state of consciousness in relation to Maharishi's teachings, saying, "Cosmic consciousness is transcendence along with activity. That's what I'm experiencing. I've also experienced a little of God consciousness when I saw everything was alive and permeated by light." John was also fairly certain about his own experience, but it was contrary to what Maharishi outlined. He did not feel he had experienced any of the states except in brief glimpses during mystical experiences he had had before he began meditating. This does not mean he did not see benefits from meditating, but that he did not see the specific outcomes that Maharishi predicted. He expressed his understanding in this way:

> Cosmic consciousness is transcendental consciousness on a permanent basis. I've had nights where I've witnessed, but it's vague, and it's not permanent. So no, I'm not in cosmic consciousness. I don't have subtle visions, so I'm not in God consciousness. Unity consciousness is the non-dual state. I haven't experienced that. What I experienced when I was a teenager [before meditating], was more like cosmic consciousness because the absolute and relative weren't one. It was more like infinity was inside me.

Most TM practitioners struggled to understand how their own experience fit with Maharishi's blueprint. One person said, "I don't feel like I'm enlightened, maybe semi-enlightened. But Maharishi hardly ever talks about those lower states of enlightenment any more, like cosmic consciousness. Now he's always talking in terms of unity consciousness and Brahman consciousness." Donna felt she had some of the different experiences that Maharishi spoke of, but that they did not fit his consecutive pattern:

> It's very hard to see your own progress. My son is fourteen and a half, and he's growing so fast. But usually I don't see it because I'm so close to it. I think the growth in consciousness is like that. I learned to meditate in 1971, and I think most of the growth in consciousness occurred in 1971 and '72. I think it's exactly like Maharishi said. You do the regular practice of TM, and growth happens. No, it's not consecutive growth like Maharishi outlined. I had experiences in the mid-seventies that were the beginning of what I would characterize as qualities of unity consciousness. And yet

there were many aspects of cosmic consciousness and God consciousness that I never had.

Darren's experience was similar to Donna's. He felt he was experiencing unity consciousness without the earlier stages:

> When I think about my own self and where I am in this, I can't figure it out. Maharishi says it should be clear. I don't have any questions that aren't answered, and I feel established, and I don't feel ignorant or lacking. Basically, I feel enlightened. Now Maharishi says the first stage of enlightenment is cosmic consciousness. But I'm definitely not witnessing all day. I think I'm beyond that first stage. But I don't see angels or anything like you would in God consciousness. I don't know, I think to experience the finer levels of the relative, you would be aware of celestial life, angels and everything. But I don't have that kind of experience. But I do feel unity. I feel at one with everything in my environment and with other people. And I feel compassion for everything—people, animals, the earth. It's not because I'm some kind of special, loving person. I feel this because all of these things are my own self. So I don't know if I'm in unity consciousness or God consciousness or what. I used to think I'm beyond all that. Maharishi talks about Brahman consciousness too. I don't really know. The other thing is it's just not so important any more. I really don't care that much. To me, evolution is completely natural. I don't even have to desire it. I'm past all that. But I don't know where I am in all these states of consciousness, and Maharishi says it should be clear.

Conclusion

Many meditators, when they first began the practice, were fanatical about reaching the goal of enlightenment. Maharishi used to promise those who practiced TM that they would attain "cosmic consciousness" after meditating for five years, and people acted as if they were on a racetrack trying to get there as fast as they could. Later, after many years of *sadhana* (spiritual practices), meditators noticed that their egos were still hanging on, even if a bit more mellowed. Yet I did not sense disillusionment from these long-term meditators. As the years passed, they have become more relaxed about attaining a final goal and seem content to perform their daily practices and to try to integrate their experiences of meditation into daily life. Although nobody I interviewed claimed to have reached the goal of enlightenment that

they once thought was right around the corner, they all proclaimed that they are happier and more peaceful than they used to be. When I asked Bryan, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, if he had expectations when he first began meditating about where he would be today, he replied,

> Yeah, I had all those delusions about how fast I would go. I had ideas about what I thought it was all going to be. That's all shot now—and it's good that it is. It was just another mental construct to let go of. It's obvious now it was just a fantasy. But I'm very happy now, and that makes me willing to let go of mental fantasies about what spirituality is supposed to be and what state of consciousness is supposed to be a high state of consciousness. The less I try to know, the better off I am. I'm happier with myself and the world. And happier is the goal.

It appears that meditators' early expectation of attaining some mystical and ethereal goal has been transformed to the goal of living life at this point in time in the best way possible. They have not given up faith that the experiences their gurus have promised are possible and desirable, but the expectation of having these experiences is not foremost in their minds.

8

Worldview

Existential questioning at a young age and the suffering that often accompanies it was a predominant theme among those I interviewed: "I would look up at the stars and ask, 'Why am I here?'" "I was always searching, searching, searching." "I felt something was really missing." "Always in the back of my mind I was thinking, there must be something more." "Everything seemed empty."

When these young people discovered meditation and the Hindu philosophy that accompanies its practice, they felt they had found purpose to their lives. Their newfound path seems to have satisfied their need to know their ultimate purpose. There was often a struggle with the religion in which they were raised in order to make the transition to a new one. Once the transition was made, they felt they had a belief system that made more sense than the one that had left them unsatisfied. The practice of meditation gave them a method for finding stillness and stability in the midst of a troubled world. Their belief in the supernormal state of the guru gave them an anchor to hold them steady and a hope that some day they would no longer be affected by their particular angst and suffering. Gathering with other devotees gave them a community that understood their longing and supported them on the path.

The spiritual practices, beliefs, and community gave them a new worldview, or a new "meaning system." The sociologist William Sims Bainbridge defines this phrase as "an orientation to the world so global that it encompasses both ultimate values and basic beliefs."[1] The meaning system of HIMMs must be distinguished from the norms that are prescribed by particular HIMMs. The meaning system is general and overarching; norms, as they have been conceptualized by sociologists since the mid-twentieth century, are specific prescriptions for the proper behavior to be followed in particular situations.[2] The guru and organization of each HIMM has specific prescriptions for its participants, which they take great care to preserve. The preservation process is referred to as "protecting the purity of the teachings."

What is considered correct in one HIMM may be considered the obverse in another. For example, it would be incorrect for a practitioner of TM to say the mantra out loud. But followers of Siddha Yoga view this as not only correct but desirable. It is correct and good to talk about one's spiritual experiences in Siddha Yoga, but incorrect and harmful to do so for those in SRF. It is improper to talk about kundalini in TM, whereas kundalini stories abound in Siddha Yoga. These are a few of many examples of specific prescriptions. "Protecting the purity of the teachings" includes discrediting spin-off groups and discouraging followers from visiting gurus outside the particular HIMM, or even reading their literature. In this sense, each HIMM is a closed system.

The overall meaning system, however, is shared by all HIMMs, including the spin-off groups of the main organizations. The system includes the ideas that subtle levels of consciousness are more powerful than mundane; that all things are interconnected; that existence and time are cyclical; that karma and evil are inevitable; that the guru is perfect; that equanimity, detachment, and sustained effort are to be cultivated; that sacred space and time are to be valued; and that God or Being dwells within the heart of each person. These beliefs and attitudes have consequences in the ethical actions, social interactions, and religious practices of meditators. When people with the same meaning system join together by sharing ritual customs and a common metaphorical language, a sense of community ensues. The community, with its shared beliefs and customs, constitutes the religion of HIMMs.

A New Religious Worldview

Throughout the history of Western belief systems there have been two general forms of religious expression. These forms exist on a continuum with overlap and shades of gray, but, for the purpose of discussion, two polar ends can be delineated and contrasted. One way has its source in Jewish tradition and is later appropriated by Christians and Muslims. This type is often referred to theistic, prophetic, or Abrahamic religion. It focuses on one transcendent "wholly other" male God who takes a personal interest in the affairs of humanity. While he is a God of compassion, he is also a God of justice, rewarding the good and punishing the evil. This God communicates ethical guidelines to humans through specially chosen prophets. In this worldview human beings are considered to be, if not innately evil, at least prone toward sin. If people follow God's commandments, and in the case of Christianity, accept Jesus's compensatory death, they enter into a special covenant with God, and they become part of God's chosen in spite of their sinful natures.

Because of their special place in creation, human beings in this religious stream are viewed as having dominion over nature.

A second way of being religious could be called pantheistic or mystical. In this worldview God can be either impersonal or personal, but in either case is believed to exist within the human heart. One can realize God's existence "within" through nature or through meditation or contemplation. Those who follow this way of being religious de-emphasize doctrine and believe that truth exists in all religions. They stress human beings' innate perfection because humans share in God's nature. The mystical tradition can be found in Kabalistic Judaism, in Christian mysticism, in the Sufi tradition of Islam, and in many forms of Asian religions. The theistic/prophetic tradition is the dominant tradition of Western culture, and the pantheistic/mystical is often considered subversive in the West. The two traditions may, and do, intertwine. Some religious institutions cannot be labeled clearly as either theistic/prophetic or pantheistic/mystical. On which side of these two streams would one classify the Quakers, for example? While they eschew outer authority and rely on the "Inward Light" and "God in every man," they also hold to many orthodox Christian doctrines.

Sydney Ahlstrom argues that prophetic religiosity arises from the Judaic tradition, later taken up by Protestant Christianity. The mystical, he argues, has its source in the Greco-Roman tradition, which later influences the catholic tradition. The former is strongly associated with the idea of a covenantal relationship between God and humans and is connected to a particular land.[3] Robert Ellwood has also speculated about the nature of the two streams: "There are two basic types of religions: those grounded in cosmic wonder and communicated by the exemplary personalities, and those grounded in revelation within history and emissary communication." He comments further on the former type, which he views as having significant impact on contemporary America making a change in its understanding of religion:

> We sense a new spiritual type emerging in contemporary America. The new spiritual man is more like the kind of person we have heretofore associated with the East—or with cultists. He presumes without question that God or spiritual reality, if it is to be found, is to be found within through expanded states of consciousness which penetrate like searchlights toward the deep floor of being. Interior exploration is his main concern. He is suspicious of words and verbal communication. He is disenchanted with sermons, lectures, and disquisitions, but is highly sensitive to nonverbal

> communication and the lessons of meditation. He is susceptible to the exemplary person, one who by subtle, often nonverbal means shows he is "turned on" and is able to "turn on" others just by the radiance of his presence. The new spiritual man's social concern is for an organic, ecological harmony of humankind with the cosmos in subtle interaction. His moral values center around openness, sincerity, and love.[4]

Wade Clark Roof argues that the divisions between these two religious types, ("theists" and "mystics"), increased during the 1960s, and the divide continues to the present day. He asserts, "The cognitive boundaries between evangelicalism and fundamentalism, on the one hand, and a growing New Age spiritual consciousness, on the other, hardened as time passed—leading to a crystallization of people's self-definition, whether traditionally religious or spiritual, in response to the cultural unrest of the period."[5] Based on interviews with more than five hundred baby boomers, he concludes that "the great spiritual divide" can be correlated to exposure or lack of exposure to the counterculture of the 1960s:

> An image of God as father, viewing life as influenced by God, beliefs in eternal life and in the devil, having a born-again experience, and a pessimistic conception of human nature—all are held more strongly by those who did not embrace the 1960s. This constellation of beliefs and symbols hangs together and is meaningful over against the disruptive experiences of the sixties. Likewise, a set of items tapping mystical consciousness varies in the opposite direction. Having God "within" us, being influenced by new insights learned from ourselves, being alone and meditating, belief in reincarnation, and regarding all religions as equally true and good—all are endorsed more strongly by those who *did* embrace the sixties. The constellation as a whole is predictable on the part of those drawn toward an alternative meaning system. Clearly, along a theistic-to-mystical axis, there was and still is a deep polarization of symbols, meanings, and assumptions about human nature.[6]

Experience is important in both ways of being religious, but the type of experience that is *valued* is different. In the mainstream Christian church, for example, religious experience is interpreted as a personal encounter with a Father God, or with God the Son who was sent by his God to sacrificially die for the sins of humanity. Experience is interpreted differently in the Chris-

tian mystical tradition. The encounter is with a God who is in communion with the human soul, or, taking the idea farther, no different than the human soul. It is the mystical stream that followers of HIMMs find attractive. While for some the transition from the theistic/prophetic model in which they were raised to the mystical model was difficult, others were instantly attracted to it. For example, when Blake heard of the idea of spiritual presence existing in all things in a Sunday school class, he immediately felt that it was true. On the other hand, one SRF follower spoke of taking years to adjust to the idea that God can be experienced within: "My whole worldview had to change. It took eleven years for me to come to terms with the idea of reincarnation. It took that long because I was raised Catholic. It was a very gradual shift. Now I see that all the insights I've had from Yogananda's teaching bring more depth to what I know about Christ's teaching. But I moved in that direction very slowly."

Some spoke of how they preferred the focus on inner experience to the focus on doctrine in the religion they had left behind. Barbara said,

> Always from young childhood I prayed a lot. I was Catholic, but I dropped the church when I went to high school. I needed to break away from family tradition and establish my own choices. The underpinnings of the church were right, but the words were wrong. They always focused on the right way and the wrong way of doing things. They didn't focus on experience. It was always about what the Bible said and the interpretations of priests and the pope. I knew I had experiences. I had deep-heart connections, and the church didn't talk about those.

Vincent left his church because he viewed it as based on rules rather than love:

> The more I practice Siddha Yoga, the more I see there is no conflict between what's in the gospel and what is taught in Siddha Yoga. But I do find there's a huge difference between the two when I look at the church. The emphasis was always on the rules and on going to church.

Others spoke of the theistic view as being narrow-minded and focused on humans' sinful nature. Many devotees were being exposed to new ideas and cultures as high schools began to offer courses in sociology and world religions, and the church did not speak to their growing awareness of plural-

ism. For Eleanor, it took some time to overcome the feeling that her church had deceived her:

> I went to a Lutheran church, and they were always talking about heaven and hell. They talked about how the Jews were going to hell and about how there was a difference between Catholics and Lutherans. When I was in high school, I took a class in sociology, and we studied comparative religions. For the first time, I was exposed to different ideas. The teacher opened my mind. I saw the fallacies I had been taught. When I went to college, I couldn't even think about religion. It felt like a betrayal. The things we were taught in church were just not true.

Grace was introduced to the possibilities offered by different religions when she returned to school to get a degree in Religious Studies. She spoke of the realizations she had when she learned that there was more to religion than just the Roman Catholic Church:

> I was studying comparative religion and I learned how sacred texts often came into existence around a central figure. Followers wrote what each considered to be sacred texts. I'd never thought about this before. Something happened inside me, and I cracked open. I had the realization, wait a minute, if the Holy Bible is written by men around a central figure and we believe it's sacred, but the same is true of the Quran, then what makes the Bible so special? I had taught religion classes in Catholic churches from the time I was fourteen. I believed that Catholicism was it. This thing came up, my gosh, if there are other religions with the same basis, whoa! I started being more critical of Catholicism. When I would go to mass, I would actually start to get sick. First of all, there was the degradation of women. And then the whole aspect of sin didn't sit with me anymore. That was end of Catholicism for me. I was in my early thirties. I still believed in God, and I felt a connection with Him, but I no longer associated myself with a group.

Some interviewees spoke about combining worldviews or of holding two or more views simultaneously rather than abandoning one for another. Combining the theistic and the mystical often came up for followers of Yogananda because his teachings attempt to bring together Christianity and Hinduism. Bryan said,

I was raised Jewish, not religious, but we were cultural Jews. When I was in my early twenties, I read the Bible from beginning to end. I was really interested in Jesus. I had strong feelings about him, and this caused a conflict. Then when I read Yogananda, I connected to Jesus as an avatar (an incarnation of God). I didn't have to leave Western culture or mythology. I feel lucky I didn't grow up Christian because I don't have to rebel against that. I'm not attracted to Krishna or Hindu mythology. I try to, but I can't make that leap. It's not important to me. I've never been to India. I'm not attracted to forms of God, and I'm not attracted to ritual.

Here we have an American Jew coming into relationship with Jesus in the form of a Hindu avatar! Bryan's reaction is similar to some of the Hindus that Christian missionaries attempt to convert. Jesus for them is simply another incarnation of God. On the other hand, and I think this is important in looking at HIMMs as an American phenomenon, Bryan liked the idea of Jesus being an avatar because it allowed him to combine worldviews, yet he was simply not interested in other Hindu avatars.

After they began meditating, some began to read such Christian mystics as Saint John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. Others brought the different views together in a way similar to what Vivekananda and other Neo-Hindus had done—by subsuming all paths under the philosophy of Vedanta. A TM practitioner spoke of how she loved the ritual of Holy Communion, and yet she wasn't sure how this fit with her new worldview:

I love taking communion. It's like a yajña [Vedic fire ceremony]. For years I thought communion was kind of silly. But I don't approach it from an intellectual standpoint anymore. I don't think the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. I don't know what I think intellectually. All I know is I have a tremendous experience of some kind of grace of God when I do it, so it doesn't matter to me whether it physically becomes the body and blood or it's just a symbol. I feel there is some sort of presence of Christ there. I don't know how to relate all the Vedic things I've learned like Shiva and Vishnu and Brahma and the different aspects of Mother Divine and the Absolute and the supreme value of the relative. I don't know how to relate all that to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But it doesn't matter. Every culture expresses divinity in a different way—whether the tree is divine, or the wolf is divine, or Christ is divine, or God in the abstract is divine, or Mother Divine is divine. It's all the same. In a way, all those different forms are part of the illusion.

She ends on a Vedantic note by saying, "all those different forms are part of the illusion." Advaita Vedanta is a philosophical outlook that was articulated in the *Upanishads* and was later formally constructed into a consistent philosophy by the eighth-century Indian metaphysician, Shankaracharya. Its central theses are that the empirical world is an illusion and that Brahman, the supreme principle of the universe, is no different than atman, the substrate of the individual. The reality is one, and apparent multiplicity is an illusion. The simplicity of this doctrine may be part of its attractiveness for Americans, a point made by Swami Vivekananda who said that Vedantic religion is particularly suited to the American ethos.[7] The feeling of inclusiveness offered by the monistic view is appealing to many followers of HIMMs. One interviewee said, "Each one of us is relatively insignificant, but at the same time part of a wonderful whole. There is this sense that all things are connected."

Ethical System

When I asked meditators about their life's purpose, I found their answers to be fairly uniform. Almost all spoke of two purposes, which they saw as related: to attain self-realization and to serve others. Serving others can only be done unselfishly if one pursues spiritual practices. Blake explained the relationship:

> I'll know what's right if I do the practices. God is right here within each one of us, and we should be able to make that connection at will. I'm here for service. Every way I can, in everything I do—even just driving down the road, if I see someone who looks unhappy, I smile and wave. At work, my service is to get grants and to serve my students. I read their manuscripts; I help them design experiments. It's not me first; it's them first. That's how I look at it. My relationship with people *is* my relationship with God. And the goal of life is spiritual union with God.

Bryan also brought the values of self-realization and service together:

> In the biggest sense, my purpose is to realize myself as a divine being. I know these are exalted words, but I really do believe that's the purpose of my life. When I get away from that direction, I feel pain; when I'm pointed in that direction, I feel happier and happier. So I know from experience that it must be true. The challenge is to take everything in daily life—not

just meditation—and make it a part of that. I mean everything—household chores, going to work, filling out forms for my son's college. I try to see nothing as better or worse. I try to see all of waking life as a way of practice in working with my higher self. I used to think meditation was an escape from life. Now I see it in an integrated way. Meditation isn't separate from life; it helps the rest of life. The deeper I go in meditation, the more harmonious the rest of my life is.

On the other hand, some had trouble balancing the two goals because they felt a pull to leave the world and focus on their own enlightenment:

I went to a Mother Divine course [a TM course for women] when my daughter was not yet two. She had just been weaned. When I arrived at the course, I thought, "Oh yeah, this is what I'm here for." I felt pulled right back into the movement from a world that had exploded into the multiplicity of the relative—career, big house, etc.—which was never what my goal was. The women of Mother Divine had just been out of silence for a couple of days. They did a group puja [worship] to Maharishi, and then they just sat waiting for his phone call. One hundred and fifty women sitting in silence. I just can't tell you how much silence there was in that room. And it was like a crisis of identity for me. As if I could walk away from a house in downtown Washington, a business, a half dozen employees, a husband, and two kids. I was Shankara; I was ready to leave and go to my cave. Of course, I couldn't do that. So I continued to go to Mother Divine regularly for the next five or six years for six weeks out of a year.

It seems that the concerns of Vivekananda at the beginning of the twentieth century are same concerns at the beginning of the twenty-first century: that is, finding a balance between inwardness and active service to others. Vivekananda chided his gurubhais in India for being too reclusive. He saw service as holding the key to overcoming the poverty and social problems that plagued his country. Yet he himself was acutely aware of the struggle involved in working hard in the world while still maintaining a sense of God-consciousness. Most followers of HIMMs solve this problem by going on annual retreats, which is why ashrams in the United States are very lively places in the summer as thousands make their annual pilgrimages.

While most of those I interviewed spoke of balance, it may indeed be that the call of the inner life trumps the call to service, causing HIMMs' influence on American political and social life to remain weak. HIMMs are primar-

ily a religion of personal ecstasy. The emphasis on meditation and inner fulfillment has not been conducive to marshalling the tremendous energy and resources required to develop programs for young people. Many HIMMs are able to establish summer family retreats or camps for children, but during the year, the smaller groups scattered throughout the United States have trouble supporting regular youth programming. The religious education of children is still left to traditional religious institutions, causing some meditators to attend churches and synagogues when they have children. Because of this emphasis on the individual, it is questionable whether HIMMs will ever grow to encompass a large portion of American culture. Robert Ellwood has noted that the two functions of religion must be balanced. "It must engender ecstasy, but it must also conserve the social order. If the former takes precedence, there are no sanctions by which to safeguard a religious movement's outer structure. If the latter takes precedence, then the religion seems to have only constraints to offer and not joy."[8]

For followers of HIMMs, Karma Yoga creates the ethical basis for combining these two goals. The philosophy states that self-realization can be attained while performing duties in the world with detachment. In the Bhavagad-Gita Krishna counsels Arjuna to fight, even if it means he must kill some of his own relatives, because it is his duty as a warrior. Yet Krishna warns Arjuna that he should realize he has no control over the outcome of the battle. If a person is not concerned over the results of his or her actions, contentment and equanimity arise. Thus Karma Yoga brings together the two purposes of life: to attain enlightenment, (peace, equanimity, and joy), and to serve others by doing one's duty. Roxanne spoke of learning this lesson from Yogananda:

> There is this goal of giving service, but it's even more than that. It's to find God. You have these duties to do as well, like raising children. People are always asking, 'What shall I do with my life?' Master [Yogananda] and God don't care. You just enjoy whatever you do and you give service. God wants you to find Him. It's hard in our culture, because we're such strivers. We should accept our role, play our part, and have fun with it.

Meditators value the ethic of contentment. It is cultivated not only by enjoying one's work but also by relating to others with equanimity. Diane spoke of overcoming a lifetime problem with anger and impatience when she learned from Maharishi that "it is more important to be harmonious than to be right." Meditation helps to cultivate harmonious relationships. John, who works in a mental hospital, spoke about how meditation helps him to help others:

> Meditation gives me a stable base from which to operate. I work with very disturbed people. They're truly psychotic, or close to it, and some of them are dangerous. Meditating helps me to have a secure basis within myself in dealing with these chaotic minds. In fact, regular practice gives me more of everything, more wisdom and compassion, and it helps me let go of crap and brings in more positive energy. So when I do my TM program in the morning, I have more to offer to my patients, and then when I go home and do my program again, I'm more able to have a healthy relationship. I have my problems just like any other person, but I think meditation helps me to be a better partner, lover, and friend to my fiancé because it encourages virtues.

Paul spoke of repeating the mantra when he feels like he might explode in anger at someone. It helps him to keep from acting impulsively. Another spoke of how meditation "makes you aware of the pleasure of the state of peace, so that you know what it is. Then when buttons are pushed, like being in heavy traffic, you start to be aware of what's happening, and you make a choice."

Meditation is part of the ethical system of HIMMs not only because it helps one to have enough presence of mind to serve others well, but also because it is believed to provide beneficial "vibrations" for the world. For followers of HIMMs, meditation is not a selfish act but an ethical act. They believe that the vibrations produced by all thoughts and deeds carry positive or negative overtones. Furthermore, the vibrations created at deep levels of meditation are overwhelmingly positive, and the deeper the level achieved, the more powerful the effect on the surrounding environment. Thus meditators would counter the critic who views meditation as being narcissistic.

While meditators value ease and equanimity, they also believe in the value of sustained effort, which is part of Karma Yoga as well. The fact that so many meditators have advanced degrees points to their fortitude. This is due partly to their inheritance of the American work ethic and partly to the discipline they have developed through applying sustained effort in their spiritual practices. The two work in tandem. Eleanor thought that the American ethic of success helped her to have faith that she could reach the goals she desired on the spiritual path: "As Americans, we have the belief we can achieve. We set a goal and move forward. It's not like in India where the caste system would be a hindrance. The American belief that we can forge ahead is helpful to us on the spiritual path." Blake applied the ethic of putting forth maximum effort

to his marriage: "We help each other to grow. We are always asking ourselves, 'Are we continually striving? What are we doing better today in our marital relationship?'" Randy spoke of learning the value of striving on the spiritual path from Yogananda:

> I feel that I have to make an effort all the time. Yogananda had sayings like "Make every day's meditation deeper than the day before," and "Never go to sleep before contacting God." He put the bar so high that we never stop trying. This is the essence of the spiritual path. If you have a low goal, like 'I'll meditate for ten minutes a night,' when you reach that, you'll stop trying. But if you have a high goal, you'll always be putting forth effort.

The ultimate social goal in HIMMs' ethics is for everyone to become detached from the desire for pleasure. Meditators believe that a person acts in the best interest of everyone only when she is detached. Followers of HIMMs are not, however, world negating. They strive to procure good health, a nice environment, and good company, but when bad things happen, they do not rail against their misfortune. This acceptance draws on two philosophical doctrines: karma, and the balance of good and evil in the relative world. Everything that happens is believed to be the natural consequence of past actions performed in this life or a previous life. Most meditators also believe that different forces must interact for creation to occur. Based on Hindu philosophy, three *gunas,* or qualities, are inherent in all natural phenomena and behavior. One of those qualities, *tamas,* is darkness or delusion. Another common belief is that the universe cycles through four stages. We are currently in the last, or *kali yuga,* which is the shortest, lasting 432,000 years. The Kali Yuga is the Dark Age when selfishness and material values predominate. These cycles are believed to progress along an orderly divine plan. This idea takes good and evil out of the complete control of human beings and places it partially in a universal force. Evil will play its role regardless of humans' striving to overcome it. Most believe, however, that it is their duty to perform good actions without being attached to the result of those actions, in accordance with Karma Yoga.

If followers of HIMMs were to create a creed, it might look something like this:

> I believe that the source of all harmony and creativity in the world comes from inner stillness, and the way to cultivate this is through meditation. I believe that everything is connected, and therefore, every person has a

social obligation to think and act in positive ways for the benefit of all. The way to remain positive is to tap into the transcendent level beyond thought where goodness and peacefulness lie. I believe that people should continually strive to bring creative energy to every task, but that they should not be disappointed if the results of their efforts do not bring the fruits they had hoped for because I believe that ultimately there is a larger cosmic plan which is unknown to humans.

Rituals

Each HIMM employs a different mixture of rituals from Hindu and Western religious and secular traditions. For example, Siddha Yoga emphasizes Hindu rituals quite a bit, with ceremonies performed at ashrams such as the washing and feeding of statues *(abhisheka*), offering worship through waving trays containing lights burning on wicks dipped in ghee, flowers, and other sacred objects (puja), and fire ceremonies (yajñas). SRF combines Hindu and Christian rituals with a sprinkling of original rituals created by Yogananda. One of these involves rapidly rubbing the hands together and then stretching the arms upward and, along with a slow motion of the arms downward, chanting *Om* as a way of offering blessings to the world. TM employs Vedic rituals, such as yajñas, as well as puja. In spite of their differences, HIMMs also participate in some of the same rituals and share characteristic attitudes toward ritual. The main goal of ritual is not to reinforce group identity, (although it does this), nor is it to affect changes in the outer world. Followers of HIMMs believe that the purpose of outer rituals is to stimulate an inner sense of sanctity.

Mircea Eliade theorizes in *The Sacred and the Profane* that one function of a religious system is to separate the sacred from "the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space."[9] This is accomplished by carving out a sacred space and delineating it in various ways from the profane space that surrounds it. For followers of HIMMs, this space may be a meditation room or altar within one's home, a rented hall, or an ashram. The first priority before using a public space is to clear the air of negative vibrations that are believed to permeate spaces used for mundane activities. One way to do this is to clean the space. Followers of HIMMs believe that the "inner Self" is pure because it is no different than God. Not only should the outer environment reflect this inner purity, but it should also help people to get in touch with their inner purity. For this reason, places of gathering are meticulously clean and orderly. In fact, some Siddha Yoga centers use a special vacuum cleaner

in the sacred space where meditation occurs. This vacuum cleaner may not be used to clean other spaces, such as the area where they eat. As well, they never eat food in the meditation room. Incense and flowers are used to create sensual delight, and they are believed to have purifying qualities. Meditators may also play recordings of Hindu chants in order to purify the atmosphere. Sweet scents may be used on people or doused on items in the room.

Meditators believe that positive vibrations accumulate over time when a space is used for meditation or chanting. For this reason, they prefer to reuse the same space. Most meditators have a room or a portion of a room in which they meditate every day. They also believe that places where gurus or holy persons have lived or visited are permeated with spiritual vibrations, and they will often make pilgrimages to these sites. The holiest site for pilgrimage is the physical presence of the guru. If that is not possible, they may visit the shrine where the guru is buried or different places the guru has spent time. They make pilgrimages either alone or with a group. For example, SRF monks and nuns conduct tours of places where Yogananda spent time, and they tell stories about him and the events that surrounded his life as they travel from one place to another, thus reenacting and reinforcing sacred history for his followers.

Observing a HIMM gathering, a person might first be struck by its Hindu elements. People often take off their shoes before entering the room used for meditation. Often people bow to something in the room that symbolizes the sacred. It may be a picture of the guru, the actual guru, or one's own seat. One bows again before leaving the space. The bowing may be as simple as bringing the hands together in front of the chest or as elaborate as completely lying on one's stomach with arms stretched out in front, symbolizing complete surrender. Men and women may sit separately on opposite sides of the room. Indian musical instruments are often used: a tamboura (a stringed instrument), mridanga or tabla (Indian drums), and a harmonium (a keyboard instrument).

Yet further observation reveals the Western character of these gatherings. Western terminology, such as "service" or the more secular term "program," is used when referring to the time in which meditators come together. Great care is given to maintaining a disciplined atmosphere. The events begin and end promptly on time, with a leader or teacher carefully introducing the elements of the program. Seating is in an orderly fashion, whether on the floor on in chairs. In fact, it appears as though gatherings among followers of HIMMs are patterned to a certain extent after a Protestant church style. The SRF movement furnishes its temples for worship very closely on a Prot-

estant model, with a simple altar in the front and pictures of the guru lineage (rather than a cross as in a Christian church), flowers, tall candles or tapers in silver candleholders, and pew-style seating. Siddha Yoga and TM gatherings also have a simple focus with a picture of the guru or pictures of the guru lineage, some flowers, and a small candle. People remain quiet in order to respect the sanctity of the meditation space.

This atmosphere contrasts to the Hindu rituals of worship I have witnessed in India and in Hindu temples or gatherings in the United States. The silence and sanctity maintained in ashrams in both America and India are similar, though. In both countries ashrams may be used for spiritual retreat away from the concerns of daily living. But worship for those who are in the midst of work, family, and school obligations occurs in the "temple" in India, and in the "center" in America. The center may be a home, a rented hall, or a permanent facility. An atmosphere is established for the rituals and meditation that take place in a center, and this atmosphere contrasts with that of many Hindu temples where there is more toleration for noise, and children often wander around. The inclusion of all ages in Hindu worship events highlights the cultural flavor of Hinduism. Since HIMMs have not been inculcated into the culture of America, it is individuals, or perhaps married couples, who attend programs, and very rarely whole families. Statues of gods and goddesses adorn Indian temples and are often painted in bright colors. Hindu worship is filled with clanging symbols, resounding conch shells, and lines of people holding trays of offerings to give to the priest, who takes the offerings and unceremoniously throws them in a heap in front of the deity. Generally, there seems to be much more tolerance for chaos in Hindu gatherings than I have witnessed at HIMMs gatherings.

Vasudha Narayanan, a professor of religious studies at the University of Florida who has studied Hindu temples in America, has noted some of the differences between American Hindu temples and those of India. She states that only "proper deities" have received their visa to America. Kali, the mother of time and death, with a garland of skulls around her neck, disheveled hair, and tongue lolling, for example, did not receive her visa.[10] Even groups that value Shiva as symbolic of the "Self," such as Siddha Yoga, choose the more sanitized versions to display. The beautiful and lyrical *Shiva Nataraj,* with Shiva standing on a dwarf that symbolizes the ego while it dances the creation and destruction of the world, is an ideal choice. The *Shiva Lingam,* in which Shiva is depicted as a phallus resting in a *yoni* (womb or female sexual organ), which is seen everywhere in India, is not found in meditation centers of HIMMs, probably due to the lingering effects of puritanism in the United States.

Meditators treat certain objects in a special way because of their imbued sacredness. These include books that have been written by the guru or Hindu scriptures revered by the HIMM, gifts from the guru or objects that once belonged to the guru, and holy pictures or statues. They would never put them on the floor, and they may give them a special honored location within the sacred space that has been set off. A special dusting cloth might be set aside for use on these objects. Many meditators regard certain gems or crystals as efficacious in purifying their bodies or their environment. Siddha Yoga meditators are especially fond of wearing *rudraksha* (eye of Shiva) beads, which are traditionally associated in Hinduism with Lord Shiva. Legend says that the rudraksha tree, a large, broad-leaved evergreen that grows throughout Malaysia, Nepal, and India, is said to grow from the tears of Shiva. SRF meditators also use rudraksha beads, which are made from the seeds of the rudraksha tree. The SRF bookstore website states that the beads "convey to the body helpful electromagnetic influences." Besides being worn as a bracelet or necklace, they are also used as a *mala* with which the meditator repeats a mantra as he or she passes the beads on a string through the fingers. TM meditators also value the gems that have been chosen specifically for them through the Maharishi Vedic Astrology program.

Because the philosophy of HIMMs asserts that God or Brahman dwells in all things, respect is paid to the human body as the "temple of God." The body itself is a sacred space and the spinal column, believed to be the "home" of spiritual energy, is, to use Eliade's terminology, the *axis mundi* as it provides an entryway to the transcendent, thus connecting the mundane and spiritual realms. Respect for the body is enacted through personal cleanliness, modest clothing, and maintaining good posture. Whether the HIMM emphasizes sitting on the floor or on a chair, proper upright posture with a straight back is believed to serve two purposes. It energizes the body—particularly the spine—so that "subtle" energy (prana) can flow freely, and it also displays respect for the sacred environment that has been created for spiritual practices. Maintaining silence for periods of time is thought to enhance a person's development of an inward contemplative attitude, while at the same time adding to the purity of the outer environment. Retreats and courses in SRF, TM, and Siddha Yoga often include periods—sometimes as long as a month—of maintaining silence. Walking and speaking in a dignified manner is also considered supportive to maintaining a sacred environment, both inwardly and outwardly.

Many followers of HIMMs believe that the inner psychic world of humans is connected to the outer cosmology. This is evident in the belief in world

ages or yugas that are thought to determine humans' spiritual and mental capabilities. The ages are determined by the rotation of planets. The placement of the planets at the time of one's birth is also believed to influence one's personal characteristics. Like traditional Hindus, some TM meditators use astrological charts to identify the most suitable time to begin something new, such as a new business, or to determine whether a possible marriage or business partner is compatible. In conjunction with astrological consultations, TM meditators are advised to have certain "yagyas" (yajñas) performed for them by Vedic pandits in India. These fire ceremonies are believed to avert negative influences and to enhance the success of an undertaking. Although Siddha Yoga and Self-Realization Fellowship do not offer formal astrological consultations as part of their organizations, some followers of these groups do consult astrologers.

A sense of sacred time is created as people relate the stories of the gurus' lives and as they celebrate their gurus' birthday or *mahasamadhi* (time of death). Most HIMMs also celebrate traditional Hindu holidays such as *guru purnima,* a time of the full moon in July when the grace of the guru is honored. Many also celebrate the birth of Christ. In fact, SRF holds an eight-hour meditation on this day. Meditators believe that the guru is one who has transcended time, so by honoring or remembering the guru, even if it is only through a brief thought, the meditator enters sacred time.

Sacred time is also experienced on a more personal level when meditators privately commemorate the day of their own initiation into meditation. Some meditators mark their lives from before and after their initiation. The history of the movement is also considered to exist as a type of sacred history. It is believed to have appeared in the world at just the perfect time to work out God's divine plan. Yogananda, Maharishi, and Muktananda all referred to their bringing meditation to the West because the "time was right" or because of the "fullness of time."

The daily routine of meditation also creates sacred time. It is a pause in the day when all the cares of "worldly life" are set aside. While it offers a break from mundane time, the practice of meditation is also believed to infuse all time with sacredness, since the aftereffects of contacting the transcendent, the divine source of all life, are believed to be carried into whatever activity follows meditation. The vibrations generated through meditation are believed to be so powerful that they can affect the meditators' ancestors and descendents in a positive way. Some believe that the effect of meditation can travel three generations back and three generations forward.

Eating food is considered a sacred act by many meditators. Food is believed to contain not only physical nourishment but spiritual nourishment since it contains a subtle energy called prana. Meditators often pause for a moment of silence before eating. Food is also thought to contain the vibrations of the people who have prepared it. For this reason, meditators may be hesitant to eat food from restaurants. Many also believe that once a person has begun eating, that person's karma is intricately tied to the food, an idea that derives from Hinduism. Because of this, they often will not eat the leftovers of another person.

A certain amount of ambiguity surrounds the role of ritual in HIMMs since rituals are viewed as religious and HIMMs see themselves as "beyond religion." On the one hand, rituals are viewed as less important than inner states of awareness, and yet, on the other hand, they help create a more refined inner consciousness. Rituals also help to create a sense of unity among members of a HIMM. When a person first enters a HIMM, he may feel some discomfort at not knowing how to act. Over time, as in all religions, the rituals of the group become second nature.

Myths

When I queried meditators about how they relate to religious myths and symbols, I received a mixed response. Some meditators are opposed to any type of personification of God. Others enjoy representations, drawing freely from both Christian and Hindu mythology. Some combine metaphorical language in interesting ways as in Kevin's description of Jesus with the moneychangers:

> I've come to think that people go to church once a week and I go to church twice a day [in meditation]. I go into the temple twice a day, and the temple is my body. All that stuff about Jesus chasing the moneychangers out of the temple is a metaphor for chasing the stress out of the body.[11]

Meditators realize mythical symbols' ability to connect them to levels of reality beyond the mundane. They possess what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has termed the "second naïveté." In the "primary naïveté," according to Ricoeur, religious symbols are simply accepted as given. With the critical scholarship of the twentieth century, however, particularly the works of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, religious symbols were called into question. Those who possess second naïveté do not deny critical thinking, but they

also do not deny the depth of meaning that religious symbols can unfold for a person.[12] They do not dismiss myths as meaningless fairy tales; neither would they assert their ontological truth.

Followers of HIMMs feel free to choose the personification that they are most attracted to because, as Barbara said, "The deities are fascinating, but they are really aspects of my own consciousness." They view myths and sacred symbols as arising from universal consciousness and taking the worshipper back to that consciousness. The specific form of the symbol is not important: "You can talk about God using traditional language like surrender or humility or sacrifice or praise—that kind of Christian stuff—or you can get into Hindu stuff. It really doesn't matter."

Meditators do not identify themselves with a particular sect as Hindus might by calling themselves Shaivite or Vaishnava. This is so even though SRF disciples place a picture of Krishna on their altars, and Siddha Yoga devotees chant a mantra to Shiva. On the other hand, many of them value mythological symbols' ability to draw them to levels of awareness that approach the transcendent. They might agree with Paul Tillich when he wrote, "Nothing less than symbols and myths can express our ultimate concern."[13] The Hindu deity who seems to best express their ultimate concern is Shiva. While meditators related that they enjoyed stories about Krishna, iconographic depictions of Shiva seem to speak to them on a deeper level. Mark, a follower of Maharishi, said,

> Shiva has a special role for me because of the absolute silence that he represents and the absolute knowledge that comes from that silence. Shiva is the ultimate ascetic. It's difficult for me to put into words, but Shiva seems to be the ultimate form. It's the aspect I experience more internally. I don't have a strong feeling for Krishna or any of the others.

Paul, a follower of Gurumayi, also related to Shiva, but in another form, as the Lord of dance, known as the Shiva Nataraja. He said,

> I believe these myths are just aspects of ourselves and of creation. The one that makes the most sense to me is the statue of Shiva Nataraj. It represents the five principles: creation, sustenance, destruction, concealment, and grace. When Shiva opens his eyes, the world unfolds, and when he closes his eyes, creation ends. This is like a scientific explanation. I see it as the "big bang theory" and the universe is expanding and contracting.

Shiva Nataraj—a home altar. (Photograph by the author)

Many meditators are drawn to feminine depictions of the divine personified as one of the Hindu goddesses, as Mary, the mother of Jesus, or as feminine qualities such as compassion that might be found in Jesus or in their guru. All of the HIMMs under consideration make reference to a feminine force. SRF calls it "Divine Mother," TM "Mother Divine," and Siddha Yoga "Shakti." Some of the meditators I interviewed see Mary as representative of a universal feminine force. Donna converted to Roman Catholicism after many years of practicing TM specifically because of her attraction to Mary. It was "all this Mother Divine stuff on the Hindu level" that, in part, stimulated her desire to convert. Vincent said that when he was a Roman Catholic priest, he related more to Mary than to Jesus, and he believes that it was his

devotion to Mary that led him to Gurumayi. Several of those I interviewed conflated Christian and Hindu mythology when speaking of the feminine. Aaron explained, "I feel at home with all the devatas [divinities], but more with the goddess than others—especially Lakshmi [goddess of abundance] and the Virgin Mary. They are two sides of the same coin for me."

Donna referred to deities as archetypes. Again we see the conflation of mythology from India and Christianity, with a bit of Jungian psychology added to the mix as well:

> I could care less about the historical Jesus, whether he lived or not, whether the Virgin Mary was really a virgin, or whether she bodily ascended to heaven. These are completely stupid points as far as I'm concerned. The reality—whether they can be archeologically documented—is so meaningless to me. What is meaningful is that there is something to the archetypes. In Hinduism we have the goddess archetype of purity and without sins, and in Catholicism we have the Virgin Mary. The whole concept is the same. I love Hanuman. But I love St. Joseph too. It's the archetype of humility. It's not Hanuman. It's not St. Joseph. It's service. I could say it's Hanuman or St. Joseph, or I could go out and say it's the moss in the woods because here's this gorgeous, huge hickory tree that's been here for more than three hundred years and at its foot is this little moss. But the force wouldn't go on without this little insignificant moss.

Donna's attitude is prevalent among followers of HIMMs. A representation that exists in the relative world cannot contain the whole. Each representation is an archetype for a quality or qualities that exist on many levels of creation. Furthermore, it is not necessary to draw from just one religious tradition when imagining these many qualities.

Language Creates Community

Another way in which meditators create a meaning system is through the use of metaphorical language. I became acutely aware of this one day while I was sitting in on a conversation in which several meditators were discussing times when they felt "expanded" and times when they felt "contracted." There was a woman joining in the conversation who was not a follower of a HIMM, and she was confused by these terms. When they told her "contracted" means being "in the ego" and expanded means being "in the heart,"

she became more confused. The woman wanted to know what the ego was and why it was not a good thing.

As I scanned my interview transcripts looking for metaphors, several appeared repeatedly. One word was "inner" or "within." Even though these are spatial designations, meditators use the words to represent the experience of something that is beyond space and time. Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols* and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* state that the starting point for most religious symbols is the human body. The spatial metaphor of God as within may derive from the fact that when people close their eyes to meditate, they shut off the outer visual and auditory world, and inner sensations, thoughts, and feelings become more apparent. Since this is the starting point of meditation, any mystical experiences that may subsequently occur are described as inner experiences. Another aspect of the metaphor comes from its implication of intimacy. If God is within a person, then there is no separation between that person and God.

Other common metaphors were "heart" and being "connected." Sometimes the two words were used together as in: "The most important thing for me is to keep staying *connected* to my *heart*." The heart that meditators refer to is, of course, not the physical heart, even though they would sometimes place their hand over the area of the heart when they used the word. It refers to a state in which boundaries between oneself and others become less rigid. The phrase "in my heart" seems to imply that the heart is boundless and infinite so that anything can fit inside of it. Other times there is the sense that the heart is something that needs to be cracked or broken as in "My heart was frozen," or "It pierced my heart," or "My heart exploded." When used in this way, it seems the heart is related to another metaphorical term, the "ego." Both are "hard" until grace softens them or explodes them. They may also be related causally. A hard heart causes a big ego; when the heart is pierced, the ego dissolves. Examples of the heart metaphor include:

If I don't meditate, it's harder to stay in the *heart*.

When I get away from my *heart*, I take a deep breath and quiet my mind.

I try to stay totally in my *heart*.

I'm aware of wanting to be in my *heart*.

My *heart* was frozen.

Liquid bliss courses from my *heart*.

The chant pierced my *heart*.

Sometimes my *heart* explodes.

My *heart* was ever expanding in love.

The *heart* is just kind of rolling in waves.

I saw Jesus go into my *heart*.

It's like my *heart* is energy, and there's no boundary.

The other common term used to describe a state of consciousness is "connected." The three terms—connected, inner, and heart—are related when used metaphorically. However, the term "connected" seems to be the strongest indicator of the state of unity that is so often associated with mysticism as in the following:

We're all *connected*.

Everything is *connected* into one whole.

There is a sense of being *connected* to something larger than oneself.

I really had the sense of being *connected* with everyone.

Meditating keeps me *connected*.

The language shared by meditators is a powerful tool that unites them into a sense of community. Several interviewees spoke about the importance of sharing a language with "like-minded people," and others spoke of the difficulty of talking to people outside of that shared community:

> I love living on "Heavenly Mountain" because I like being able to talk my language. That's why I hate the idea of living in DC. My language is a different language than Washington intelligentsia. The most important part of my life is about meditating and the whole vocabulary of knowledge.

> That's why I'm depressed about moving back to Washington. Ninety percent of the people don't share my paradigm and don't share my vocabulary. It's very isolating to live there.

John spoke of the feeling of community he had when he attended Maharishi University of Management where everyone meditates together twice a day in the "dome." He reflected, "Even though the dome didn't really give me profound experiences, it was nice to have a community—to be with like-minded people who share your philosophy and practice." Jennifer also spoke of her comfort with other meditators:

> I feel like I can talk to Siddha Yoga friends because we're like-minded. And, as Gurumayi says, we have access to our heart. It's like night and day. I'm just so comfortable with the people. I can throw words out like shakti or guru, and it's no problem. There's no censorship.

Not everyone who meditates enjoys community. Brent said, "I don't seek out others who meditate. I like group practice, but I don't seek it out. I'm leery of true believers of whatever stripe. People who do group practice tend to be true believers. They've got all the answers, and I don't even know what all the questions are." However, for most followers of HIMMs the shared language, ritual customs, and spiritual practices create a sense of community. The community sense is further enhanced by the belief system of HIMMs. The belief system in turn affects the ethics of HIMMs. The interrelationship of all of these is what defines HIMMs as a unique religious phenomenon.

Attitudes toward Dying

The majority of the people I interviewed were forty-five to sixty years old. Their first reactions to questions about aging were probably not unique to meditators and would have been similar to others of that generation as well. They said they felt surprised when they looked in the mirror; they thought of themselves as eternally young until they saw their reflections. But the secondary responses may not have been so universal. While they did not revel in the new experiences of bodily aches or of having less energy, they thought of aging as growing in wisdom and contentment: "I see aging as more of an opportunity to connect with God." "The body ages, but not the spirit." "The physical stuff is hard, but I don't focus on it. I see getting older as a ripening." "Getting older is a good thing because life keeps getting better."

Questions about dying also brought fairly uniform responses. Most said they still had some fear of the process of death, particularly of pain that might be involved, but that they had much less fear than they used to. They felt that the process would be made easier because their gurus would help them from the astral plane. They also felt that life itself did not end, because all believed in reincarnation. Some saw their meditation practice as helping them learn to die since the process of meditation is "dying to the ego." Death was viewed simply as one more lesson in giving up the ego. Unlike in meditation though, the body is also given up. Sarah stated,

> I just hope I get through the lessons I'm supposed to get here, and I hope I can meditate to the end. It would be nice if I could go consciously. I know that Master [Yogananda] will be right there. I'm not as scared as I was before I was on this path. I didn't believe in anything before. What I now know is that the consciousness you carry with you is what's going to go with you.

Walter felt that his current beliefs after studying Yogananda's teachings would help him more with the process of dying than the beliefs of his Roman Catholic upbringing:

> Christians are afraid of judgment and the threat of hell. That was an idea I had to change. Hell is here; it's what we create for ourselves; it's not someplace we go. Catholics go through horrible conflict over it. They think, 'I love this person, but will he be condemned?' The contradiction is so glaring, yet because it has been asserted and repeated, it just sticks. Without the idea of reincarnation, there's no way of dealing with death or with all the inequalities in the world.

Grace looks forward to her own death, saying,

> I think death will be beautiful. I don't know who I'll meet, but I know it'll be full of light, and it will be a beautiful experience. I feel that there are very many realms, and earth is just one of them. That's why I need to work harder on this path, because I want my soul to be ready to progress to a higher realm.

Diane spoke of an inner strength she experienced when confronting the death of her five-year old daughter. She said,

> Most people who go through something like that don't have the resources that we [who meditate] do. They don't understand death—that death is just a part of life. It's just dropping off of a suit of clothes. Christians believe there is no death, but they don't live it. My meditation program cultures inner silence; it cultures detachment from the relative changing world. It doesn't make the impact of the experience any less, but it allows you to see the truth of duality—light and dark, pain and pleasure, and the whole range in between. The nature of the relative is to change, and the nature of the absolute is to never change. The best experience for me is to live in a time of massive change and not lose my center. I never lost my center when I lost my daughter. I never lost it! That is grace.

Two people I interviewed had themselves faced the prospect of dying. For them the question "How do you feel about dying?" was not hypothetical. Walter had experienced a massive heart attack. He said, "It was very critical. On a pain scale of 1 to 10, I was at 10. I felt I was crossing over. My consciousness was very clear. The main thing is that I was not afraid in the least. I know this was the result of years of following this path." Amanda, diagnosed with terminal cancer, had come close to dying several times. She experienced anger and depression over having her life cut short, but she also viewed it as an opportunity:

> When I got up the next day after I was diagnosed, I wrote an intention that I wanted to find the blessings in this every day, rather than the misery, and that I wasn't willing to live it as a tragedy. This came in my life for a reason, and I was going to etch everything out of it that I could. And the kids and I talked about it, and I told them this didn't mean they had to think this was a great thing. It didn't mean they had to have positive feelings, but it meant that we would be honest with each other about how we felt, and we would be willing to go through the feelings. We've all, my husband and the kids and I, talked about how we could live this as a blessing and a gift rather than as a tragedy.

When I listened to Amanda, I was aware of how many of the forces in her life had come together to prepare her for dealing with cancer in the way she did. It was not only the strength she felt she gained from meditation that was helpful; it was also the many years of experience with therapy groups and with being a counselor herself that affected her attitude. She had a willingness to talk openly with her family and to experience this as a blessing.

She spoke of how she receives her chemotherapy treatments as a gift that will dissolve whatever in her body is not beneficial. She sees her path now as learning how to let go of her attachments. She spoke of how meditation has helped her with this process:

> Meditation changes your identity about who you are. Most people think they are their name and their body, and meditation gives you the opportunity to see that you're much more than that. Initially it was very hard to lose my hair, and then all of a sudden there was a huge freeing moment when I realized that my hair wasn't who I was anyway.
>
> The last time I came close to dying was really beneficial because suddenly I had a breakthrough of dropping the concept of death and realizing that this is what I wanted—stepping into this oneness with God. I don't fear death, I really don't. I feel it will just be an opening. But the thing about death is letting go of everybody and everything. I've done it again and again. You do it a million ways and suddenly there's this huge realization that you never had them in the first place. It's a very interesting process. For me now it's more of an interesting adventure. I've had experiences of absolute oneness with God where I totally dissolved, and they've been very nice. And I can look forward to that and *do* look forward to that. And that's not scary at all. I'm starting to call *that* death, rather than society's idea of death.

Conclusion

The intense yearning for "something more" that many meditators felt as children or teenagers appears to have been satisfied by their involvement with a Hindu-inspired meditation movement. It has given them faith and the inner peace and stability needed to meet the challenges of living and dying. The particular historical and geographical situation in which they find themselves allows them to embrace a philosophical outlook that draws on Indian Hinduism without leaving behind American values of independence, equality, and material progress. Their lives are being shaped by their participation in both HIMMs and American society, and likewise, they are contributing to the ethos and worldview of America as their beliefs and customs filter into society. The beliefs in karma and reincarnation, the idea that peace and equanimity should be cultivated, and the eclectic mixing of metaphors and symbols from different worldviews are a growing part of American society

today, as are vegetarianism, meditation, and very popular practice of Hatha Yoga. Even the language of HIMMs has seeped into the American lexicon as, for example, referencing an expert in a field as a "guru."

How to balance social involvement with personal mystical experience emerges as a major theme in the lives of meditators. The gurus of many HIMMs sometimes urge their followers to undertake extreme measures to attain enlightenment. Even though they also encourage followers to combine meditation with daily activities, often their underlying message is "If you want to progress faster, become a celibate and leave the world behind," or at least "Attend as many retreats as possible." This sets up a struggle for some meditators who feel torn between the two goals of service and meditation. TM followers used to repeat Maharishi's phrase, "It's all mud out there," meaning that social involvement brings a person down, so it is better to focus on meditation. Vivekananda's influence on HIMMs is evident, even after all of these years. He urged his followers in India toward service and his followers in America toward meditation in order to correct the imbalance in each culture. Today the Ramakrishna Mission in India focuses more on service and the Vedanta Society in America more on meditation. Perhaps the imbalance has reversed to some extent.

As Ellwood pointed out, the dual focuses on personal ecstasy and preserving the social order must be balanced for a religion to succeed. Some religions solve this problem by creating a division between monastics who live apart from the world and laypeople who live in the world. Each of the HIMMs explored has a similar division. SRF's monks and nuns provide spiritual teachings and services to the laypeople; TM's Mother Divine (for women) and Purusha (for men) provide the silent basis on which they believe TM practitioners and the whole world depends; Siddha Yoga has their sannyasi order that teaches and serves the larger HIMM populace. Many meditators seem content with this division and practice the philosophy of Karma Yoga—acting without attachment to the fruits of action—as a way of progressing toward enlightenment while still contributing actively to society. In fact, the world becomes an enjoyable place to "evolve" because meditation helps them to maintain peace and compassion while performing their duties.

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Conclusion

Let us end where we began—with three meditators who follow three different HIMMs. Since 1969 Walter has meditated twice a day under the auspices of SRF and has attended a weekly satsang at his local center for almost as many years. Aaron has been practicing Transcendental Meditation since 1970 and performs his TM-Sidhi program in the "Dome" twice a day. Jennifer began meditating using the TM technique, but later received shaktipat from Muktananda, and for almost thirty years has chanted and meditated in the early morning and attended satsang weekly.

The differences and similarities among these three meditators are concrete. Walter follows very specific techniques that he learned through a mail-order correspondence course —energization exercises, the repetition of "hung-sau" with his breath, and listening for "aum" with his arms resting on a T-board, thumbs blocking his ears. He later added more advanced techniques learned through personal initiation, which involved circulating energy up and down his spine. He sometimes attends "convocation" with three thousand other SRF students in Los Angeles during the summer. There he hears talks by the monks of SRF and practices meditation with a large group. His is a modest path—not as flashy as Maharishi's promised enlightenment in five years or Muktananda's instant euphoria upon receiving shaktipat. Walter feels that progress is slow, and he looks forward to the experience of transcending thought again—which thus far has occurred only once. Still he feels, in his words, that "Something essential is missing if I don't meditate." When he did not feel the tiniest bit of fear upon having a major heart attack, he realized the benefits of his years of practice.

Aaron began with the simple twice-a-day practice of Transcendental Meditation. Over the years, his program has expanded quite a bit. He has a daily Sidhi practice in which he develops characteristics like intuition and friendliness, as well as the ability to leave the floor as he "hops" while repeating "light as cotton." He feels that "nature supports" him because he is more in tune with cosmic intelligence from doing this daily program. He occa-

sionally receives ayurvedic treatments to enhance his health, and his cabinet is filled with Maharishi Ayurvedic Supplements. After years of practicing meditation, he began to experience "cosmic consciousness," just as Maharishi said he would. In his words, "I don't identify with my body, my thoughts, and my circumstances. I realize that's not me; that's not all I am, just my body and thinking." He lives in Fairfield, Iowa, where he is able to practice his daily TM-Sidhi Program with a thousand other meditators, thereby enhancing his own experience through receiving the group energy created by everyone doing their program at the same time, while also benefiting the world through "increasing coherence in the atmosphere."

Jennifer's daily practice and weekly satsang gatherings place more emphasis on chanting than do SRF and TM. She feels that chanting *om namah shivaya* with a tape of Muktananda's or Gurumayi's voice enhances her meditation experience. She also chants a long text in Sanskrit, the *Guru Gita,* sometimes on her own and sometimes on Sunday mornings with fellow devotees. The text reinforces the mystical quality of the guru-disciple relationship as Shiva answers his wife, Parvati's, question about how an embodied soul can become one with Brahman. She used to make almost yearly visits to the main American ashram for Siddha Yoga in upstate New York before it closed to short-term visitors. Since Gurumayi began giving New Year's messages, Jennifer has attended every one, listening to it via satellite with other devotees in her local center. Then she buys an audio version of it and listens to it while driving to work. Sometimes she contemplates the message or books by Gurumayi by writing her thoughts in a journal. Contemplation is an important part of the Siddha Yoga path, and Jennifer feels that it helps her to apply spiritual teachings to her daily life.

Common Characteristics of HIMMs

Even though their practices are different, followers of SRF, TM, and Siddha Yoga share beliefs and attitudes. The commitment to daily practice is strong among followers of these movements. They feel that meditation provides a basis for feeling stable in the midst of chaotic situations. Embracing the values of Karma Yoga, they believe that service to others is part of the path that will take them closer to God. They do not view God as someone other than the deepest part of their own selves. If they can experience their own transcendent source (atman), then they have also touched the transcendent source of everything (Brahman). They have great faith in their gurus, whom they believe have attained the state of realization, which means they

are no longer touched by suffering, having merged with the transcendent God. They believe their gurus' experience is one of continual bliss. They have experienced their gurus' spiritual charisma through reading their books, seeing pictures and videos of them, and in some cases, being in their presence—perhaps even speaking with them. They receive guidance from their gurus through dreams and inner intuition. They relate to the "inner guru" when they meditate and experience the calm and blissful state that they believe to be the same as their gurus' state.

The spiritual practices, beliefs, and attitudes that Walter, Aaron, and Jennifer have learned through their Hindu-inspired meditation movements draw from several Hindu sources, yet they add a certain American ethos to them that creates something that is not quite Hindu. Satsangs and other programs are orderly and begin and end on time. Talks—whether given by renunciates or laypeople—are well rehearsed and always deal with positive ideas and stories. Walter, Aaron, and Jennifer pay little attention to the Hindu *Puranas* and epics and bhakti poetry that run deep in the consciousness of Indian Hindus. If they are to focus on scriptures at all, it is usually the *Bhavagad-Gita* and its interpretations that emphasize Karma Yoga and Raja Yoga rather than expositions that focus on devotion to Krishna. They already have an object for their devotion, and it is their guru. Stories of the gurus and of their paramparas abound, as do stories of people's experiences upon being around their gurus. More complex and esoteric knowledge may be taught in courses taken in residence at an ashram, but everyday fare comes from the lives and the examples of the gurus.

When we turn to the organizations, similarities can also be found. Each organization views itself as unique so that followers are cautioned about having any interaction with spiritual ideas or practices outside of the particular HIMM. Ironically, in their very insistence on their uniqueness, they are similar. All of the groups create trademarks and copyrights of common terms and names. The fear that people may stray from the path causes gurus and their organizations to encourage—sometime require—that followers read and attend only bona fide publications and events. Each of the organizations has its own spies that may engage in such activities as keeping track of who attends other gurus' meetings or who has said something critical about the organization, and then excluding them from attending the organization's programs. It is fine to attend a church or a synagogue, though, for these are viewed as cultural institutions that do not provide a life-changing "spiritual path." They are "religions," with all of the qualities the word connotes for those who are pursuing new horizons from India that answer their deepest questions.

Yet not all followers of HIMMs see religions as stultifying, and some return to them for various reasons even as they bring their own new symbolism to the message and rituals: Christ becomes a guru; communion is like a yajña (fire ceremony); the repetition of "body of Christ" becomes a mantra; Mary is a form of "Mother Divine." Many Christians and Jews sometimes miss the rituals of the religion in which they were raised, and thus return for that reason. Meditators often turn to religious institutions when they have children because, outside of possible summer camps or ashram retreats with children's programming, the local centers are too small to support their growing families' needs during the year.

Great pains are taken to hide any negative situations and events that have taken place within the organization or at an ashram. The administration of the movements' organizations attempt to prohibit any unfavorable information that may appear in newspapers, academic journals, or websites. Often those who have been deeply involved in a HIMM at the organizational level are required to sign a document when they leave, stating that they will not reveal any sensitive information to the public. In their care to present the face of a perfect organization, administrators may cover up adverse situations—including those that are the result of a simple mistake or accident. For example, someone who worked in the kitchen of the Ganeshpuri, India, Siddha Yoga ashram reported witnessing the sudden death of an Indian teenager when he was crushed by a faulty dumbwaiter: "The body was quickly removed from the ashram and the dumbwaiter was disabled without official explanation. There was no trace of blood by the next day. No announcement about the death was ever made and I do not know what the boy's family was told. As on other occasions there was 'no death' in the ashram. The cover up was so effective that most people in the ashram at the time were unaware of it."[1]

The dumbwaiter incident is representative of the general tendency we have seen in these movements to overlook or actively disavow anything that may be construed in a negative light. Each of the HIMMs we have explored stresses that the guru will take care of all organizational problems, and meditation will take care of all personal problems. We have examined several examples of this refusal to deal with problems in an open way, including SRF's dismissing its newly hired professional counselors, TM's mishandling of a young man's psychosis, and Siddha Yoga's refusal to admit that kundalini awakening may cause severe psychological problems. The tendency to avoid the shadow side is due, in part, to people's natural need to identify with a group that looks good to others. Just as people sometimes hide family indiscretions in order to save face, they also may hide deprecating events

that occur in their schools, workplaces, or religious institutions because they view their social groups as extensions of themselves. The tendency to ignore problems is compounded in HIMMs due to the belief in the perfection of the guru and the growing perfection of disciples. Another source for the denial of mistakes, accidents, and weaknesses arises from the New Thought stress on positive thinking. "Harmonial religion," with its emphasis on spiritual, mental, physical, and economic health that resulted from New Thought and similar movements, strongly influences the general milieu of HIMMs. The "harmonial approach" ignores the dark side of people, events, and institutions because it believes that giving attention to the "shadow" serves to perpetuate it.

Relevance of Viewing HIMMs as an American Religious Phenomenon

In the early 1980s I was enjoying an extended retreat at Shree Muktananda Ashram. While doing the seva (service) of pulling weeds in a garden, I fell into a conversation with an elderly Indian man. He expressed how amazed he was to see the dedication of the young Americans he had met during his stay. He might have expected to see this kind of dedication in India, but not in America. He asked me several times in the course of the conversation, "Where does this dedication to yoga and meditation come from?" He seemed truly astonished. This book attempts to answer his question, for I have tried to show why and how the people this man encountered in an ashram in America—young adults then, but now middle-aged—have dedicated their lives to a guru and to the practice of meditation in the hope of achieving liberation from the bonds of samsara (worldly illusion).

"Where does this dedication to yoga and meditation come from?" is relevant not only for that elderly Indian but also for anyone who is curious about how and why people choose to express their ultimate concerns in a particular way. It is pertinent as well for those who are interested in cultural change, particularly when the change occurs as the result of the confluence of two cultures. It is relevant for those who wonder why religious traditions arise, evolve, and sometimes take on forms so new that they bear little resemblance to the tradition(s) out of which they grew.

We have explored how some members of the baby boom generation have turned to Hindu philosophies and practices as a way of addressing their ultimate concerns, how they express this commitment, how this expression changes over time, and how communities of practitioners develop systems of meaning. This has involved a new conceptual level of analysis—broader than

an individual movement, but more narrow than "new religious movements." When a new category is created, observations and understandings begin to manifest. It may be that observers or followers of individual Hindu-inspired movements, using this conceptual level, start to see commonalities between movements that were not apparent before. Possibilities for new comparisons stretching out beyond the scope of this study include the following questions: What are the differences and similarities between Hindu-inspired meditation movements in America and Hindu immigrant groups practicing in America? How do Hindu-inspired meditation movements compare to Buddhist-inspired meditation movements? How do HIMMs in America compare to HIMMs in other countries? Since the ethnographic portion of this book focused on long-term practitioners that were affected by the countercultural revolution of the 1960s, further research might pursue a cohort analysis of a younger generation attracted to HIMMs. Likewise, there seem to be new gurus from India and elsewhere that are of a younger generation. Is their message similar? Do they rely on Vedanta and do they stress the guru-disciple relationship? Another question concerns the extent and ways in which the philosophies and practices of HIMMs have infiltrated into American society. One might indeed explore the stories of the people who have left HIMMs, many of whom have turned to Buddhist practices or to simply a more generalized Hindu practice of chanting and meditating.

The remainder of this chapter attempts to answer three questions using the data gathered in this book: What are the psychological ramifications of HIMMs? What conclusions from the study of HIMMs might compliment the study of religion in general? And, finally, how do HIMMs in America intersect with American culture?

Psychological Ramifications

Long-term meditators view their lives as a process of growth and learning, and their death as another step in that process. They attribute their growth in positive thinking and ability to handle difficult situations to their practice of meditation, as well as to the guidance they have received from their gurus about how to live life in a spiritual way. Furthermore, they have a strong commitment to practice the things they have learned. Growing spiritually is the most important thing in life, and their present positive attitude stands in stark contrast to the way they felt before entering a meditation path.

These devotees would not have continued their commitments if they did not see benefits. On the other hand, people also leave HIMMs because they

do not see a benefit, or because they are disillusioned. The Internet abounds in websites begun by ex-meditators in which they express their feelings about adverse effects of meditation or of following a guru. We have also seen that research provides evidence that meditation or involvement with a HIMM may have damaging psychological or sociological consequences. What accounts for the discrepancy between these seemingly polarized effects of following a HIMM?

To attempt to answer this question, we will return to the findings of survey research[2] cited in chapter 4 that outlined negative effects of TM on long-term practitioners—evidence that seems to directly contradict findings from the sample of twenty-seven meditators whose voices we heard in part III. The reason for the differences may be because the studies on TM performed in the early 1970s consider a "very long-term meditator" to be one who has practiced meditation for three years. "Experienced meditators" are those who have practiced for eighteen months. The people I interviewed had been practicing for twenty, thirty, or even forty years. Without exception, they attributed their positive attitude toward life as stemming from the practice of meditation and from embracing at least some of the philosophy that accompanies HIMMs. The TM studies did not look at spiritual or religious dimensions, which are probably the motivators that kept people practicing even in light of psychological problems. It may be that "seekers" are more sensitive to their environment and their own psychological makeup than "nonseekers." William James has pointed out that "individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever . . . have often shown symptoms of nervous instability."[3] That these people with "an acute fever" seek ultimate answers to the problems of existence makes them able to bear their sensitiveness and press on toward their goal of self-realization. This is the quality of mumukshutva, or intense desire, that Shankaracharya declared a prerequisite for entering the meditative path.

The reason neuroses have lessened in the long-term meditators I interviewed is because they are experiencing inner peace that the practice of meditation has given them over time. Within the first few years of meditating, while that composure is not yet well developed, some have mystical experiences that, if the experience is good, may in fact increase unsociability as they become fanatical about pursuing their path. Some meditators have profound mystical experiences—sometimes upon their very first experience meditating—that engender an excitement about their new path and that motivate them to meditate for the rest of their lives in order to make that experience a permanent reality. We have also seen cases in which a strong

kundalini awakening can have harmful repercussions and in these cases, the people may abandon their meditation practice and therefore never make it to the long-term stage when they might reap the benefits of peace and increased ability to cope with stressful situations that were expressed in the interviews.

Evidence suggests that when people first begin to meditate, their enthusiasm for the practice is often so great that they assume it will solve all of their problems as well as the problems of the world. The experience of transcendence or "perfection" can cause a person to "dissociate from the authoritative self" as Polly Trout stated, and turn instead to "an idealized, perfected spirit within." It is only after time passes and meditators become aware that they are not "enlightened" after all and may, in fact, still be dealing with old psychological issues that they turn to other avenues for help. The psychologist and researcher of New Religious Movements, Dick Anthony, addressed this process when he spoke of his own spiritual quest:

> [W]hen I originally encountered Meher Baba, I repudiated my former interests in psychotherapy and human potential techniques. The state of awareness I had glimpsed through his intervention seemed to be very far beyond any that I had experienced through such means. Therefore, I thought for a time that transpersonal or human potential approaches and following Meher Baba were probably incompatible with each other. Involvement with such techniques might sidetrack one from the process of genuine awakening by draining off energy that could be better employed in drawing closer to the master.
>
> Subsequent events showed that, in my case at least, the situation was not so clear-cut. When I repressed my mundane emotional needs in favor of my spiritual interest, I found that my inner awareness of Meher Baba began to lack vivacity. In my case, overly ascetic suppression of mundane emotion began to block my capacity for spiritual intuition as well. Subsequently I have worked on integrating the two realms rather than suppressing one in favor of the other.[4]

Many long-term meditators have gone through a process similar to that of Dick Anthony. After what might be described as a period of fanaticism, they learned a balance between surrender to the guru and developing their own psychological resources for dealing with life situations in a healthy and independent way. From a psychological perspective, the combination of involvement with a HIMM and various forms of psychotherapy along with alternative body and mind therapies may be a good mix.

Mysticism can be viewed either as an isolated occurrence or as a systematic and institutionally based practice cultivated over time. The latter, when combined with the positive ethical outlook that Karma Yoga provides, often leads to a healthy psychological outlook. The question of the source of mystical experiences, as exemplified by the constructivist/perennialist debate (see chap. 7) currently dominates discussion on mysticism. Perhaps an area of future research could concern itself not just with the *source* but with the *result* of mystical experiences—particularly when cultivated through a systematic meditation program. Meditation seems to engender mystical experiences, even if they are very subtle. For example, Walter thought he did not have any "experiences," but then spoke of glimpsing "another reality" and of "seeing the world as consciousness." Over time these subtle experiences attained through meditation appear to engender a mystical outlook on life. Meditators experience a growing sense of unity with others and with the cosmos. It is this mystical outlook that allows them to experience more stability, discernment, and compassion. When comparing the actual experiences of meditators to the ideal road map the gurus predict for their disciples, a correlation cannot be found. Perhaps a new road map could be created, based on the evidence of long-term meditators' experiences that would be a better predictor of the outcomes of regular meditation. Although hearing *Om*, seeing auras and angels, or visualizing the "blue pearl" would not be featured in this particular map, feeling peaceful, finding joy in life, and experiencing equipoise in difficult situations would form a significant part of it.

The Category of HIMMs in the Study of Religion

We are entering a new era in which the linking of world religions to discreet geographical areas may no longer be the best way to describe and analyze religious phenomena. Religions have always been "global" in the sense that they have incorporated the beliefs and practices of those they encounter through travel and more permanent shifts in populations. How different would Christianity be today if St. Paul had not made major accommodations to the Gentiles, or if the European pre-Christian rituals of the winter solstice or the rites of spring had not been incorporated into the yearly festivals? Would Islam have grown to a world religion if the Abbasids had not declared Arabs and non-Arabs to be equal? There are numerous examples of religious beliefs and practices changing through intercultural contacts. How much more must we consider the intersection of beliefs and practices today when people are moving in ever greater numbers from the places of their cultural

origins? Technology also aids the creation of "amalgam religions" as people from around the world turn on their television sets and witness a Muslim mullah or a Hindu guru or a Baptist preacher expounding on their respective faiths. In looking at the conjunction of Hindu and American religion, we have identified one such amalgam religion in the context of one geographical area.

Undoubtedly, more emphasis must be given to the study of religions as global rather than regional phenomena. An important question to consider is *how* these global religions are to be studied. If a religion is studied, for example, in an American university classroom setting, as a way of life that exists in some "other" part of the world, it is easy to "bracket the truth question," as is often recommended for college settings. If a tradition is presented as the religion of Indians or of Arabs, then the questions and concerns the religion poses appear remote from the personal concerns of the students. What if, however, globalized forms of those traditions appear in America? The study becomes less aloof when the "foreign" religion under consideration is a viable option for a student to actually participate in. The study of Eastern-inspired religions on American soil can be accompanied by a certain amount of fear that causes some to quickly label such alternative religious options as "cults." When the study of religion is about "us," normative and theological questions will naturally enter the discussion. Parents' natural concerns over whether a child is becoming involved in something antithetical to their own ethical and intellectual culture must be considered. While scholars of religion cannot play the vanguard for people as they explore religious options, they are increasingly being called upon to judge the safety of a "new religion" in criminal and civil cases, as are psychologists and sociologists. Perhaps rather than eschewing this public issue, they/we should together explore ways of critically analyzing new religions that do not too quickly label them as dangerous cults, but that also do not leave people in ignorance about their social and ethical consequences.

If a single aspect of HIMMs were to be isolated as being inimical to American values, it would be the idea of surrender to a guru. Independent thinking is a value held very dear to Americans. But the guru-disciple relationship forms one of the foundations of HIMMs, and to discount it is to also discount HIMMs. A critical stance is needed in examining this relationship, though. Dysfunctional and even abusive guru-disciple relationships do exist. Yet for many the guru-disciple relationship opens them to a sense of deep, abiding love, which is then offered to others. Disciples receive guidance from their guru that helps them in both their spiritual practices and in their daily lives.

Sincere followers of HIMMs do not feel they are relinquishing their own power. Instead, they view the goal of the relationship as transcending hierarchy so that the disciple becomes, like the guru, spiritually independent.

A helpful approach, which offers critical tools but does not offend the religious sensibility at the core of the relationship, is available in *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (Anthony, Ecker, and Wilbur). The authors offer suggestions for developing a critical stance while not undermining the religious position of the disciple of a guru. What is unique about this book is that it intertwines the usual decisive boundaries between theology and the academic study of religion. The purpose there is to offer rational methods of discrimination for seekers in today's spiritual market before those seekers commit themselves to a particular path. It employs a reflexive methodology as those working on this project constantly examine their own assumptions and procedures. Its purpose is more than simply presenting a belief system in an objective way. It assumes rather that the question of submission to a guru is one with which many Americans will grapple, and it offers advice.

The question of passivity occurring through surrender to a guru is an important one for HIMMs and scholars who study HIMMs to consider, particularly in light of scandals that have occurred in various groups, both of Hindu and Buddhist derivation. It may be that the guru-disciple relationship will mutate into something totally new as it continues to have a place in American society. The issue of sexual and other abuse scandals in both Hindu and Buddhist groups has caused the Dalai Lama to say:

> I recommend never adopting the attitude toward one's spiritual teacher of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. This may seem a little bit bold, but if one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaging in unsuitable or wrong behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior.[5]

Research on hierarchical relationships in religious settings has application beyond HIMMs since many forms of religion depend on some type of surrender to a spiritual authority, whether that authority is conceived of as embodied or as transcendent. Determining how this surrender blends with the values of independent thinking and strong ego-development is a worthy endeavor.

We have examined the values and powers that circumscribe HIMMs and the followers of HIMMs as they take on institutional forms. The authori-

tarian and hierarchical style of these organizations naturally renders them suspect in a culture that values democratic egalitarianism. It may be that as the commonly held institutional qualities found in HIMMs of hierarchy, secrecy, and of suppressing the whole person in favor of the "spiritual person" become apparent, more gurus and their followers will seek for ways to improve communication. Two former monastics of SRF, Heidi Hall and Steve Shires, are working to take HIMMs in this new direction. They have created a consulting service called Extraordinary Transitions (ET) for the purpose of helping spiritual organizations face challenge and change. As they explained in an e-mail to me in August 2008: "The same *themes* exist in all organizations, regardless of their size—especially in the realm of listening to dissent and handling conflict. If the issues are left unaddressed, they become larger. Over time organizations can become dogmatic and unconscious, and end up succumbing to the undermining influence of negativity. Reactivity and control increase—all of which contribute to a slide into mediocrity. As consciousness evolves, spiritual organizations are invited to step into a new form of leadership. We help them do this through powerful, awareness-based processes."

Clarifying the institutional aspects of HIMMs allows us to compare categories of analysis that appear in all religious institutions. The interplay of individuality and conformity is one example of a comparative category. Spiritual freedom is almost always curtailed to some degree as a person attempts to understand and fit in with a specific institutional form. It is rarely true that a person accepts everything within a particular tradition. When people join a "path" or "tradition" or "religion," it is because it fits with their viewpoints and experiences *more than* another path or religion. As we have seen, meditators' own words point to the interplay of acceptance and doubt when they discuss their commitment to and, at the same time, their questioning of the actions or beliefs of a HIMM or a guru. This interplay between faith and doubt, surrender and independent thinking, is a phenomenon that could be compared among religious institutions. How to negotiate between the two extremes is a relevant question for adherents of any religion and, indeed, of any secular organization as well.

HIMMs and American Culture

Hindu-inspired meditation movements in America comprise a religious phenomenon that affects, and is affected by, the environment in which it exists—that is, American culture. HIMMs, like all religions, are born when

one person or a group of persons attempt to relate their experiences of the divine or transcendent to others. In order to be persuasive and relevant, the exposition of the experiences must tie in somewhat to the existing culture in which it is presented. Rodney Stark argues in his essay "How New Religions Succeed" that both organization and doctrine must be strong and clear for a movement to survive. He illustrates this point by comparing Christian Gnostics to Paul's early Christian church. Gnostics sought secret knowledge through private enlightenment, and they were held together through loose networks among individual adepts. Saint Paul established an organization of congregations and articulated the doctrine of his religion clearly, and history has proved which is the more effective for establishing a long-term religion. Stark also argues that a "medium tension" between the new group and its environment must exist: "Faiths with a wholly alien doctrine may be regarded as too deviant." On the other hand, "Without significant differences from the conventional faith(s) a movement lacks a basis for successful conversion."[6]

Using Stark's theory, each of the HIMMs under consideration has developed over time strong organizations, understandable doctrine, and a "medium tension" (with some exceptions) with the surrounding milieu, which would make them contenders for successful new religions. Yet, if one HIMM does not fit these criteria and fails, the phenomena of HIMMs will probably still continue. Success does not depend on one or several movements but on the phenomenon as a whole. If we look at the individual movements mentioned in this book, we can see that Yogananda accomplished a "medium-tension" by relating Hindu practices and beliefs to Christianity. He articulated a clear "doctrine" through his books and correspondence course. He established an organization to disseminate his teachings and personally named the new head of the organization before his death. He made it clear that his teachings were to be shared through the Self-Realization Fellowship and not through rogue organizations that taught in his name. Maharishi established a "medium tension" with the American milieu by relating his techniques and philosophies to science, using analogies and scientific research to prove the benefits of TM. He founded courses and schools—from elementary to university level—to disseminate his teachings. He also established specific locations where communities of meditators could live and perform their spiritual practices together. Muktananda created the SYDA Foundation and linked his philosophy to Kashmir Shaivism, which might be considered the "doctrine" of Siddha Yoga. He too established a correspondence course to articulate these doctrines. Gurumayi updated the SYDA Foundation by naming a CEO who uses Western organizational styles to

facilitate leadership and communication in this global movement. The correspondence course that currently goes out to Siddha Yoga students focuses on techniques for integrating the teachings of Siddha Yoga into daily life in a practical way. Gurumayi lessened the tension with the surrounding society by de-emphasizing specifically Hindu practices such as bowing in front of the guru.

At the same time, each of the HIMMs maintains significant difference from conventional American faiths. The tension factor obviously can intensify when a group changes the physical makeup of the surrounding community, as when SRF attempted to move the remains of Yogananda to California's Mount Washington, or when the TM movement began tearing down old houses in Fairfield, Iowa, to replace them with Sthapatya Vedic style homes, or when SYDA ignored local environmental regulations for Sullivan County, New York, and dammed up Lake Nityananda. The tension factor also increases when scandals are made public or when a group oversteps its boundaries as did the TM movement when they attempted to incorporate the practice of TM into public schools.

Whether HIMMs will thrive and grow or whether they will go the way of the Christian Gnostics is impossible to say. In analyzing the success of HIMMs, a model other than membership numbers may have to be used. They may always comprise a small minority of the American population, but this does not mean that they will not have significant influence not only on practitioners but also on American culture—even as they remain on the fringes of the mainstream. Robert Ellwood postulated the difference between "established religions" and what he terms "excursus religions" in the West. He chose the term "excursus" because people who leave an established religion are viewed as taking a temporary deviant path, a digression, away from the conventional path. HIMMs would come under the rubric of excursus religion. The metaphors Western societies use to talk about these two ways of being religious helps to reify their differences. Established religions are referred to using geographical terms. They provide the foundation, the "bedrock," on which a stable society is based. Indeed, established religions are viewed as coterminous with culture itself. Established religions and culture together are imagined as the "static, underlying substrata out of which an individual lives." Excursus religions, on the other hand, are referred to using more ephemeral, biological terms, as in "once a seed is planted, the movement grows, develops, and then decays."[7]

Another way of distinguishing between the two is by examining the connotations of the terms "religion" versus "movement." A religion is larger,

more static, and more permanent than a movement. Yet it may be that a new paradigm for religious America is better imagined through the metaphors of biology than of geography. A recent Pew Forum Survey on Religion and Public Life has shown that there is growing independence among Americans from religious institutions. The bedrock institution is not viewed as necessary to believing in God and pursuing religious or "spiritual" practices. Ellwood proposes the possibility for a new way of envisioning religion in America:

> Secularization unequivocally does not mean decline in interest in religious issues or in desire for religious expression. That has obviously not been the upshot in the twentieth century. Rather, what it has meant is that religion has been increasingly divorced from the major structures of society—first (as early as the late Middle Ages) from economics, then from the state, then from education, and finally from religious institutions that parallel major structures of society in their organization and symbolic social roles. That divorce liberates religion to exist principally, possibly even to prosper unprecedentedly, within subjectivity and in small groups.[8]

It is possible that in the future HIMMs and other small group movements may become the norm rather than the exception. America may become, not a "Christian nation," not a "secular nation," but a nation typified by small groups, each developing its own style of religiosity. A more likely scenario is that the small group model will coexist with the also increasingly popular mega-church model. If small religious groups increase, they would be similar to the style of folk religion, or the sampradayas and kulas found in India. While Stark argues that "both organization and doctrine must be strong and clear for a movement to survive," it may be that organization will not, in the future, be conceived of as a central command center that guides the activities and determines the doctrine of suborganizations. It is interesting to note that the HIMM associated with Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) and the Mother (1878–1973; a French woman who joined Sri Aurobindo and became a leader after his death) is as strong in term of numbers today as it was when they were alive. Yet the gurus (who did not refer to themselves as gurus) were adamantly opposed to organization. They taught that the important work occurs on an inner level. There is today no central authority or organization, although there are many "centers" and study groups around the world that offer followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother a place to gather. There is also no clear articulation of the teachings since Integral Yoga, established by Sri Aurobindo, is a very open system in which each person must discover his

or her own path. There is certainly not "medium tension" with the surrounding culture. The books of Aurobindo and the Mother are filled with descriptions of fantastic journeys into other realms and "bringing down" gods and goddesses to dwell in particular human beings. On the other hand, one might say there is "no tension" with the environment since the larger society would not be aware of quiet study groups taking place in someone's living room.

The same could be said for many other HIMMs of the twenty-first century. Although some of the general ideas such as reincarnation have seeped into society at large, for the most part, few have heard of specific HIMMs unless they happen to be located near a central gathering place for a HIMM. Nonmeditators who live in Fairfield, Iowa, obviously know about Transcendental Meditation; those who live in South Fallsburg, New York, are aware of Siddha Yoga; those living in Encinitas, California, have heard of Self-Realization Fellowship. These are all small towns, however, and off the map of consciousness for most people. For the most part, HIMMs carry on a quiet existence apart from mainstream society. Can they be considered successful if few people even know they exist? This is a hard question to answer since success is so variously defined. They are certainly not the bedrock of American society. If, however, they ultimately help to change the very definition of religion so that it is not identified with large institutions but instead with changing levels of consciousness in individuals, they will have made a huge impact on American culture.

In some ways, the worldview of HIMMs reinforces values and understandings that are already common to American culture. The authors of *Habits of the Heart*, a book that interprets the religious and civic traditions of modern American society, point to John Winthrop, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Walt Whitman as illustrative of four streams of American culture: biblical, republican, utilitarian individualism, and expressive individualism. All of these streams can be found in HIMMs. The worldview of HIMMs calls for an ethic based on compassion and service just as John Winthrop, the first Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, did. It respects freedom of religious choice and believes in the separation of church and state just as Thomas Jefferson did. It calls for people to strive to do and be their best just as Benjamin Franklin did. It celebrates the present moment and rejoices in the self just as Walt Whitman did.

Certainly followers of HIMMs are inheritors of the American tradition of individualism. Tocqueville defined individualism as a "calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society

formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself."[9] In fact, this type of individualism is so widespread in American society in general that it is hard for many to imagine any other way of being.

Two types of individualism are delineated in *Habits of the Heart*: utilitarian and expressive. Both find a place in the ethos of HIMMs. Utilitarian individualism, personified by Benjamin Franklin, values career success and advocates that anything can be accomplished through self-effort. Applying oneself diligently to a goal is believed to benefit not only oneself but also society as a whole. Expressive individualism, personified by Walt Whitman, values self-expression and enjoyment of life. The first is goal-oriented and the second is present-oriented. The first values self-effort and stamina; the second, surrender to the creative muse. Followers of HIMMs combine the two types of individualism. They express utilitarian individualism as they apply self-effort in their relationships, careers, and spiritual practices. They manifest expressive individualism by valuing a present-time orientation and subordinating material and career ideals to the goal of experiencing bliss. So in both of these ways—utilitarian and expressive—followers of HIMMs value individualism and thus support what might be considered the cornerstone of the existing American ethos.

The culture of HIMMs, overlapping with the culture of "harmonial religions" in general, correlates to a large extent with the American "therapeutic character" outlined by *Habits of the Heart.* The authors propose that the word "therapy" implies that something needs to be cured. "But cured of what?":

> In the final analysis, it is cure of the lack of fit between the present organization of the self and the available organization of work, intimacy, and meaning. And this cure is to take the form of enhancing and empowering the self to be able to relate successfully to others in society, achieving a kind of satisfaction without being overwhelmed by their demands. In its own understanding, the expressive aspect of our culture exists for the liberation and fulfillment of the individual."[10]

In many ways, followers of HIMMs resonate with the "therapeutic character." They seek individual liberation, and their work and relationships help them to achieve this goal. Through Karma Yoga, all levels of life are brought together in the service of liberation of the individual. In this way, they create a "fit" between the self and society. Furthermore, they seek a balanced life and do not want to be overwhelmed by the demands of society.

Yet the ethos of HIMMs is also different from that of the therapeutic character. They want more than a lifestyle that works. They desire ultimate spiritual fulfillment, which they believe will come from following the path of their guru. They do not try out different roles and negotiate relationships in order to find personal satisfaction as a therapy model suggests. This is because roles and relationships are not the means to ultimate satisfaction according to the meaning system of HIMMs. While meditators seek ease, comfort, and fulfilling relationships, they also understand that surrender to a guru involves sacrifice—ultimately, the sacrifice of one's own ego. This, of course, can cause discomfort and fear, but they take that risk. Their philosophical understanding supports the idea that pleasure is not the goal but rather bliss, which they understand to be a spiritual state that exists beyond the realm of pleasure and pain. As they try to carry out the teachings of their guru, they give up the freedom to pursue whatever the current market is encouraging. They have already chosen where to put their attention even when, as some of the interviewees attested, they sometimes struggle against the mainstream to accomplish their goal. This may be an area in which followers of HIMMs set a standard worthy of emulation. The corruption that has become glaringly evident with corporate scandals brings to light a festering blight of greed and self-interest that has become too much a part of American culture. The ethical system of HIMMs offers the value of contentment as an alternative to the quagmire of material pursuit.

The ethic of HIMMs also calls for service to others based on dispassion and disregard for the "fruits" of their actions, as the *Bhavagad-Gita* teaches, and offers a practical way of achieving this attitude of nonattachment through meditation. From the time that Vivekananda articulated this ethic of Karma Yoga, it has had a place in the meaning system of HIMMs. Their philosophy also holds the view that spiritual perfection is the birthright of human beings, and this state calls out for people to learn from those who have realized this. Furthermore, it offers to American culture a consideration of the law of karma—that every action returns to the actor.

Areas of high tension between the values of HIMMs and mainstream American culture exist as well. Detractors of the ethics of HIMMs may assert that their meaning system, because of its strong dependence on intuition and on a guru, obscures the Western value of rationalism and detracts from the value of self-reliance. They might add that the philosophy of HIMMs leads to passivity because of its belief in karma and the balance of good and evil that manifests in life cycles, planetary cycles, and universe cycles. These beliefs hinder a person's moral fortitude to accomplish as much good as possible.

They may say that meditators are so wary of "stress" that they do not contribute enough to society.

Perhaps the highest tension exists between the beliefs and values of HIMMs and those of the evangelical Christians, a group that stands out in the contemporary religious scene of the United States as having an ever-increasing influence on the American ethos.[11] This group, belonging to the prophetic/theistic religious stream, exists in polar opposition to HIMMs. Evangelical Christians believe that God's son died for their sins; participants in HIMMs believe that people are ignorant of their own true worth, and this causes them to "make mistakes." Evangelicals pray to a Father in heaven; followers of HIMMs meditate on their own inner Self. Evangelicals believe that salvation through Jesus will take them to heaven when they die; followers of HIMMs believe they will be reincarnated until they attain "enlightenment." While followers of HIMMs see the evangelical Christian view as "misguided," the evangelicals view HIMMs as "cults" and "dead wrong." Is there any room at all for cultural and religious dialogue in this case? It is unlikely. But there is room for dialogue between more moderate religious groups in America and HIMMs, and some of these attempts at dialogue, such as the work of Bede Griffiths and Francis X. Clooney, have been successful (see chap. 2).

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The authors of *Habits of the Heart* state that "Cultures are dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants, and American culture is no exception. . . . American culture remains alive so long as the conversation continues and the argument is intense."[12] The arrival of Hindu gurus in America in the twentieth century adds a new dimension to the American dialogue. Perhaps some feel that these gurus are intruders in a "Christian nation"; others welcome difference, aware that cultural and religious diversity is what makes America what it is; still others embrace the teaching of the gurus as their own. My intention is that this book contribute to the "dramatic conversation" among these groups and thus help to keep American culture alive.

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Notes

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. 2001–03 Bede Griffiths Assn. "Summary of paper presented by Bruno Barnhart at the Monastic Symposium, New Camaldoli, June 2000." http://www.bedegriffiths.com/wisdom/wisdom_11.htm (accessed July 22, 2008).

2. Although it appears to the outsider that followers of Hare Krishna are attempting to imitate Hindu culture, they themselves do not see it that way. Steven J. Gelberg, a scholar of religion and participant in ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), states, "As we saw it, we had not affiliated ourselves with a cumulative tradition formed and shaped by particular historical, ideological, and social contingencies, but rather were partaking in an enlightened, transcendent culture." "The Call of the Lotus-Eyed Lord," in Miller, *When Prophets Die,* 155.

3. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999).

4. Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest,* 13.

5. Maharishi, *On the Bhagavad-Gita*, 449.

6. Gurumayi, unpublished transcript, Mar. 8, 1991, quoted by Douglas Brooks in *Meditation Revolution*, 592, n27.

7. W. C. Smith explains this process in *Meaning and End of Religion,* 42–43.

8. The Art of Living Foundation advertised in 2008 that it has taught over a million people the "Sudarshan Kriya" technique in more than 130 countries.

9. D. G. White argues in *Kiss of the Yogini* (2) that "For a wide swath of central India in the pre-colonial period, Tantra would have been the 'mainstream,' and in many ways it continues to impact the mainstream, even if emic misappreciations of Tantra tend to relegate it to a marginal position."

10. Larson notes differences between methods of propagation in traditional Hinduism and Neo-Hinduism, drawing on the work of J. N. Farquhar and Kenneth W. Jones, *India's Agony over Religion*, 134–35.

11. Raheja and Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words,* xxviii.

12. This refers to a type of conversion in which a person makes a pronouncement of faith. Conversion to Hinduism *did* take place on a cultural level as Hindu traders and settlers entered other countries as, for example, in Bali.

13. Hacker, *Philology and Confrontation,* 231.

14. Ahlstrom, "From Sinai to the Golden Gate," in Needleman and Baker, *Understanding the New Religions,* 3–22.

15. Ibid., 9.

16. Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 309.

17. Moseley, *Cultural History of Religion in America,* 62.

18. Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 391.

19. Ibid., 366–67.

20. Tweed and Prothero, *Asian Religions in America,* 43.

21. Kopf, *British Orientalism,* 5.

22. Spencer Lavan, "The Brahmo Samaj," in Baird, *Religion in Modern India,* 4–5.

23. *A Gift to Deists* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1949), n.p. Quoted by

James N. Pankratz, "Ram Mohun Roy," in Baird, *Religion in Modern India,* 336.

24. Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities (1833–1857*),* (Chittagong: Mehrub, 1965), quoted in Baird, *Religion in Modern India,* 9.

25. William Adam, *Raja Ram Mohun Roy,* eds. D. K. Biswas and P.C. Ganguli, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Sadharn Brahmo Samaj, 1962), 227, quoted in Baird, *Religion in Modern India,* 6.

26. Halbfass, *India and Europe,* 206.

27. Ibid., 397.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Emerson, "Over-Soul," in *Portable Emerson*, 210–11.

2. Emerson, "Compensation," ibid., 172.

3. Protap Chunder Mazumdar, *Genius and Character of Emerson,* 367, quoted in Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia,* 156.

4. Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," *Portable Emerson,* 94–95.

5. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* vol. 2, 3–4.

6. Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known,* 21.

7. Ahlstrom, *Religious History,* 1019.

8. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience,* 92–93.

9. Wessinger, "The Vedanta Movement and the Self-Realization Fellowship," in T. Miller, *American's Alternative Religions,* 177.

10. French, *Swan's Wide Waters,* 118.

11. Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples,* 206–7.

12. Urban, *Tantra,* 150.

13. Jeffrey Kripal's controversial *Kali's Child* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) presents the details of Ramakrishna's Tantric experiences, and speculates that he did not engage in *maithuna,* intercourse with a woman, because he was attracted instead to young boys.

14. Urban, *Tantra,* 163.

15. French, *Swan's Wide Waters,* 149.

16. Ibid., 145.

17. Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America,* 117.

18. Ibid., 96–98.

19. Yogananda, *Autobiography,* 408.

20. Roof, *Generation of Seekers,* 44. The survey results were first reported in Joseph Veroff's *The Inner American: A Self-Portrait from 1957 to 1976* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

21. Ibid., 8.

22. Susan Love Brown, "Baby Boomers, American Character, and the New Age," in Lewis and Melton, *Perspectives on a New Age,* 90–92; Roof, *Generation of Seekers,* 43–44.

23. Yankelovich, *New Rules,* 5.

24. Bellah et. al., *Habits of the Heart,* xi.

25. Sociological survey conducted by Hammond in 1988 and reported in Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening,* 327.

26. *Time,* Jan. 6, 1967, quoted in Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening,* 177.

27. Quoted in Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard, *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America,* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 229–30.

28. Tweed and Prothero, *Asian Religions in America,* 229.

29. Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973*)*, quoted in Tweed and Prothero, *Asian Religions in America,* 229.

30. Survey reported in Susan Love Brown, "Baby Boomers, American Character, and the New Age," in Lewis and Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age,* 95.

31. Grof, "Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy: Observations from LDS Research," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology,* 1973, 25. Quoted in Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth,* 162.

32. Roberto Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (New

York: Viking Press, 1971), 46, quoted in Smith, *Forgotten Truth,* 101.

33. Donald Stone, "The Human Potential Movement," in Glock and Bellah, *New Religious Consciousness,* 94.

34. Melton, "New Thought and the New Age," in Lewis and Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age,* 16–17.

35. Mason, *Maharishi,* 39.

36. Swami Durgananda (Sally Kempton), "To See the World Full of Saints," in Brooks et al., *Meditation Revolution,* 81.

37. Yogananda, *Autobiography,* 554.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. The friend was Nanimohun Mazumder, the younger brother of Yogananda's best friend, Satyananda. Mazumder related the story to his friend Satyeswarananda, who retold it in *Kriya*, 148.

2. Satyananda, *Collection*, 254.

3. In contrast to this, interviews with immigrant Indian Americans revealed that all of the thirty subjects were familiar with Vivekananda, yet only a few had heard of Yogananda.

4. "Native Lecturer of India is Honor Guest at Dinner," *Los Angeles Times,* Jan. 4, 1925.

5. Walters, *The Path,* 174.

6. Paramahansa Yogananda, *SRF magazine*, Spring 1974.

7. Rosser, *Treasures Against Time,* 3.

8. Yogananda, *Autobiography*, 275.

9. Ibid., 276.

10. Ibid., 279–80.

11. Ibid., 279.

12. Satyananda, *Collection*, 182; Ghosh, *"Medja"*, 139–44.

13. Ghosh, *"Medja"*, 140.

14. Yogananda, *Scientific Healing Affirmations*, 4.

15. Personal correspondence with SRF monk, Brother Chidananda.

16. Satyananda, *Collection,* 213–14.

17. Yogananda, *Autobiography*, 355.

18. Satyananda, *Collection*, 83–84.

19. Ibid., 205–6.

20. Ibid., 193.

21. Rosser, *Treasures Against Time,* 44.

22. Sri Daya Mata, *Him I Shall Follow,* videotape recorded at SRF's international headquarters in Los Angeles, Aug. 14, 1983. Los Angeles, CA: SRF, 1997.

23. Trout, *Eastern Seeds, Western Soil,* 110.

24. Yogananda, *Autobiography,* 20.

25. Ghosh, *"Medja,"* 22–25.

26. Ibid., 144–45.

27. Satyananda, *Collection*, 171.

28. Ghosh, *"Medja"*, 122–29.

29. Satyananda, *Collection*, 172.

30. Robert Carroll. "Incorruptible Bodies," in *The Skeptic's Dictionary.* http://www.skepdic.com/incorrupt.html (accessed July 29, 2008).

31. Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religion,* 871.

32. Ibid., 875.

33. Email correspondence, SRF monk, May 2008.

34. Email correspondence, SRF nun, August 2008.

35. http://srfwalrus.yuku.com/topic/1248/t/When-I-Crash-Landed-posted-by-CrashLanded-7-07-03.html (accessed July 29, 2008). SRF, like all HIMMs, maintain websites that are favorable toward the gurus and organizations; SRF, like all HIMMs, also contain websites of disgruntled former devotees.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Global Country of World Peace (an official website of the Transcendental Meditation movement) 2003, Globalcountry.org. (accessed July 22, 2008).

2. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Eliade, s.v. "Tantrism" (by Andre Padoux), 186.

3. Maharishi, *On the Bhagavad-Gita,* 16.

4. Kathleen Erndl, "Afterword," in Pechilis Prentiss, *Graceful Guru,* 246.

5. Mason, *Maharishi,* 35.

6. Ibid., 23. This story was related by Elsa Dragemar, a Swedish woman who was close to Maharishi in the early days of the movement.

7. *TM-EX Newsletter*. Taped conversation between Robert Kropinski and Swami Swarupanand, http:/minet.org/TM-EX/Fall-92 (accessed July 22, 2008).

8. *TM-EX Newsletter* 4, no. 5, Fall 1992, 1, http:/minet.org/TM-EX/Fall-92 (accessed July 22, 2008).

9. Sanderson, "Shaivism and the Tantric Tradition," in Sutherland, *World's Religions*, 130–31.

10. Brooks, "Encountering the Hindu 'Other,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 405–36.

11. "The Report of Germany's Institute for Youth and Society on TM" Oct. 29, 2000, http://trancenet.net/research/index.shtmlt (accessed July 22, 2008).

12. D. G. White in *Kiss of the Yogini* (18–21) explains how the *kula,* or clans, were traditionally formed in Indian Tantra.

13. Ibid. White describes the meditation in detail. 234–41.

14. Ibid., 240.

15. Ibid., 241.

16. Earl Kaplan, "The Truth," Apr. 16, 2004, http://tmfree.blogspot.com/2008/04/earl-kaplans-letter.html (accessed Aug. 1, 2008).

17. http://tmfree.blogspot.com/2007_01_21_archive.html (accessed Aug. 1, 2008).

18. Zweig, *Holy Longing*, 148–49.

19. *News of the World*, Aug. 23, 1981, David Merton, "Sexy Romps of the Beatles' Giggling Guru," http://www.rickross.com/reference/tm/tm156.html (accessed Aug. 1, 2008).

20. Bainbridge, *Sociology of Religious Movements,* 189–90.

21. http://archivetm.org/sidhi/index.html (accessed May 16, 2009).

22. "Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment," http://www.maharishischooliowa.org/educationforenlightenment/sci/index.html (accessed July 22, 2008).

23. D. G. White, *Kiss of the Yogini, 7,* 10, 27, 188–218.

24. Herrera, *Beyond Gurus,* 396.

25. D. G. White, *Kiss of the Yogini,* 24.

26. Robert Kropinski sued the TM movement 1986 for psychological damage. The Philadelphia jury awarded him $138,000.

27. Franklin D. Trumpy. *Soma and the Gods, 2.* Feb. 25, 1997, http://www.trancenet.net/secrets/soma/soma2.shtml (accessed July 22, 2008).

28. J. C. Smith, "Psychotherapeutic Effects of TM," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 630–37.

29. John M. Knapp. "Trancenet: DeNaro Affidavit." 1995, http://www.trancenet.net/law/denarot.shtml (accessed July 22. 2008).

30. Knapp. "The Report of Germany's Institute for Youth and Society on TM," 1995, http://trancenet.net/research (accessed July 22, 2008).

31. Gilpin, *Maharishi Effect,* chap. 15.

32. Otis, "Adverse Effects of TM," in Shapiro, *Meditation,* 207.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Brooks, *Meditation Revolution,* 47.

2. "Gurudev Nityananda" ca. 1990 published by the Nityananda trust. http://www.leavingsiddhayoga.net/history.htm (accessed July 23, 2008).

3. Swami Durgananda outlines what is known of Nityananda's life in her chapter "Without Talking, He Gave Instructions" in Brooks et al., *Meditation Revolution,* 7–24.

4. Caldwell, "Heart of the Secret," *Nova Religio,* 22.

5. Muktananda. *Play of Consciousness,* 58.

6. Ibid., 208.

7. Mishra, *Kashmir Shaivism,* 122–23.

8. Muktananda. *Play of Consciousness,* 34.

9. Ibid., 124–25.

10. Trout, Stan, correspondence to webmaster of Leaving Siddha Yoga website, Oct. 7, 1999. http://www.leavingsiddhayoga.net/frames2.htm (accessed August 22, 2009).

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14. Phone interview, July 11, 2008.

15. Muktananda, *Secret of the Siddhas,* 85.

16. Cohen, "Yoga, Ego, and Purification," in *What is Enlightenment,* www.wie.org/j17.asp (accessed July 23, 2008).

17. See Gopi Krishna, *Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1970; repr., Boston: Shambhala, 1994); Bruce Greyson, "The Physio-Kundalini Syndrome and Mental Illness," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology.* 1993, vol. 25, no. 1, 43–58.; B. Greenwell, *Energies of Transformation: A Guide to the Kundalini Process* (1990; repr., New Delhi: Matilal Banavsidass, 2002); L. Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence?* (Lower Lake, CA: Integral Publishing, 1987; Stanislav Grof, *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes A Crisis* (New York: Penguin/Tarcher, 1989).

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19. Harris, "O, Guru, Guru, Guru."

20. Ibid.

21. Szabo, "The Guru Looked Good" (accessed July 23, 2008).

22. Ibid.

23. Caldwell, "Heart of the Secret," 9–51.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Gold, *Comprehending the Guru*, 112.

2. David Miller, "Guru as the Center of Sacredness," 131.

3. Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 235.

4. Ibid., 89.

5. Cenkner, *Tradition of Teachers*, 159.

6. Krishnananda, quoted in Cenkner, *Tradition of Teachers*, 156.

7. Bettina Baumer, "The Guru in the Hindu Tradition," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 2, no. 3 (1990): 341–53, quoted in Hallstrom, *Mother of Bliss*, 135.

8. Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*, 452.

9. Yogananda describes his first meeting in "I Meet My Master, Sri Yukteswar," in *Autobiography*, chap. 10, 99–111.

10. Yogananda, *Autobiography*, 122.

11. Satyananda, *Collection*, 177–79.

12. Yogananda, *Autobiography*, 108.

13. Muktananda, "Shaktipat: The Rarest of Gifts," in *Darshan*, vol. 67 (Oct. 1992): 14–29.

14. Anthony, *Spiritual Choices*, 158–59.

15. Hallstrom, *Mother of Bliss*, 133.

16. Mahoney, "Guru-Disciple Relationship," in Brooks, *Meditation Revolution*, 229.

17. Ibid, 228.

18. Brother Anandamoy, "Experiencing God Within: The Universal Truth Behind All Religions," (videotape, Los Angeles, CA: SRF, 1999).

19. Sri Mrinalini Mata, "In His Presence," (videotape, Los Angeles, CA: SRF, 2001).

20. Yogananda, *Autobiography*, 399.

21. Walters, *The Path*, 172

22. Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*, 8.

23. Maharishi, *Transcendental Meditation*, 24.

24. Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, 30–31.

25. Gurumayi, *Yoga of Discipline*, 18.

26. *Nectar of Chanting*, 35.

27. Ken Wilber is an American philosopher who has developed theories about human growth and consciousness. Among his books are *No Boundary* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001)*; Grace and Grit*; *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001)*; A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001); and *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (Broadway, 1999).

28. Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, 112.

29. *Transcendental Meditation*. "Global Celebration," Mar. 11, 2004http://www.maharishitm.org/en/vieoen.htm (accessed July 23, 2008).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Steven Katz has been a major proponent of the constructivist view. ("Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" [1978], etc.). William James, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, and others have argued for the perennialist view. Robert Forman has debated Katz by editing two books, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (1990) and *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy* (1998), and writing a third, *Mind, Mysticism, and Consciousness* (1999). He maintains that the experience of transcendence ("pure consciousness event") lies beyond the realm of language and is, therefore, not bound by cultural-linguistic expectations.

2. Ninian Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 10–21, in Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 20.

3. Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness,* 86.

4. Muktananda, *Kundalini: the Secret of Life,* 17.

5. Desai, "Kundalini Yoga through Shaktipat," in John White, *Kundalini, Evolution, and Enlightenment.*

6. Tirth, *Devatma Shakti,* 104.

7. Latham, *Galaxy of Fire,* 274–76.

8. Herrera, *Beyond Gurus,* 445–46.

9. Forman, *Problem of Pure Consciousness,* 8.

10. Franklin, "Postconstructivist Approaches to Mysticism," in Forman, *Innate Capacity,* 235.

11. G. William Barnard, "William James and the Origins of Mystical Experience," in Forman, *Innate Capacity,* 164.

12. Hollenback, *Mysticism*, 81–83.

13. Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* 30.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Bainbridge, Sociology of Religious Movements, 283.

2. Ibid., 282.

3. Ahlstrom, "American Religious Values and the Future of America," in Van Allen, *American Religious Values,* 5–23.

4. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups,* xiv–xv.

5. Roof, *Generation of Seekers*, 122.

6. Ibid., 124.

7. "Is Vedanta the Future Religion?" Vivekananda lecture, San Francisco, Apr. 8, 1900. *Vedanta Electronic Newsletter*, May 2002.

8. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups*, 8.

9. Eliade, *Sacred and Profane,* 22.

10. This may be changing; in 2008 a temple dedicated to Kali was built in Washington, DC. Information on the temple is available at http://www.kalitemple-washington.org/home.aspx (accessed 23 July 2008). Pictures on the website reveal a fairly benign Kali.

11. A tenet of TM is that when the mind and body settle down in meditation, stress is automatically released from the nervous system.

12. Robert Bellah discusses the Ricoeurian formula as it relates to the study of new religious movements in "Perspectives: Nature and Significance of New Religions," in Needleman and Baker, *Understanding the New Religions*, 106–12.

13. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 53.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. http://www.leavingsiddhayoga.net/frames2.htm (accessed Aug. 5, 2008).

2. Leon S. Otis, "Adverse Effects of Transcendental Meditation," in Shapiro, *Meditation*, 201–8.

3. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience,* 7–8.

4 . Anthony, *Spiritual Choices,* 166.

5. Butler, "Encountering the Shadow," quoted in Caldwell, "Heart of the Secret," 37.

6. Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in Bromley and Hammond, *Future of New Religious Movements,* 15–17.

7. Ellwood, *Alternative Altars*, 13.

8. Ibid., 171.

9. Tocqueville, quoted in Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart,* 37.

10. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart,* 47.

11. I use the term "evangelical" to refer to a type of conservative Christianity that has had increasing popularity in the United States since Jerry Falwell established the Moral Majority in the 1980s in an attempt to unite fundamentalists, Pentecostals, charismatics, and evangelicals. The Evangelical Christian Church is a distinct entity, however.

12. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart,* 27–28.

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